

**Hearing the voices of babies in baby-educator interactions in Early
Childhood Settings**

By

Caroline Chantal Guard, BA, MA

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Abstract.

This doctoral study examines how the voices of babies enrolled in early childhood settings are made visible during close dialogic interactions with early childhood educators. An ethnographic study set across two, private, 'for profit' early childhood settings, this study was deliberate in its attempt to draw out the unseen dialogue that surfaces in baby room practice. A qualitative research design, underpinned by a Cultural Historical theoretical frame, infused with Froebelian principles and Bakhtin's Dialogism, the study conceptualised voice to be a structured thread of connection intentionally engaged by babies to connect with adults, relationally and historically rooted in the child's relational histories in the home. Five distinct dimensions of voice manifested as a silent but strategic and unique pattern of communication used intentionally to draw adults into social encounters. Babies presented as creative and resolute in their attempts to source a sense of belonging through interactions with educators, amplifying voice through acts of teasing, humour, and strategic movements to orient adult attention into their social space. Findings point to the pivotal role early childhood educators play in validating babies' voice acts through responsive, dialogic interactions. However, close, responsive encounters, where voice primarily surfaced, were deeply entangled in educator responsiveness and emotional availability. Amplification of voice initiations created external demands for educators, who conscientiously tried to balance conflicting institutional priorities. The study highlights the way in which institutional traditions are anchored in broader policy directives, which ultimately influence the availability of educators to see and respond to babies' voice contributions. This study presents Video Interaction Dialogue as a reconceptualised methodological approach and introduces a new pedagogical concept, Adagio Interactions, where voices are dialogically and unhurriedly connected in practice. The study proposes that Adagio Interactions and Video Interaction Dialogue have potential to be integrated into early education practices to support the elevation of babies' voice contributions beyond this research project.

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Terminology used within the study.

In this study the following vocabulary is used:

- The term '**baby**' refers to infant, infants, babies, and very young children under the age of two years. All five terms are used within this thesis.
- The term '**infancy**' refers to the period of development between 0-2 years.
- The term **Early Childhood Setting**¹ refers to nurseries, non-familial settings, and institutions. All four terms are used within this thesis. Reference will be made to early childhood settings collectively as 'provision' in some circumstances.
- The term **Early Childhood Educator** refers to educators, practitioners, adults. All four terms are used within this thesis. Some areas of the literature review may refer to 'caregiver' to frame the role within literature and research being reviewed. Parents will be referred to as 'parent' or 'primary caregiver'.

¹ Early Childhood Setting is defined in this document as offering formal care between the hours of 7am-7pm

Chapter One: Introduction.

1.1 Introduction.

This introductory chapter sets out the context to my doctoral study, which examines how the voices of babies are made visible by paying attention to their interactions with Early Childhood Educators. The thesis argues that while the voices of babies attending early childhood settings have seldom been documented (Johansson and White, 2011; Wall *et al.* 2019), researchers, early childhood educators, parents and policy makers have a moral and ethical responsibility to source strategies to observe and respond to the intentional voice acts babies elicit as part of their early communication patterns. Throughout this thesis, I draw on a Froebelian philosophy and position babies as co-authors (Quiñones and Cooper, 2021) of their social world, competent and astute, closely connected to their environment and to those who care for them. Babies navigate a paradoxical world, on one hand viewed to be competent and cognitively astute, but on the other hand, vulnerable and reliant on the responsivity of those who care for them. Drawing from several theoretical strands, this research contributes original insight into how babies establish a confidence of voice in early childhood settings and how early childhood educators play a pivotal role validating babies' voice acts. The outcome of this thesis offers potential to transform practice in baby room environments for babies and educators, repositioning how both can offer valued contributions to early childhood settings and wider society. The study contributes new knowledge regarding the competencies of very young children which will facilitate cross sector dialogue and aid provision and policy review.

This chapter presents an overview of the thesis structure, initially reflecting on my own personal and professional position to illuminate the original motivation behind the project's inception. The chapter locates the doctoral study in the broader social and political landscape of current early childhood education discourse, reflecting on the rights of babies and the cultural influences that shape early childhood settings. The research aims and objectives are set out and the research questions guiding the study presented. Attention is paid to the sensitive nature of this type of research, reflecting on the ethical implications of designing, implementing, and presenting a doctorate involving the contributions of very young children. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of chapter content and thesis overall.

1.2 Rationale - The personal and professional context for this study.

The motivation for this study is twofold, inspired by over two decades of professional experience in the early childhood education and care sector and motivated from my perspective as a mother to two young children. I will first reflect on my professional journey and consider its influence on the inception of this doctorate before shifting my focus to how being a mother has shaped my doctoral journey.

I commenced my early years training at the age of 16, completing a vocational qualification where I gained extensive practical experience in a variety of early childhood settings and primary schools. During this time, I was introduced to the writing of Tina Bruce, (1991) and Cathy Nutbrown (1999) helping to ignite an interest in child centred philosophy. At 18 I embarked on an initial teacher training degree at university, specialising in early education and inclusion. My training coincided with a significant movement in early years policy that saw radical changes instigated by the Ten-Year Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2004) which set out plans to reform access to 'high quality, affordable childcare' for all families. Aligning to this agenda was the inception of two documents of curriculum guidance, The Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and Birth to Three Matters (Sure Start Unit, 2002; DfES, 2002) which sought to provide early childhood providers with non-statutory guidance to streamline quality in provision for young children. In addition, much of my training was delivered by several key proponents of early education including Tricia David and Kathy Gooch who were instrumental to the Birth to Three Matters inception. Their advocacy for young children pervaded lectures, and further inspired my own educational philosophy.

Following graduation, my career trajectory continued to run in parallel with significant reforms in early childhood education policy, cited to be the most significant revolution of in England in living memory (Faulkner and Coates, 2013). Policy changes prompted a shift in family life, transforming access to affordable childcare provision and family support services. Consequently, the rapid roll out of early childhood settings and Sure Start centres (DfES, 2004) offered opportunity for me to gain experience working in several different institutions with young children and their families, advancing my early career experiences. Through my own informal observations, I became intrigued by how young children worked hard to attract the attention of their parents or adults in

every context, the home, toddler groups, parent/child classes or nursery provision. Sometimes the children were successful, and they received a response but at other times their calls for attention were missed and as a result, challenging behaviours often emerged, frustrating child and adult alike. Beyond this, my own professional frustrations surfaced from experiences managing nursery provision that appeared to favour profit over the children's experiences. On more than one occasion as a nursery manager I was asked by senior management to 'cover up' staffing issues and move children room to room to conceal staff shortages. These decisions raised ethical and moral anxieties, so I removed myself from the sector for a short while before instigating a career change to lecturing in further and higher education from 2009. These career experiences continued to open my eyes to the misalignment between children's behaviours and those of adults caring for them as well as the systematic challenges facing the workforce and wider sector.

My focus on baby room provision developed following visits to early childhood settings in my capacity as a tutor assessing student practice. Baby rooms were often occupied with the sound of crying and staff seldom seemed to communicate face to face with the babies, absorbed in their own conversations, even with a visitor present. Staff in one open plan setting shared with me the reason a baby was crying was because the child had become 'too attached' to their key person, so the key person had been moved to the adjoining toddler room for the week. The child spent my two-hour visit distressed and staring at the staff member who was in view across the low-level room dividers. There appeared to be a misunderstanding and fear of attachments between staff and babies. In other sites, management would often place students into the baby room claiming it was the easiest room to 'get to grips with', and students would return to classes stating the baby room was boring, and they had nothing to do.

Above all, from my perspective, the baby room exposed itself to be a complicated and misunderstood room to operate drawing a consistent picture with Gooch and Powell (2013a) who argue baby rooms frequently occupy an unloved and forgotten identity in provision. Extending this theme, my observations highlighted staff were also notably overlooked. I recall visiting one nursery which had a sign on the door requesting other staff do not enter unless it is an emergency, for fear of unsettling the children. Seemingly motivated by strands of maintaining consistent attachments for the children (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991), I understood what they were trying to achieve but this resulted in baby room staff having little or no contact with the rest of the nursery. I wondered

whether the team felt 'cut off' from the rest of the staff. Moreover, by remaining intensely focused on the babies, with few breaks, I considered the influence this may have had on their relationship with the babies and the baby's attachment to them. Such an intense level of intimacy may aid and strengthen the emotional bonds between educators and babies, yet staff I encountered seemed exasperated and disconnected with the babies, despite working so closely with them, echoing growing research evidence that work with babies encompasses significant complexities (Page and Elfer, 2013; Elfer *et al.* 2018; Brace, 2020).

Studying for my master's degree in education further reconceptualised my thinking around the capabilities of young children. My thesis titled '*You've got a secret smile and you use it only for me*' (Guard, 2017) focussed on the intentional communications babies engage in the family home and took its title from a mother's narrative who revealed she and her son shared a secret smile during breastfeeding that no one else in the family were privy to. Findings from this small-scale qualitative research study corroborated a familiar narrative in established studies that from a very early age, infants display an intentional sequence of cues to gain the attention of others (Stern, 1990; Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt, 2016). It appeared babies' calling patterns differentiated for the different people in the home environment, mother, father, sibling, and grandparent. I noted my data demonstrated babies' great capabilities in employing a myriad of creative behaviours to sustain and prolong intersubjective communications with their partners. If communication ceased, the babies who were aged between 11 weeks to 11 months, all remained committed to and persistent in regaining their partner's attention, (Guard, 2017). Following successful completion of my study, I began to consider what the voices of babies might look like in contexts outside the family domain.

Typically, the home environment can offer a space where secure bonds develop through responsive, one-to-one moments of caregiving co-constructed together over time (Moullin, Waldfogel and Washbrook 2014; Hogg, 2019). However, in early childhood settings, the adult to child ratio is reduced and babies are typically unfamiliar with those caring for them. I began to consider how babies might cope with the different emotional dimensions of a new environment. Drawing all these experiences together, I wondered if early childhood settings offered the optimum conditions to respond to babies' voice expressions and emotional needs. The small selection of research papers available in England indicated similar observations to my own; that adult, child

interactions were seemingly routinised and insufficiently meeting the needs of babies and the workforce (Goouch and Powell, 2013a; Elfer *et al.* 2018). Subsequently, I questioned if exploring the intricate voices of young babies in early childhood settings could deepen the level of professional and scholarly understanding of the subtle initiation's babies engage to attract the attention of adults caring for them. Moreover, I wondered if staff might gain confidence in their own abilities to read and respond to babies' initiations, thus potentially resulting in a calmer, more respectful environment for all, if they were involved in the research process.

1.2.1 Bringing motherhood to the research journey.

Reflecting on my role as a mother is an essential aspect of my identity as a researcher and offers an important dimension to this study. Becoming a mother in 2010 enriched my life beyond all recognition and elevated concepts of children's development I had studied from the age of 16. Undoubtedly parenting has shaped who I am and how I align my philosophy of early childhood education. While there is substantial research examining the journey of becoming a mother (Laney *et al.* 2015), there is little published research that openly contemplates how being a mother (or a parent) shapes the identity of becoming a researcher (Ajebon, 2021). Yet for me, my story, and the narrative of this doctorate has developed in parallel with my role as a mother and in response to my children and broader influences in my life. This aligns Gottlieb's assertion that we should:

... recognize, and try to account for, the inextricable ways in which our so-called private lives conspire to shape our scholarly decisions and agendas - including the topics we choose to pursue, the field sites in which we come to feel at home, even the theoretical orientations we embrace.

(Gottlieb, 2012, p.2)

I opted early on in motherhood not to enrol my babies in full day care. I was fortunate that my own mother offered grandparenting care, contributing a valuable 'alloparenting' role and offering my children, an irreplaceable extension of parenting (Norman, 2022). My decision to only source nursery care when my children were toddlers seemed rooted in my career experiences of knowing what 'goes on behind the scenes' of nursery provision. Perhaps my early career experiences were unique in the way they exposed me to sector challenges that clouded my judgement, though I remain optimistic such challenges were not replicated in all provision. Nevertheless, my personal belief was that my children would be more resilient if they remained cocooned in the family home

for longer and did not encounter interchangeable childcare experiences until they were older. There is no doubt that my combined professional and mothering experiences influenced my desire to find out more about everyday experiences that young children encounter in early childhood settings.

Locating the self in the research context is 'intrinsic' to research process and personal narratives cultivate a depth to research findings which are particularly important when conducting research with young children (Coffey, 1999; Alderson, 2016). Ajebon (2021) points out the invisible dilemmas that come from combining motherhood and research, and I would agree that I encountered several invisible and ethical dilemmas conducting this study I allude to in Chapters Four and Nine. Castelló, McAlpine, and Sala-Bubaré, (2021) contribute the view that identity in research is ever evolving, a little like individual identities across motherhood. More than navigating the obvious challenges of balancing research with parenting and work commitments (Huopalainen and Satama, 2019), the research process connected deeply with my own emotional dimensions of motherhood. Locating myself in the field to closely observe children's voices was often a painful and confronting undertaking. I viscerally felt deep emotions throughout the entire research process and still find revisiting video clips or field diaries an embodied experience which triggers an array of feeling. Vygotsky (1987, p. 50–51) asserts 'Every idea contains some remnant of the individual's affective relationship to that aspect of reality which it represents', reflecting the interplay that occurs between the researcher and reality of conducting a research project. While it was a privilege to undertake this research project, I often wonder, if had I not been a mother whether I would have responded differently or immersed myself so fully in the project. I contemplate if I would have listened so closely to the babies and staff narratives if the emotional dimensions of motherhood and research had not collided so viscerally.

My research centralises the role of relationships and viewing myself 'within a web of relationships and within the broader social relations of the (research) community' (Albon and Rosen, 2014 p.9), was central to the success of this project.

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a

thou). Separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self as the main reason for the loss of oneself.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.287)

Bakhtin refers to the relational endeavours experienced and the significance this has on establishing a consciousness as a researcher. He alludes to the challenges posed by creating too greater distance between the research context, and individual, citing a loss of identity if researchers divorce themselves from relationships with others or their own heritage. Caution is always needed to maintain professional boundaries, and this involves sensitive piloting through relational and ethical challenges (Hedegaard, 2008a). Upholding my identity as a mother during dialogic encounters with adult participants or babies' serves as a strength to this study and is something I maintain increases the level of moral answerability demonstrated in the thesis. Developing researcher consciousness, is rooted in my own life history, each relational endeavour with research participants forming an essential and visible feature of the study (Ferraz, *et al.* 2023). Encountering research in spaces with babies warrants careful preservation of moral and ethical approaches (Johansson and White, 2011). White (2020) illuminates the concept of the 'work of the eye/I' drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, p.29) who posits researchers have an ethical, evaluative, and answerable role to undertake. In this sense, adopting a researcher optic brings a level of moral accountability to participants and the research objectives (Bakhtin, 1986; 1990; Hedegaard, 2008a). My role as a mother heightens the need for morality and answerability, driving my consciousness to authentically present the data and findings of this project sensitively to honour the stories and contributions of all participants.

1.3 Examining the political context for this study – Early Childhood Education.

This study is set within a changing political landscape in England where Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) appears to be high on public agenda, but its purpose and intentions greatly debated (Cameron and Moss, 2020; Moss, 2023). Policy movement concerning early childhood education accelerated between 1997 to the mid-2000s following inception of the Ten-Year Childcare Strategy (DfEE 1997; 1999; DfES, 2004) as part of the New Labour Party manifesto resulting in 'care' and 'education' unified under one system (Moss, 2020). Advancement of affordable early childhood care services followed amid a substantial increase of larger private

childcare providers, the key driver being to provide childcare for working parents (DfES, 2004; DfE, 2013). Despite this, access to nursery places is fragmented with a divide between those who can afford to pay high fees and those who rely on government funding, with only 7% of places available in publicly funded provision (Laing Buisson, 2019; Moss, 2020).

Childcare can improve educational outcomes for children. Childcare enables parents, particularly mothers, to go out to work, or increase their hours of work, thereby lifting their families out of poverty.

(Department for Education and Skills and Other Government Departments, 2002, p.5)

Prolonged government focus on viewing early childhood providers as a necessary solution to wider societal issues has created a notable tension between terminology adopted by government and early education specialists (Archer, 2022). Childcare and early education remain in contention, with childcare 'seen as a service families must utilise...and that must be paid for by those who benefit from it' (Penn, 2019, p. 2) and early education promoting high quality learning experiences for young children (Sylva *et al.* 2004). Despite substantial government investment and recent pledges to boost funding by £4.1 billion to fund places for babies as young as 9 months old (DfE, 2023a) increased demand for accessible and affordable childcare has resulted in substantial expansion of the private market, which is cited to be worth between £6.5 and £6.7 billion pounds (Laing Buisson, 2021). Figures published in Ofsted's Childcare and Early years provider report (DfE, 2022) highlights there are approximately 1.54 million childcare places offered by 59,400 early years providers, 21,600 of which were group based. 38% of the 21,600 places were provided by private group-based providers such as day nurseries. It is thought up to 1,440,000 children aged 0-4 accessing some sort of formal childcare, with approximately 166,000 families estimated to be accessing day nursery settings. It is notable the childcare provider report does not offer any specific statistics for 0–2-year-olds, grouping all under 5s together indicating deficient data recognising the importance positioning under two-year-olds as a distinct period, in its own right (Powell, 2020). However, a recent Department for Education survey of parents (DfE, 2023a) offers a more detailed breakdown of children's age, citing of the families surveyed, up to 47% of babies (one year and under) are accessing formal childcare, of which 30% are enrolled in a day nursery setting.

1.3.1 The Early Years curriculum in England.

New Labour invested substantially in early education and support services for families which resulted in extensive growth and reform in workforce training with various studies indicating the need for a graduate led workforce (Sylva *et al.* 2004; Children's Workforce Development Council, 2006). Increased childcare places across the sector, largely driven by the need for rapid expansion achieved through private companies adopting a 'business economic model' (Penn, 2019) warranted an early education curriculum to streamline the learning and development of young children preparing them for formal education (DCSF, 2007b).

The turn of the millennium, saw the commission and implementation two early years curriculum frameworks in quick succession. The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) sought to guide a play-based provision for preschool aged children, setting out early learning goals to assess children's learning and development. Research commissioned at the time determined high quality preschool experiences correlated with better outcomes in formalised education, and this was particularly evident for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sylva *et al.* 2004). Such rhetoric aligned government energy to expand childcare provision to bridge the educational gap for the most disadvantaged.

Expansion of informal childcare places for the under threes in the early 2000s necessitated a framework to promote effective practice leading to the implementation of Birth to Three Matters in 2002 (Sure Start Unit, 2002; David, Gooch, Powell and Abbott, 2003). For many reasons the Birth to Three Matters framework was significant. Grounded in evidence-based research, the framework sought to promote a positive conceptualisation of the young child as a 'strong, skilful, competent and healthy' individual from birth (Sure Start Unit, 2002; DfES, 2002). Ten principles framed the guidance, and closely correlate with the objectives of this doctoral study including the recognition of children being viewed as 'competent learners from birth' and the recognition of relationships as central to children's learning and development (DfES, 2002). Significantly, Birth to Three Matters drew attention to young children 'Finding a voice', affording for the first-time formal attention to babies' capabilities to use voice as a conduit to connect with others (David *et al.* 2003). As a result, interest in the lives of babies and toddlers increased and attention began to shift from pre-schoolers to babies and their experiences out of home (Gooch and Powell, 2016; White and Dalli, 2016). Overall, the framework fostered links across policy, practice and research and led to a

landmark impact on practice and a revitalisation of training and qualifications for educators (ESRC, 2015; Page, 2017).

Following government attempts to streamline policy documents in early education and services for young children, the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2007b) in September 2008 resulted in the amalgamation of the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) and Birth to Three Matters (Sure Start Unit, 2002; DfES, 2002) into a single framework for all children from birth to five years. Page (2017, p.4) notes this to be the most 'historically, educationally, ultimately morally' political shift in the status of young children in recent history. Recognition in the context of formalised education and care policy, was viewed to be a landmark shift in the recognition of early education overall. Recognition of children as 'unique' individuals and the ratification of the Key Person Approach (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2012) in statutory guidance were positive additions to provision and seen as a government commitment to drive forward high-quality provision and investment for young children. While many features of the original Birth to Three Matters framework were retained in the EYFS (DCSF, 2007b; DfE, 2021a), others seemed to become diluted or removed altogether. More pressing was the departure from positioning infancy as a period, 'in its own right', categorised as 'childhood' weakening the strong narrative established up to that point (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2003). In their review of international early education provision, Davis and Dunn (2018, p.8) point out, 'Infant (or synonyms such as baby or toddler) did not arise in the EYFS' and highlight how 'the English document is effectively silent on any sense that infants or toddlers might be differentiated from older children' (Davis and Dunn; 2018, p.8). Lack of precision regarding the representation of babies and recognition of their social agency led to a marked marginalisation from policy developments which endure today.

As this doctoral study commenced, the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (Department for Education, 2019) was newly revised for a second time and moving towards a period of sector consultation which resulted in new revision rolled out to early childhood settings in September 2021 (DfE, 2021a). The newest reforms focussed on improving language and literacy outcomes for disadvantaged children and streamlining workload for educators. The consultation and new guidance cite the importance of 'Children's back-and-forth interactions from an early age' which 'form the foundations for language and cognitive development' (DfE, 2021, p.15) and positions

young children as 'powerful learners' (DfE, 2021, p.3). New revisions to the framework promote a subtle shift in rhetoric affording greater attention towards preparing children for later learning in formal education over recognition of valuing their everyday contributions (Moss, 2020; Clark, 2022). Moreover, guidance for educators promoting knowledge of children's development across the first two years appears condensed and undervalued. In response to shifts in the narrative, organisations from across the early education sector formed a coalition to develop an alternative non-statutory guidance to offer the workforce a child centred perspective where children's voice and contributions to learning are actively celebrated (Early Education, 2021). I had the honour of being involved in the development of the guidance and worked collaboratively with colleagues across the sector to develop and refine the Communication and Language section, which reflects 'a baby's voice is evident from the beginning' (Early Education, 2021, p. 44). Though this remains non-statutory guidance, Birth to Five Matters channels a rights-based approach, promoting respectful caregiving and responsive pedagogy shaped around children's right to be heard and listened to which is a significant reconceptualization long overdue in the public domain (Early Education, 2021).

1.4 Examining the political context for this study – Policy Development in England.

Policy concerning the participation rights of very, young children have typically centred around their voices being amalgamated alongside older children. This notable absence from policy and literature has led to implementation of curriculum documents directed towards outcome-based agendas which fail to recognise babies' contributions (Davis and Dunn, 2018; Cameron and Moss, 2020). Recent years has seen a reactive rather than proactive growth and implementation of ECEC policy in England, with policies for under three-year olds being particularly patchy (Leach, 2018) and government funding streams slumping. Evans (2022) notes how the lack of specific guidance pertaining to the recognition of infancy seems to limit the promotion of their rights overall. Typically, children's participatory rights are set within a human rights agenda, recognised, and promoted in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). The UNCRC (UN, 1989) provides a framework for governments internationally to promote the rights of all children through the implementation of local and national policy. Specific to the context of this study which examines the voices of babies, is Article 12 that advocates for children 'capable of forming his or her own views that right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the

child' (UN, 1989, p.5) and Article 13 which centres around children's freedom of expression. Specifically, Article 12, calls for the child's views to be 'given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. Herein lies the challenge for policy makers and those working with the youngest child, as 'voice' is often misunderstood or skewed within a discourse centred around babies lacking cognitive and communicative ability.

There have been several calls to place greater emphasis on babies' rights as part of the UNCRC (WAIMH, 2016; Wall *et al.* 2019; Cassidy *et al.* 2020). In 2005, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) placed prominence on implementing rights in early childhood, citing their often 'powerless' and 'voiceless' invisibility in families and society. The General comment notes,

(c) States parties should take all appropriate measures to promote the active involvement of parents, professionals, and responsible authorities in the creation of opportunities for young children to progressively exercise their rights within their everyday activities in all relevant settings, including by providing training in the necessary skills. To achieve the right of participation requires adults to adopt a child-centred attitude, listening to young children and respecting their dignity and their individual points of view. It also requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child's interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating.

(CRC, General Comment No. 7, (2006, p.7)

As well as highlighting the correlation between joined up thinking between stakeholders and professional training for those advocating for the rights of young children, the Committee urged countries to develop a 'systematic and integrated approach to law and policy development in relation to all children up to 8 years old' to promote a rights based approach and called for early childhood provision to "empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence" (CRC General Comment No. 1, 2001 and General Comment No.7 2006, p. 11).

Though short-lived attention to babies' voice was recognised in the Birth to Three Matters (DfEE, 2002) policy guidance, it remained notably absent from other government documents. Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) sought to remodel early childhood services and set out government intentions to 'ensure children's and young people's voices are effectively heard' by appointing a statutory Children's Commissioner to advocate for 'voices' that are 'too often drowned out' (DfES, 2003, p.79). Though a Children's Commissioner remains in place today, their advocacy for the

voices of babies remains ambiguous. In 2013, a Conception to Aged Two All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was established to bring together cross party representatives to campaign for streamlined implementation of support services during the perinatal period and beyond. The APPG established a '1001 Critical Days Manifesto' (Hosking and Walsh, 2015) which instigated a movement to prioritise the emotional wellbeing of babies and families. While the APPG's work continues to influence the implementation of Parent Infant programmes nationally, The Best Start for Life report, published by the government in 2021 advocating for the first 1001 days states, 'we will also ensure that the voices of parents, carers and families inform national policy and decision making (HM Government, 2021, p.39). It appears remarkable that a report commissioned to advocate the wellbeing of babies pays a distinct lack of attention to sourcing strategies to evidence the contributions from babies and toddlers. Alderson (2013, p. 4) highlights this absence referring specifically to 'unmentioned children' in countless moments of history citing a 'passive presence' has contributed to the 'woeful neglect' of children in policy agendas (Moss, 2020 p.60). The World Association for Infant Mental Health (2016) point out the UNCRC does not sufficiently 'differentiate the needs of infants and toddlers' and advocate for an increase in the prominence of infancy and the placing of greater attention to infant mental health, recognising the baby as having an 'identity from the moment of birth' (WAIMH, 2016, p.4).

Despite this motion, an alarming political 'Baby blind spot' materialised (Parent Infant Foundation, 2021; Reed and Parish, 2021) in the government response to the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. In a similar narrative to the one Alderson (2013) alluded, babies and children were omitted, the pandemic highlighting weaknesses in policy relating to young children's rights to a voice (Russell and Stenning, 2020; Colucci-Gray, 2022). While this issue was not isolated to England, the English government remained slow to respond to calls to centralise babies' wellbeing and increase investment for young children as recovery from the pandemic ensued (Best Beginnings, Home Start and Parent Infant Foundation, 2020; Reed and Parish, 2021). In stark contrast, in response to WAIMH's (2016) position paper, and published opportunely as pandemic recovery commenced, the Scottish Government motioned The Scottish Model of Infant Participation (Scottish Government, 2023) as part of their commitment to the Scottish UNCRC Bill (2021) which encompasses best practice guidance for professional working with babies and their families. The guidance intends to reposition infant voices as a central feature of decisions made about their

mental health and wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2023). This motion indicates a momentous change in the way in which babies are positioned in service provision and offers hope other nations may replicate similar intentions.

In March 2023, the Conservative government announced greater investment in early education, pledging to increase current early years funding streams, with a model that progresses towards 30 hours funding for under 2-year-olds in 2025 (DfE, 2023a). The government highlights,

... that the early years is a vital part of a child's education and remains committed to ensuring parents can access affordable, high quality, flexible childcare.

(HM Government, 2023, p. 9)

Tendered as part of a supportive package to encourage parents into employment, the motion appears concerned with the needs of parents over those of very, young children (Archer, 2023). While it could be argued pledging to invest in under twos provision in early education may aid the political status of babies, caution is needed to assess if this initiative will drive enough sustained investment to offer the optimum early education conditions for children under two. Simultaneously, the government published regulatory changes to childcare (DfE, 2023a;2023b) outlining intentions to change the minimum adult to child ratio for two-year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5, despite a groundswell of opposition from the early years sector and beyond (Butt *et al.* 2023; Early Years Alliance, 2023). Government rationale for this overhaul is to 'provide managers with the flexibility to utilise staff in a more efficient and effective way...' but reiterates the need to 'ensure that staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure the quality of care, safety and security of children is maintained' (DfE, 2023a, p. 10).

The Children's Rights Alliance for England (2023) report a substantial regression in children's rights since 2016, noting England is 'lagging behind' other areas in the United Kingdom, citing the distinct lack of political urgency to attend to the legislative rights of children. The report notes several social and economic factors contributing to the overall neglect of children's rights, including the Covid-19 pandemic and years of austerity, nevertheless, the report is damning in its condemnation of the failures of the UK Government to prioritise implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This report, published in parallel to the government's recent

manifesto to increase funding for early childhood services emphasises the fragmented approaches adopted by successive governments (Cameron and Moss, 2020). There is a lack of joined up thinking and recognition to consider early childhood education as a tool to aid the rights of young children.

In 2021, Oliver Steeper (aged 9 months) died whilst attending an early childhood setting in England (Oliver Steeper Foundation, 2023). While the death of a young children in nursery remains mercifully rare, Oliver's case draws attention to the fundamental role of a highly trained workforce and the criticality of appropriate adult: child ratios for all children, particularly babies. Recurrent international research affirms high quality care and safety in early childhood settings is associated with high levels of adult supervision, frequent responsive interactions, and a highly trained workforce (Dalli *et al.* 2011; Page and Elfer, 2013 Degotardi and Pearson, 2014; Elicker, Ruprecht, and Anderson, 2014; Loizou and Demetrio, 2019). The government's own research highlights the necessity for 'creating more opportunities for interactions between adults and children that help children to develop speech and language' following impact of the pandemic (Ofsted, 2022, p.20). So, it begs the question government proposals to decrease the number of adults caring for young children is a sensible action. Moreover, it is unclear how altering the structural features of early childhood education promotes the democratic rights of young children to have access to high quality, responsive care, and education experiences. From my own investigations of research, I have found no evidence to the contrary and I believe Oliver's case confirms much of the message of this thesis, babies matter and without proper investment the quality of care they receive in early childhood settings will be insufficient in meeting their basic human rights.

1.5 The aims of the study and research questions.

This study intends to add to international discourse concerning the rights of babies in early education, focussing specifically on their voices in research and the broader societal and political field. It seeks to act as a platform to document the ordinary social occurrences of everyday life in nursery between babies and early childhood educators, whilst investigating aspects that may influence how and if a baby's voice is heard and responded to. This study does not avoid the well documented tensions associated with involving babies in research or the ethical and

methodological challenges encountered (Johansson and White, 2011). Rather, it confronts the notion that whilst we can never be certain what babies' voices are truly communicating, employing observational techniques that seek to examine space and time that voice materialises and consider broader external influences, we can learn more about babies' experiences in settings outside the home which can facilitate greater awareness of how to develop appropriate and responsive pedagogy to meet their needs. At no point does this study claim to know or conclude babies' voice or their perspectives, instead it presents detailed descriptions of a small sample of babies enrolled in two early childhood settings that helps to increase our knowledge of how the visible aspects of voice can manifest in nursery and support our understanding of how voice acts influence practices in baby rooms. This study acts as an important contribution to research, presenting insight into the experiences of babies and those working closely with them.

The underpinning research aims are:

1. To explore what are the patterns of communication babies use to express their voice in nursery provision and consider how these are used to initiate and sustain interactions with educators in a nursery environment.
2. To determine if the voicing patterns may relate to a baby's voicing in the home environment.
3. To investigate educators' responses to babies' voices in the setting
4. To consider the ways in which the culture of the nursery environment may influence the interactions that take place between babies and educators.
5. To add to scholarly understanding of babies' voices outside the home environment
6. To develop new concepts and understanding of baby-adult interactions outside the home environment

These six aims provided a framework to inform development of the following research questions:

Research question 1 - What are the patterns of communication babies employ to express their voice in nursery provision?

This question provides opportunity to explore the patterns of communication babies engage in early childhood settings. Chapter Two refers to a vast array of literature pertaining to the voices of very young children; therefore, this question offers potential to learn more about how voice in the context of nursery. Underpinning the spirit of this research question is the premise that voice

embodies any movement, gesture, sound, or utterance, and is driven by an 'innate dialogic motivation' (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007) to ignite interaction with others. All babies have a voice that should be listened to, and voice can be observed through their patterns of communication in social spaces.

Research question 2 - How are these patterns of communication used to initiate and sustain interactions with early childhood educators in a nursery environment?

It is important to attempt to explore the meaning behind the patterns of communication documented as part of research question one. The focus children in each early childhood setting will be observed in varying capacities to ascertain the significance of their communicative attempts. Reddy (2008) asserts babies are born capable of seeking out others for moments of interaction, establishing synchronicity with consistent and responsive partners. Accordingly, the way in which babies endeavour to attract the attention of the adults caring for them and the way in which they then sustain this attention is integral to this study and will hold weight for any further investigations or discourse across the sector.

Research question 3 - How do the observed patterns of communication in nursery relate to parent's descriptions of patterns of interactions in the home?

As a parent myself, I believed it was important to provide an opportunity for parents to be involved in the study. Children enter settings with experiences from home informing their social abilities and understanding of relationships with others. The personal histories and the family culture or funds of knowledge they absorb alters their perception of the social world (Gonzalez *et al.* 2005). This study does not aim to provide a comparison between interactions in the home and day care settings, there will always be profound differences between these contexts. However, it is necessary to consider what stories and experiences the child enters the setting with as this will inform their expectations of the adults caring for them and the voicing techniques they exercise.

Research question 4 - In what ways do early childhood educators respond to babies' voices in the setting?

Central to this study is to consider the responses babies receive following their voicing attempts. Research asserts the importance of interactions between babies and adults in all contexts with Shonkoff and Phillips (2000, p.314) determining the quality care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the childcare provider and child. Their research, along with a plethora

of others (Gibbons, Stratford and White, 2017; Mitchelmore, Degotardi and Fleet, 2017) recognise the quality of daily interactions between practitioners and children carry weight and influence the long-term development of the children they care for. In addition, literature indicates babies are committed to attracting the attention of adults, even after adult attention is terminated (Reddy, 2012). However, if responses are never received, the child is more likely to give up, raising the levels of stress hormone, cortisol in their bodies (Sumner *et al.* 2010). Little research in day care contexts is available that substantiates the opportunity for intimate engagements between practitioners and babies. Educators hold a great responsibility to care for and interact with many children on a day-to-day basis. If these interactions are few and fleeting, then the experiences of children in settings becomes ineffective and the educator role fruitless.

Research question 5 - Do early childhood educators think the culture of the wider nursery environment influences their interactions with babies - and if so, in what way?

It is probable organisational structure and cultural context of a nursery environment will influence opportunity for interactions between educators and infants to materialise (Pinto, *et al.* 2019). To increase understanding of how the characteristics of nursery life increase or inhibit opportunities for voice to appear during interactional moments, educators must have a chance to share their experiences. This question is necessary to open a dialogue between the tensions that may arise in settings regarding policy expectations and emotional demands of working closely with young children.

1.7 Confronting the ethical challenges of research with babies.

In addition to the current precarious early education sector wide position, this study faced several challenges which require attention early in the thesis.

During my initial literature searches, it became quickly apparent that scholarly work outside the psychology domain featuring babies is relatively rare and often contested (Johansson and White, 2011). In the past, childhood and particularly infancy was viewed as a period of immaturity, a process of formation toward adulthood resulting in a deficient position in society (Alderson, 2015; Wall *et al.* 2019; McFadyen, *et al.* 2022). This study leads from a position that children remain central to adult matters relating to societal issues, policy developments and legislative movement, despite underrepresentation from the children themselves (Nyland, 2009). Parents, teachers,

stakeholders, and politicians alike claim to know what is best for children resulting in economies and policies emerging based on adult interpretations of children's requirements. The worlds of children and adults are interwoven, yet there appears to be an imbalance where 'child friendly' research is notoriously adulterated in favour of political and societal precedence (Matthews, 2001). Dalli (1999) argues adult researchers and policy makers claim to know and understand what a child's voice is communicating without any prior knowledge of a child's personal life which dilutes the significance of any inferred outcome. It is thought this emerges from a discourse of uncertainty of babies' own perspectives, a fear of 'adulthood morphing' and objectifying infants (Stern, 1977, p.47; Waller and Bitou, 2011) and a concern of appropriateness relating to ontological and epistemological approaches (Johansson and White, 2011). Further, Bradley *et al.* (2012, p.141) ask if researchers can ever 'ventriloquise' what babies are really saying without imposing their own preconceptions about infant behaviours or theoretical underpinning of development. This thesis aligns Elwick *et al.* (2014a, 2014b) view that the voices of young children must be equitably evidenced in research and policy development, but I acknowledge the tensions concerning the most appropriate methodology to represent these. From the outset the discourse surrounding the ethical origin of voice shaped my thinking and created the need for this project to move cautiously and thoughtfully through each research milestone.

I refer now to an example where my ethical lens was unsettled which led me to consider the bearing of responsibility assumed as a researcher leading this project. In March 2019 I attended a conference where a speaker showed the audience a YouTube clip of a baby reacting to music and his/her mother's singing. The speaker did not know the child, or the context in which the video clip was recorded, but they claimed to 'know' what the child was feeling and attempted to share their interpretations with the audience. The speaker interpreted the child's voice to be a positive indicator of their emotional connection to their mother, citing the child was emotionally 'moved' by the mother's singing voice. This view was contrary to many others in the audience who found the clip uncomfortable and viewed the child as distressed, confused, and disturbed.

Two issues are raised here – the first relates to the ethical dilemma surrounding the rights of young children, and whether it is 'right' to unwittingly film them in highly emotive situations, and furthermore to then share this on social media. The second issue this case highlights is the

subjective nature of attempting to interpret another's feelings and perceptions of an experience we do not fully understand.

As adults, responsible for the wellbeing and protection of children, I deem it inappropriate to consent on the behalf of a child and share footage of them widely on the social media. I am acutely sensitive to the moral and ethically privileged position I hold as a researcher to witness the unfolding development of babies first hand and document a passing episode in their short lives. Perhaps this arises from my mothering role, or perhaps it has more to do with protecting the rights and dignity of children, ensuring in line with the Article 3 and 16 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) affirming children's best interests should remain paramount, and they have a right to privacy. I note several high-profile researchers and advocates for children's rights regularly share short video clips on social media platforms which brings into question how this safeguards children's voices and participatory rights. It is ironic this study has developed in parallel to substantial expansion of media platforms including TikTok and Twitter where clips of children are shared daily. This is a contentious issue, and is not the focus on this study, though I believe such issues hold relevance and have shaped the ethical and moral approach I have adopted as an early career researcher.

Bradley *et al.* (2012, p. 141) draws from Deleuze's (1995) constructs of the 'indignity of speaking for others' and contemplate the inappropriateness of infant experiences as an objective entity and dispute the lack of understanding adults/researchers can ever have on a baby's inner thoughts. And in addition, whilst less seriously, this is an issue for any group, young or older, I intentionally approach this study from the perspective of joining a dialogue rather than speaking on behalf of the children involved. The social world is complex, subjective, and culturally shaped, so it is vital researchers dedicate time to designing respectful research methodologies that present the voices of very, young children aligning 'ethical optics' (Levinas, 1969) to prioritise equity and careful attention to their contributions (Elwick, *et al.* 2014a). I maintain however, without knowing the experiences of babies accessing early childhood settings, we are further facilitating their silence. What can be 'seen' and 'heard' in the social context of a nursery environment needs to be interrogated and can facilitate further knowledge and understanding of young children's voices and their participation rights. As explained in Chapter Four, at no point in this project do I claim to know, with certainty (Elwick *et al.* 2014b), the voices or perspectives of the children attending the settings. Rather, the

study examines the multifaceted communication patterns, comprising movement, vocalisations and expressions that characterise voice and provides vivid narratives of the baby: educator interactions that unfold. From this, I contend this project can assist in repositioning babies as individuals with something unique and meaningful to contribute to research. Section 1.2 highlights the ethical and moral responsibility assumed in the role as a researcher and I argue those accessing this thesis should also be held morally accountable to act on the voices presented herein and join a sector wide dialogue to advocate for babies' voices to be heard.

1.8 Outline of the thesis

Chapter One sets out the rationale for the study, research questions and indicates the personal, professional, and political context framing the research journey. In addition, this chapters lays out some of the challenges associated with conducting research involving babies and introduces the key terminology used across the thesis.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature pertinent to the study context. Literature reviewed originates from several different perspectives to critique voice in the context of infancy. The project examines several broader themes connecting with the importance of early relationships, the context of early childhood education, babies' rights, and the current professional situation of early childhood educators. The chapters conclude with reiteration of the study aims and leads onto the theoretical framework in Chapter Three.

Chapter three introduces the theoretical framing which guides the doctoral study. Three distinct theoretical perspectives are introduced and infused to create a frame for the study overall.

Arising from the theoretical origins is **Chapter Four** which introduces the study's methodological design and provides a detailed examination of the research methods and ethical approaches adopted in the project. Due regard is given to the researcher role and the chapter makes clear how the informed consent of participants and assent of the babies involved was an ongoing and reflexive process.

Chapter Five details the complex data analysis processes involved in uniting five research methods using a cultural historical and grounded theory framework to generate data and findings.

Examples of the data analysis process are included, and reference is made to additional sources presented in the appendices.

Chapter Six is a short chapter that provides a brief account of the two institutions involved in the study and presents context where the research was conducted, and data originated.

Chapter Seven and **Chapter Eight** introduce the two institutions accessed as field sites for data generation, Little Birdies and Little Pandas respectively. Both chapters present the findings emerging from my time in the field and are organised around the five research questions. Research question five is presented before the other research question findings. This is a purposeful and ethical decision to present the institutional context to the reader prior to any specific findings concerning the babies or educator responses. Vivid descriptions of the babies' voice expressions are presented together with vignettes from parents and educators which show the multiple perspectives of voice that emerged following data analysis.

Chapter Nine is the discussion chapter that brings together findings from both field sites to present an overall illustration of the research findings. The five research questions act as a frame to guide the discussion and findings are considered in the context of current literature and the theoretical notions underpinning the context of this study.

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by considering the key findings and its distinct and original contribution to research. The chapter reflects on the doctoral journey and considers the limitations of the study as well as challenges encountered. The conclusion is framed within three perspectives taken from Hedegaard's (2008a) wholeness approach, the societal, institutional, and personal.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction.

This study does not stand alone but builds on what is already known in the field of early childhood, with a specific focus on examining the voices of babies attending early childhood settings. Xiao and Watson (2017, p.93) assert that a literature review is the foundation to any academic inquiry, and it is through this process we begin to understand the 'breadth and depth of existing body of work and identify gaps to explore'. With that in mind, this chapter grounds the study within the context of current literature pertaining to the voices of babies, early interactions, and baby room provision in early childhood education. While this chapter critically examines literature sources relevant to the context of this study, the focus topics span several research domains (Bowlby, 1988; Gopnik, 2016; Trevarthen, Delafield-Butt, and Dunlop, 2018; Dalli, *et al.* 2011; Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018). This has warranted careful selection to determine their inclusion, and as a result sources included are representative and not exhaustive.

This chapter largely draws on scholarly contributions where patterns of communication are framed as intentional communication and can be conceptualised as 'voice'. In addition, scholarship pertaining to early childhood provision is extensive, although it is noted that scholarly attention to early education provision for babies is far less. Subsequently, literature prioritises contributions from authors who afford attention to baby room pedagogy and those who have attended to the importance of early interactions in early childhood settings. Literature searches highlighted a prominent issue across the literature around the lack of cohesion across research fields resulting in varying theoretical perspectives and a diverse array of vocabulary applied to research papers, varying between 'infant' and 'baby' and 'practitioner' or 'educator'. To that end, this doctorate seeks to act as a bridge between research domains, referring as far as possible to 'babies' and 'educators' to offer some consistency to terminology. This chapter draws specifically on sources from developmental psychology as well as early education field and creates a fusion of dialogue to aid cross sector discourse concerning the voices of babies and their experiences in early childhood settings.

This chapter is framed by two core questions that have guided the review of literature to ensure there are clear boundaries when conducting literature searches and reflecting on the relevance of sources included.

1. What is already known about the voices of babies attending early childhood settings?
2. What are the literature gaps pertaining to understanding babies' voices in the context of early childhood settings?

By considering literature within the constructs of these two questions, it was possible to determine how my study could be shaped to offer a unique contribution to current discourse and add value to available literature pertaining to the voices of babies in early childhood contexts.

2.2 Babies' voices as a right for participation.

Seeking to afford voice to the youngest child and acknowledging their right to freedom of expression is a research priority, with urgent calls to represent the voices of our youngest from various sectors (Alderson, 2015; Elfer, *et al.* 2018, Degotardi and Han, 2020a; Degotardi and Han, 2020b; Degotardi and Han, 2022). What represents a child's voice in research remains a vague and complex issue; consequently, attempts to portray the voices of the very, youngest children remain obscured and underrepresented (Bradley, *et al.* 2012; Wall *et al.* 2017).

Typically, voice has been conceptualised as a participation right, arising from specific attention to Article 12 and 15 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) positions all children, even the very young, with the right to express their views freely, in accordance with their 'age and maturity' and considers all forms of communication as a valued expression of voice (United Nations, 1989, p.5; UN CRC 2009, p. 7). Despite this guidance, the concept of voice remains deeply entangled with the concept of safeguarding, democracy, and participation (Murray, 2019) which has created ambiguity around how to 'give' voice to very, young children. Zanatta and Long (2021) highlight the absence of clear theoretical underpinning pertaining to the rights of children, citing the lack specific training for the workforce and lacking confidence in educators to assert a rights-based approach to pedagogy. This position aligns with Moss (2007) who has long argued for 'transformative change' toward a democratic early education pedagogy to validate the capabilities of young children and integrate their rights at the foundation of all educational experiences (Moss, 2020). The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) (2023) call for urgent political attention to be paid to the rights of all children and identify the dearth

of adequate child rights education available to professionals who work with children (Culhane and McGeough, 2020).

While there is an abundance of literature examining the voices of older children, with specific focus to creating 'listening cultures' (Clark and Moss, 2011; Clark, 2005; Moore, 2021) the voices of very, young children have been either represented alongside older children or neglected altogether (McFayden *et al.* 2022). Consistent with the lack of literature concerning the voices of babies, successive policy reforms (DfE, 2013) appear to have failed to attend wholly to their rights, with only Scotland leading the way in identifying a legislative distinction between infancy and childhood (Scottish Government, 2023) (See Chapter One for a policy overview).

Murray (2019, p.2) argues,

Early childhood macro-policies focused on investment return may overlook what is important for a young child now, yet they may intrude so powerfully into the pedagogic space that there is little or no opportunity for practitioners to listen to children's views or act on them.

Here, Murray (2019) reiterates the paradox facing the early childhood sector where policy and children's rights misalign and create unachievable position for the workforce. The importance of the workforce keeping children safe amid the safeguarding agenda should not be underestimated. However, this dominant discourse may have obscured attempts to listen and increase children's participation rights (Evans, 2021). In contrast, Lundy (2020) asserts participation and protection rights should remain interconnected and cannot be separated. The Lundy Model of Participation (2007) pioneers a framework of four dimensions to facilitate the voice of young children. Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence are presented by Lundy (2007; 2020) as a way to address Article 12 of the UNCRC and acknowledge its interrelatedness to other articles. This literature review notes how the model originates from a study prioritising school-aged children, but it has since been implemented as a best practice tool to facilitate the voices of babies in parent-infant care (McFadyen *et al.* 2022; Scottish Government 2023) and to create open listening climates in early childhood settings (Moore, 2021). Lundy's model offers a valuable framing to elicit the voices of babies, and more importantly, promote the responsibility of adults working with babies to be mindful to 'create an environment that facilitates their communication and supports them to make a

meaningful contribution' (Scottish Government, 2023, p.7). Such advancements indicate a promising transference of power, in favour of the infant, although time will tell if presenting a child rights agenda in policy can be transferred successfully into practice.

Wall *et al.* (2017) build on existing knowledge of voice constructs and open dialogue pertaining to the notion of voice, with a specific early childhood lens. To support practitioners thinking and to scaffold 'collegial conversations' in practice, eight principles for eliciting voice with young children are defined (Cassidy *et al.* 2022, p.3). Definition, Power, Inclusivity, Listening; Time and Space; Approaches; Processes and Purposes aim to elicit dialogue and support professionals working with children under the age of eight (Cassidy, *et al.* 2022, p. 3). So far, the principles have been seminal in drawing attention to the voices of young children (Arnott and Wall, 2021), and aiding cross sector discourse, however evidencing the voices of children themselves remains absent. Wall and colleagues adopt a cautious approach, opting to state that voice is context specific and requires ongoing dialogue between professionals to develop 'what voice means to them' (Cassidy *et al.* 2022 p.6). Despite this, Wall *et al.* (2019) and Cassidy *et al.* (2022) argue it is essential research affords greater attention to ascertain what voice 'is' and offer a definition stating voice comprises 'behaviour, actions, pauses in action, silences, body language, glances, movement and artistic expression' (Wall *et al.* 2019 p.268). This position echoes Murray (2019, p.2; 2017) who asserts voice encompasses 'multiple modalities' that are reliant upon relational encounters with others. Further, Lawrence (2022, p.85) cites voice to be 'variable, multiple, multimodal, dialogical, emotional, as well as cognitive, co-constituted and entangled in more-than-human worlds. Lawrence (2022) captures the depth and complexity of voice constructs and its entanglement with the environment and broader influences. In addition, she underlines the lack of scholarly attention attending to the dialogical elements of voice which is consistent with other sources (Murray, 2019; Wall *et al.* 2019; Cassidy *et al.* 2022). Wall *et al.* (2017) among others (Elwick *et al.* 2014a) address the complexity arising from the ethical challenges associated with eliciting voice in early childhood. It is notable that babies' voice contributions remain sparse in the work considered herein, possibly due to the ethical concerns Wall *et al.* (2019) allude. Consequently, this doctoral study seeks to confront some of the ethical challenges by sourcing strategies to support adults to add value and depth to their interactions with babies which will facilitate babies' right to contribute to research.

2.3 Theorisation of voice through a Froebelian lens.

Contributions from Fredrich Froebel (1782-1852), present distinct work attending to voice discourse, though immediate impact at the time of his writing was disregarded (Wasmuth, 2020). Froebel's accounts depict a highly aware child, eager to interact with others, the first smile, a clue to his intense and conscious awareness of his being and responsivity as an individual.

His smile already expresses his personality, his uniqueness (his individuality), yet it is generally disregarded (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 75).

Detailed descriptions of how babies engage their bodies, facial expressions, and early vocalisations in a bid to be heard are evident in Froebel's manuscripts, yet he claimed such proficiency to be often dismissed by adults as typical 'infantile' reactions meaning very little (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967). His writing indicates a connection between the child's inner self and externally displayed behaviours, citing children engage their bodies to communicate their internal drive to connect with others (Froebel, 1826; Oboils and Berrios, 2009).

Froebelian philosophy captures the essence of this project, his principles grounding the theoretical frame which are expanded in Chapter Three. Significantly, Froebel acknowledges the child as a highly intellectual being, keen to learn about the world and responsive to the emotional tones of the adults, particularly the mother, surrounding him. The child is self-active, working to engage his 'energetic' body as a tool to draw his inner sense of self out into the world, via body movement which indicates the 'beginning of the growth of self-consciousness' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 59-60). Without the adults in his world to listen, watch and respond to, the baby's mind, body and soul will struggle to flourish (Froebel, 1887).

2.4 Theorisation of voice from a Bakhtinian perspective.

Bakhtin's core principles of Dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) and its relevance to this study is explored in depth in Chapter Three, however, his contribution to literature is acknowledged here as an important and distinct influence on scholarly understanding of voice in early childhood. While Bakhtin's components of Dialogism are many, his notion of 'utterance' (Bakhtin, 1986) offers opportunity to reflect on the minutiae of voice in infancy. Utterance is seen as a multimodal fundamental unit of communication, composed of a 'dynamic structure of acts' that warrant

'answering' (Bertau, 2007, p. 136). Accordingly, utterance is always a social act demanding an answer, constructing a social obligation for the 'other' to act and respond (Bakhtin 1990). Interestingly, in his writing, Bakhtin recognises the imprint of moments in an individual's history, stating 'utterance is always an answer' (Holquist, 2002, p.60) and there is always something that precedes it. From this, it can be understood that prior interactional experiences culturally construct how utterance manifests. The baby engages dialogically in their first relationships and learns the structure and rituals of such engagement. Over time consciousness manifests in voice expressions, surfacing in dialogue with another, creating a social identity. In other words, voice 'carries the subject out of himself' (Bertau, 2007), bringing forth his social contributions into the environment. To Bakhtin, every utterance is multi layered, comprising 'many voices' shaped by movement, tempo and 'dialogic overtones' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92). His writing refers to the 'manifoldness' of voice, in keeping with the notion that voice is diverse yet grounded and responsive to the environments it encounters (Bakhtin, 1979). Further, he suggests that although each utterance is distinct and individual, the context in which it arises develops 'its own relatively stable types of these utterances' (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60). Therefore, the social identity a baby attributes with individual environments and relational encounters will differ and the voice acts that occur will be responsive and unique to that space.

2.5 Voice as an intentional and embodied experience.

While positioning babies as active agents with rights that should be afforded attention has gained traction in recent years, developing an astute comprehension of how the voices of very, young children materialise remains vague (Guard, 2023). Discourse appears to be concerned with affording rights to young children without determining how voice manifests in social surroundings. Historical writing offers some insight into how babies engage voice in multimodal ways, and developmental psychology and neuropsychology has continued to expand this understanding, although its translation into the early childhood education sector remains fragmented (Moss, 2020). Murray (2019, p.3) calls for greater definition to 'what we mean by the term 'children's voices' and this study argues urgent attention should be paid to voice manifestation within the context of early childhood settings. Several key scholars conceptualise voice within the realms of communication patterns with primary caregivers (Stern, 1985; Reddy, 2008, Delafield-Butt and

Trevarthen, 2017) and their work presents opportunity to assist the conceptualisation of voice in infancy as a mode of communication in the context of this project.

Colwyn Trevarthen (1979; 2003; 2011) has been instrumental in leading one of the most influential shifts in how babies are positioned in literature in recent times. Trevarthen (2004, p.9) calls for the traditional 'reductive assumptions' about infancy founded in developmental psychology to be abandoned and babies to be reconceptualised as 'remarkably coherent', and 'inquisitive and creative human beings' (Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt, 2017, p.17). This premise is now widely accepted and underpins discourse concerning infant development.

Drawing on extensive evidence examining the behaviours of babies from birth, Gratier and Trevarthen (2007) situate voice as a powerful connection between mother and baby, stemming from in-utero connections, a thread into the outside world which is strengthened immediately after birth (Goswami, 2015). Trevarthen and colleagues (Trevarthen and Reddy, 2007; Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen, 2017) state babies can act in highly sensitive expressive ways, forming 'coherent rhythmic purposeful consciousness' by employing a range of movements (Trevarthen, 2011, p. 120). The baby joins a family 'theatre' and participates in a 'living chorus of voices', voice emerging from the human body, 'anticipating and adjusting to the experience they create' (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007, p.169-170). Arnott, McGowan, and Delafield-Butt (2021, p.136) argue voice projects a 'small story' varying in temporal dimensions.

Eyes, head, hands and arms, and legs dance in harmony, and the mouth sings, inspired by the pulse of a secret melody that attracts and responds to affectionate companionship that supports actions and feelings of the whole body (Trevarthen 2018, p.17).

The 'voice' emerges from the human body, a combination of physical expressions powered through an innately dialogic motivation (Stern, 1985; Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007). An embodied experience, voice arises from within the child, yet seeks and responds to moments of interaction with others. Trevarthen (1998, p. 16) characterises movements to be motivated to intentionally draw 'other persons in 'conversational' negotiation of purposes, emotions, experiences and meaning'. Reddy (2008; 2015) extends this position, stating intentions materialise as 'patterns of movement' (2008, p.155) but are reliant upon the context of their action to derive meaning.

There is a substantial body of evidence that determines babies learn through the intentional communications of others, they learn to anticipate, respond, and regulate their responses to others (Somerville, Needham and Woodward, 2005; Reddy, Markova and Wallot, 2013). This study argues it is through these responses that voice materialises and is made visible.

This process of engagement of the other's act and the infant's responses allows the developing awareness of the intentionality of the other's act as well as of one's own response.

(Reddy, 2015, p.12)

Reddy (2012) suggests babies increase their understanding of how intentional communication can be used to draw attention from others by engaging in meaningful communication contexts where intentional engagement is a shared event. Babies' intentional action directed towards their 'self' arises earlier than previously believed, supporting the premise of this study that a baby's ability to engage voice intentionally arises long before they are toddlers (Nadel *et al.* 1999; Reddy, 2015). In earlier work, Trevarthen and Reddy (2007) highlighted the concept that intention and consciousness are interconnected, and 'are mapped out inside the embryo brain and body' growing in complexity in response to engagement with the environment after birth (Trevarthen 2004; Trevarthen *et al.* 2006).

Broadly, this informs understanding of voice in infancy as arising from the 'self', but socially and culturally sensitive to the rhythms and temporal fluxes of life and taking shape from the responses received from others (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007). Similarly, whilst conducting a review of psycholinguistic theorisation of voice, Bertau (2007) contends a mother's voice gives shape to the baby's voice, which in turn becomes a socio-culturally situated identity, rooted in shared dialogic engagement. Bertau (2007) provides a rich examination of literature concerning voice theorisation and draws specifically on Osatuke *et al.* (2004) audio analysis of a psychotherapy case study. Whilst Osatuke *et al.*'s (2004) contribution focusses specifically on the multiplicity of adult voices; it offers a helpful lens to contextualise voice concept. The paper unpicks the complexity of the internal and external voice, adding credence to Froebel's (1886) view that voice is primarily internal and multifaceted, emerging as lived experiences begin to shape and build up, gradually manifesting itself as an external expression physically.

Voice comprises 'traces of experience' and arises as a 'physicality of the psychological self' (Osatuke *et al.* 2004, p.252) where movements are driven by intentionality or a 'knowledge building adventure' (Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen, 2020). Physicality and vocalisation work in harmony as a social tool, adjusting to social experiences emerging as a rhythmic pattern inspired by infant experiences from mother's voice and movements from in the womb (Stern, 1985; Gratier and Trevarthen, 2014). Subtle movements are interrelated with emotions and demonstrate an innate 'intersubjective motor control' (Trevarthen, 1986) comprising purposeful and coherent movements. Brazelton *et al.* (1974) and Trevarthen, (1979) position babies as attentive and capable of uniting emotion with arbitrary movements to reciprocate emotionally toward their communicative companion. Long before the appearance of distinct physical declaration such as pointing, babies delicately move their hands in 'self-synchrony' (Trevarthen, 2011, p.128), combining these physical expressions with subtle vocalisations, often in response to an adult or to elicit reactions from them. Babies combined 'pre-speech' sequences play out dyadically over time with established communication partners, the expressions developing as 'manifestations of an empathic awareness and mutual control' (Beebe *et al.* 2003, p. 787).

Voice develops a thickness and rich existence because of the response from the social cultural context, informed by historicity of experience or the 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez *et al.* 1995). According to Gratier and Trevarthen (2007, p.176), voice 'carries the imprint of close others and communities of belonging', never losing its natural dialogicity, but intensifying through historic affiliations. Applying this to infancy, we can derive the child's body and their relational history to be inseparable from the emerging vocalisations of 'voice'. Therefore, to dismiss their significance would be careless and undermine babies' capabilities. The body of literature above presents a strong image of the child placed within the constructs of family life, it remains unclear, however, how the tenets of voice described manifest in environments such as early childhood settings.

2.6 Attachment Theory.

Given the primacy of early relational encounters on the materialisation of voice, it is appropriate to briefly turn attention towards the contribution of John Bowlby's theory of attachment (1958). Although not the first to consider the imperative role of relationships on human development (Lorenz, 1932, Harlow, 1951), Bowlby's work remains the most comprehensive and seminal today,

extending across multiple research fields (Cassidy and Shaver, 2008). Bowlby (1953, 1969) conducted various observational studies of children and posited babies are innately motivated to seek contact and attachment with another to form a unique, secure relationship for survival. 'Monotropy', or primary attachment, sets out a framework to which other relationships are built (Bowlby, 1969). The internal working model (Bowlby, 1973) determines the child's perception and expectation of future relationships, engaging the tools established from their primary experiences. Thus, the significance of a positive first relationship experience should not be underestimated. Gerhardt (2015) claims it is imperative to acknowledge the baby's early representation of the mechanisms of relationships and its significance on their ability to form relationships with others. It is through this first, unique bond that the adult is viewed as a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988) to which the baby looks to safely explore the world around them. In unfamiliar surroundings, the baby will seek out the familiar adult for reassurance and evaluate the situation and their proximity provides comfort and confidence to the child (Ainsworth and Bell 1970; Bowlby, 1973). This highlights the importance of babies' sourcing coping mechanisms in environments that lack the familiarity and consistency of home.

Bowlby (1969) emphasised the significance of the mother-child bond, an idea that has been contested due to inconclusive empirical research and a lack of acknowledgement of cultural influences on attachment behaviours (Rutter, 1972). Rutter, (1981) conducted studies of up to 2000 boys and determined a difference between maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1953) and privation concluding high quality mothering could lead to positive attachments with other carers. This was consistent with earlier studies that surmised multiple attachment were possible from the middle of the first year of life (Schaeffer and Emerson, 1964). In later studies, Bowlby (1969; 1988) reinforced the baby's dependency upon the first relationships but did suggest subsequent relationships form in a hierarchical order of significance to the child (Elfer, 2015). In contemporary English society children are growing up in a wide range of cultural contexts and traditions in the home and community (Rutter, 1981; Rogoff, 2003) and this needs to be kept in mind here when reviewing theory of attachment.

Further, contemporary critics believe Bowlby's hypothesis fuelled feminist notions of care (Moss, 2006; Taggart, 2015) and weakened the significance of the role of fathers and other consistent

caregivers (Rutter, 1981). Accordingly, Trevarthen (2006) challenged traditional attachment theories claiming they underplayed the significance of mental engagement and active intentionality of relationships. Principles of the attachment theory uphold relevance to this study in the way in which the first relationship empowers a baby to become self-aware, mature positively and form multiple, secondary attachments with others outside the primary attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, (1999) and Trevarthen, (2002) comprehensive studies reinforce the premise that babies can form meaningful multiple attachments from birth, including with early childhood educators.

2.7 Establishing voice in the context of family relationships.

Strong evidence points to the critical nature of responsive and consistent social encounters in early childhood (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2019; Oates, Karmiloff-Smith, and Johnson, 2012; McCrory, 2023). Very, young children require responsive, sensitive care and attention from a constant, dependable adult who can respond appropriately to their needs (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014). Without such contact, the consequences to emotional wellbeing are well documented (Trevarthen and Marwick, 1982; Tronick, 2007; Melhuish *et al.* 2015; Center on the Developing Child, 2019). Though the premise of this study is to examine the context of early childhood settings, the roots of voice constructs emerge in the earliest dialogic encounters that arise in the family context (Trevarthen, 1979; Bowlby, 1988). Mental representations formed in the early months subsequently influence the child's ability to interpret and interact with other relational partners such as educators, teacher, siblings, and peers (Gullóv and Winther, 2021). Literature considering interactions with others outside the home remains underdeveloped and the authentic contributions of babies during these interactions are particularly scarce.

Bateson (1971) conducted comprehensive studies of mother-baby vocal patterns in the home and referred to the mutual gaze and succeeding patterns of sensorial movement and vocalisations as 'proto-conversations' (Bateson, 1971). She advocated how babies' conversational aptitude was innately driven and emotionally foundational for acquiring features of culture and language (Bateson, 1971; 1975). Trevarthen (1979; 2018) drew similarities to Bateson's work (1971) asserting that over time, babies regulate their own responses to match those of their parents and

as a result, interactions become unique, personalised, and culturally mediated increasing in complexity as the dyad increase familiarity with one another (Delafield -Butt and Trevarthen, 2019).

In keeping with this narrative, Daniel Stern (1985), attention to the intimacy of relations in the first relationship adds depth to the understanding of where voice acts originate. Through close microanalysis of video clips, Stern (1985) represented the earliest experiences of babies and regarded the infant is a proficient communicator from birth, taking a socially active role forming relations with others by engaging physiological reactions, signalling using head movements, tensing, and relaxing the body and reacting to the eye gaze of others. The spontaneity arising in the mother-baby relationship is characterised by Stern (1971) as 'beautiful' and he acknowledges the 'fuzzy and spontaneous' nonlinearity of initial interactions, where communication cues can misalign, but recognises the advancing trajectory as a necessary route towards contingent interactions and relationships emerging (Stern, 2002).

Like Bowlby (1969), Trevarthen and Aitken (2001) acknowledge it is usually the mother who has strong, biological motivations to communicate affectionately with the child. However, they distinctly point out that it does not have to be the mother with whom this emotional contact takes place. Earlier work identifies 'primary intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen, 1978) to describe the mutually shared pattern of consciousness babies enter with their caregiver, forming the foundation to Trevarthen's contribution to literature (Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978). Within close interactions, babies foster an equal position, just as capable and conscious as the adult, demonstrating an awareness of the other's feelings and intentions. Intersubjective moments are underpinned by intensive, rhythmic, expression and shared psychological states, each partner is sensitive and inter-coordinated with the other, the sharing of emotional states is crucial to the theory of intersubjectivity (Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978). The baby and adult work in harmony to create a shared meaning through emotional exchange and to discover 'new ways of meaning' (Trevarthen, 2004, p. 55). In unity, they take time to be attentive, attune and respond to one another thus co-creating pleasurable, meaningful shared acts of meaning (Halliday, 1975). Malloch and Trevarthen, (2009) equate this to a 'dance' leading to the emergence of communicative musicality (Malloch and Trevarthen, 2008).

Communicative musicality (Malloch, 1999; Malloch and Trevarthen, 2009) arises between baby and adults through meaningful, co-constructed episodes where voices are shared. Malloch (1999) argues communication advances fall 'in sync' and adopt shared temporal qualities in coordination with one another. Pulse, quality, and narratives are three dimensions that unite to create harmonious shared encounters, creating the contours of voice acts, shared between baby and adult (Malloch, Delafield-Butt, and Trevarthen, 2019) in a reciprocal manner. Accordingly, voice has its foundation in the movement and rhythm established with close companions and is culturally and socially shaped.

2.8 The importance of caregiver responsiveness attending to voice.

Caregiver responsiveness correlates with securing an understanding of the behaviours elicited by babies to stimulate communication (Shin and Partykra, 2017). The more understanding adults obtain about babies' patterns of communications and behaviours, the more responsive and coregulated interactions become (Brazelton and Nugent, 2011; Degotardi, 2013; Degotardi and Gill, 2019). As literature already examined in this chapter affirms, prolonged moments of responsiveness cultivate deep and meaningful relationships (Petersen and Wittmer, 2008), maintained over time lead to close, high-quality attachments (Lee, 2006). Frequency and continuity of interactions supports care givers to regulate responses to babies' voice cues accordingly. In turn, babies use these responses to engage more creatively in interactions and participate intersubjectively leading to enhanced mutual understanding, that fosters trust and enriches affectionate encounters. Meins (1997) purports it is through moments of 'mind mindedness' where meaning is co-constructed, and relationships are formed (Degotardi and Sweller, 2012). Degotardi (2013) applies the concept of mind mindedness to early childhood educators' interactions with babies and reports higher levels of mind mindedness behaviours in educators correlates with greater levels of autonomy in educator: baby play episodes. From this, it can be understood that being attentive to babies' voice expressions remains a central importance to granting them agency and reconceptualising their voice capabilities.

Interactions in the home afford prolonged periods of time for voices to misalign and reconnect, the baby and parent, biologically and unconditionally interwoven together, thus moments of discord arising can be overcome and absolved (Tronick, 2007). Merging elements of their voice cues

become more meaningful as they begin to develop a comprehensive understanding of each other's intentions and await responsiveness. Stern (2002) identified regularity as a component that enables the baby to construct a mental understanding for expectations and normative interactive routines, anticipating their parent's familiar song at bath time or awaiting the tickling hand during times of play. These situations only arise if the environment is conducive and offers 'enabling conditions; (Bruner 1983, p.30) for intersubjective encounters to emerge over time. It is widely documented that a key component to enabling conditions is an attentive and responsive caregiver (White, Peter, and Redder, 2015). In contrast, evidence examining the time available to cultivate meaningful interactions in early childhood settings alludes to fragmented and superficial encounters which warrants urgent attention (Goouch and Powell, 2012). For example, Lee (2006) maintains developing relationships in early childhood settings takes time and are reliant upon consistent caregiving in environments that promote time to nurture relational interactions. Lee (2006) argues it can take anywhere between six and eleven weeks for firm relational foundations to emerge. Thus, it is reasonable to deduce that attending to voice expression is inherently linked with the temporal growth of relationships which need to be prioritised in early childhood pedagogy.

Although dated, Murray and Trevarthen (1985;1986) present detailed studies of babies under six months old and argue evidence suggests babies detect non-contingent responses from their caregivers immediately, often quicker than their adult companions. This provides an indication of the conscious role babies foster when paying attention to the important faculties in their social surroundings. A similar account emerges from Bretherton (1991) whose study examining the role of eye contact as a primary communication tool, emphasises securing eye contact as an important feature of establishing a 'space' for intersubjective moments to occur. Over time babies develop the ability to follow the eye gaze of adults to objects or items in their wider vision, enabling them to progress from primary intersubjectivity to secondary intersubjectivity and triadic attention (Karmiloff-Smith, 2010). Correspondingly, Tomasello (2003) regards eye gaze as an intentional act, and Leong *et al.* (2017) point out mutual gaze strengthens and reinforces social connectivity and further stimulates babies to take on an active role in social encounters. Nevertheless, Bretherton, (1991, p.55) strengthens Trevarthen and Murray (1985; 1986) commenting, 'if the addressee does not respond in the intended manner, infants frequently augment the intensity of communicative behaviour...'.

Typically, a baby will engage crying as a catalyst for social interactions (Zeskind, 1985) though it usually arises following a catalogue of social cues which lay at the core of the baby's voice (Bruner, 1975; Trevarthen, 2004; Lock and Zukow-Goldring, 2010). Lancaster and Broadbent (2003) testify that if these subtleties are 'unheard' or misread by adults, then babies can be characterised as difficult or merely crying for attention. Yazbek and D'Entremont (2006, p. 599) point out babies view adult discordance as 'violating the rules of social interaction' leading a sense of loss and perplexity which may contribute to an intensification of communication attempts including compensatory gestural cues and coping mechanisms to repair the lost connection (Tronick *et al.* 1978; Trevarthen and Marwick, 1982).

The principles of 'quality' interactions, including 'warmth and responsiveness' (Elfer, 2012; Cadima *et al.* 2020) are not always clearly defined within the contexts of nursery provision. While the literature reviewed above offers learning points to underpin comprehensive of voice facets, issues arise when considering levels of responsiveness in early childhood settings as the 'enabling conditions' (Bruner 1983, p.30) will always differ. Marwick (2016) 'interpersonal positioning' (Marwick, 2017, p.104) helps to define the emotional availability and supportiveness of caregivers. She suggests discordant intersubjective exchange can be a familiar occurrence in early childhood settings, where a baby arrives to 'unfamiliar' circumstances where caregivers are often 'unavailable', 'un-attuned' to their communication advances (Marwick, 2017, p.104). Brace (2020, p.137) alludes if educators are continually unavailable or responses are frequently 'misattuned' then babies 'might find other ways to protect/defend themselves from becoming overwhelmed' which is where amplification of voice acts may be visible and characterised in the setting as challenging behaviour.

Offering physical and emotional presence to children during interactions enables a respectful, compassionate practice and promotes greater mindfulness of children's agency (Burr and Degotardi, 2021). Goodfellow (2008) advocates for a 'caring presence' (Nelms, 1996, p.368) to reconceptualise educator responsibilities during social encounters with young children. To appreciate babies' contributions of voice, educators need to embody 'a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group ...' (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006, p.265). To achieve this, individuals must evaluate their values and beliefs about infant social contributions and source strategies to

challenge constructs of power (Pianta *et al.* 2005; Burr and Degotardi, 2021). Goodfellow (2008, p.18) characterises warmth, and responsivity as a 'one-way process' travelling from adult to child which oversimplifies the agency and skill of the child, viewing the adult as the 'giver' rather than 'receiver' of emotional exchange. The child's contribution within interactional encounters is disregarded if the adult is not 'present' and actively listening to the child's voice. Positioning babies as passive receivers of care is deficient model which leads to a detachment in social encounters (Lundy, 2003). Adults must foster a presence to actively tune into the whole child and respond through use of appropriate eye contact, body language and listening (Goodfellow, 2009).

2.9 Voice as a tool to foster a sense of belonging.

Belonging is first played out in the body and the voice and in the anticipations of how and when the bodies and voices of others will behave -- how the game will be played and how the rules may change or endure.

(Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007, p. 176)

Gratier and Trevarthen (2007) offer important insight into how agency formation emerges from the familiar communication narratives established in the home. Babies typically enter early childhood settings from an environment where they have confidence and an established identity and voice. Moving from home to early childhood settings presents a baby with new and unfamiliar surroundings filled with new social demands and unfamiliar persons (Hedegaard and FLeer, 2008). Entering a place of unfamiliarity places challenges on the child and leaves them interpersonally vulnerable. The communication patterns that were optimal to achieve engagement with parents may not be reap the same rewards in nursery. Recent non statutory guidance in England asserts that fostering a sense of belonging in early childhood settings is the basis for a child to form a sense of identity and will enhance learning and development (Early Education, 2021). Feeling known leads to the child growing in confidence and feeling empowered to explore their surroundings and foster relationships in a safe environment. Johansson and Puroila (2021) concur, stating that achieving a sense of belonging arises from feeling connected and part of a social group. Without sourcing a sense of connection, the child can experience a 'emptiness' (Datler *et al.* 2010, p.75) compromising our central need to exist with others (Peers, 2018). As such, culturally engrained voice narratives play an important role in bringing a sense of identity and familiarity to early childhood experiences. Marwick and Murray (2008) suggest the lack of

'familiarity and predictability' leads to discordant communications between baby and adults arising. Therefore, if voice is as a strategy extending into the environment to seek connections with others, then the responses of others are contingent upon knowing and understanding babies' voicing behaviours.

2.10 Examining baby room contexts in England and internationally.

Examining environments in which babies spend their time away from the family home is a relatively new discourse (Page and Elfer, 2013) arising from social and economic interest and investment in the mid-1990s (Penn, 2011; Moss, 2013). Although baby room practices are not distinctly theorised and often seen as an 'after thought' coming in as a close second to preschool education (Johansson and White, 2011; Goouch and Powell, 2013), some scholars have paid attention to the intricacies of baby room pedagogy and advocate for greater attention to be afforded to this area of early childhood education (Dalli, 1999; Dalli *et al.* 2011; Goldschmied, Selleck and Elfer, 2012; Goouch and Powell, 2013; Page, 2013). In recent years, baby room pedagogy has found itself associated with a discourse of performativity, caught between outcome driven directives and traditional care lens and permutations of 'Professional Love' (Noddings, 2010; Page, 2011; Taggart, 2015). Complexities surrounding the implementation of caregiving in baby room contexts, particularly with regards to offering predictable and consistent interactions has a growing discourse (Goouch and Powell, 2012; Elfer and Page, 2015; Jackson and Forbes, 2015). Fleer and Linke (2016, p.9) suggest babies will struggle to make sense of their experiences if they are 'handled by many different people-each with their different way of holding, soothing and talking...', therefore affording time for relational encounters where familiar rituals between educator and baby can manifest is of utmost importance and should be prioritised. Aligning to this premise are calls for the early education sector to assume an unhurried approach (Clark 2022) through embedding a slow pedagogy encompassing 'lingering', 'listening' and 'dwelling' during our time with children (Clark, 2020, p.142). French (2021, p.8) clarifies adopting a 'slow relational pedagogy' relates to 'what educators do within relationships, environments and experiences in their daily care of very young children'. Moving away from a hurried notion of a 'performance of care' (Powell and Goouch, 2013) into a space where 'lingering lovingly' (White, 2013) is facilitated by emotionally resilient (Page, 2018) educators affords greater opportunity for babies' contributions to be valued and become an inherently distinctive layer in baby room pedagogy.

2.11 Structural characteristics of early childhood settings in England.

In England, early childhood settings are guided by statutory requirements set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2023a). Structural and organisational requirements currently mandate an adult: child ratio of one adult to every three babies (under twos). In addition to this stipulation, the EYFS (DfE, 2021a, p.29) states providers must ensure staff hold a relevant qualification and have access to specialised training that ‘specifically addresses’ the care of babies.

Internationally, there is no universally agreed ratio for the care of under twos, although England has one of the highest rated adult: child ratios for under two-year-olds (OECD, 2015). Debatably, ratios are a system to manage structural variables such as group size, staffing levels, working conditions which directly affect the outcomes for children (Munton *et al.* 2002; Pinto *et al.* 2019). It is important to highlight that determining the structural features of adult to child ratios has a vague history, noted in a report in 1995,

...like nursery class ratios, nursery school ratios appear to have been informally arrived at, with no research or formal review process, and no subsequent evaluation or review (McGurk *et al.* 1995, p. 5).

Nevertheless, since the 1990s, empirical evidence has consistently indicated the higher the adult-child ratio, the greater the opportunity to foster responsive and supportive adult-child interactions (Phillipsen, *et al.* 1997; Dalli *et al.* 2011; Cadima *et al.* 2020; Siu *et al.* 2022). Gerhardt (2015) determines limited staff ratios and high turnover of staff negatively impacts the quality of interactions and implicates subsequent relationships. An opinion echoed internationally alongside evidence concerning the quality of staff professional qualifications and specialist training for working with babies (Dalli, *et al.* 2011; Nutbrown, 2012; Powell and Gooch, 2013; Pinto *et al.* 2019; O’Hara-Gregan and Gould, 2021).

Nearly two decades ago, the Thomas Coram Research Centre conducted a review into international ratios, training and qualifications and drew together evidence that suggested:

...one of the ways in which ratios influence quality is through adult: child interactions.

Higher staff: child ratios (i.e., more staff per group of children) are more likely to facilitate positive adult: child interactions.

(Munton, *et al.* 2002, p. 7)

While the report acknowledges ratios are not a single determinant of quality nursery provision, it highlights the importance of considering them 'in conjunction with a range of other issues, including the training, pay and working conditions of the early years workforce' (Munton *et al.* 2002, p.32). Further, it recognises the cultural diversity of early education pedagogy and attempts to present a balanced portrayal of international provision. Likewise, Siu *et al.* (2022) highlights the culturally nuanced features of group size, presenting the contrasting views of parents and educators. In their study, parents appeared to favour larger group sizes, citing it offered a 'fertile ground' for children's social development (Siu *et al.* 2022, p.9). This contrasted sharply with educator views who favoured smaller group sizes and more staff to support a 'peaceful' and manageable learning environment.

More recently and differing from Munton *et al.* (2002), Bonetti and Brown (2018 p.5) do regard ratios to be a determinant feature of quality early childhood provision, citing it as an integral structural component to the 'iron triangle'² of quality.

The evidence on child to staff ratios is fairly conclusive: having fewer children per staff leads to better children's outcomes as it provides the opportunity for more individualised attention and leads to better teacher and child behaviour.

(Bonetti and Brown, 2018, p.6)

Following public consultation, the Department for Education (2023) determined that offering flexibility around mandated adult: child ratios for toddlers (aged two) will aid provider 'autonomy and trust' when organising provision for young children. This is in striking contrast to evidence collated by Butt *et al.* (2022) which indicate the workforce consider altering ratios may

² The iron triangle comprises, namely: workforce training and professional development, child to staff ratios and group/classroom size (See Bonetti and Brown, 2018 p. 5).

'compromise quality of care' and risk the safety of young children, placing undue stress on the workforce. O'Sullivan (2022) reiterates that changing ratios will lead to staff having less time with children, compromising opportunity for sustained, reciprocal interactions and less individualised care moments for babies.

2.12 Qualifications.

Higher staff qualifications have been linked to increased levels of sensitivity and care in interactions and communicative episodes with young children (Blochliger and Bauer, 2018; Hu et al, 2018). Recurrent studies contend, the higher the level of qualification, the more responsive and attention educators can be affording richer interactional moments with children (NICHD, 1996; Nutbrown, 2012; Degotardi and Sweller, 2012). The Nutbrown review (2012) concluded a highly qualified workforce is an essential component in the professionalisation of the early childhood sector and positively contributes toward children's long-term educational outcomes. The report noted how the qualification system offered *'is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences'* (Nutbrown, 2012, p. 5). Consistent with Nutbrown (2012) and Bonetti and Brown (2018), widespread studies focussing on the care of babies have called for continued training and professional supervision to support the quality of staff knowledge and understanding of baby development and the importance of interacting and responding sensitively to very, young children (Colley, 2006; Page and Elfer, 2013; Pinto *et al.* 2019; Pessanha *et al.* 2017; Davis and Dunn, 2018, 2019).

Goodfellow (2008) offers a contrasting narrative, suggesting too much focus on qualifications can undervalue the importance of the personal attributes' educators bring to naturally occurring interactions and responsive relationships (Colley, 2006; Early *et al.* 2007; Degotardi and Sweller, 2012). Goodfellow, (2008) calls for a greater significance to be placed on the embodied knowledge and 'practical wisdom' (Goodfellow, 2001) educators bring to interactions. 'Knowing, being, experiencing and acting' (Goodfellow, 2008, p.17) should embody the emotional sensitivity educators foster during their caring responsibilities. Similarly, Vermeer *et al.* (2008) argue there are limited connections between the level of staff qualification and interaction quality. Page and Elfer (2013) reiterate Nutbrown's (2012) assertion that a highly qualified workforce is essential for

work in baby rooms, however, they indicate forming attachments with children is largely an 'intuitive' undertaking, grounded in educator personal experiences rather than theoretical assumptions. Likewise, Degotardi and Sweller (2012) suggest personal dispositions including emotional maturity and cultural beliefs have a bearing on educator ability to foster a 'caring presence' (Nelms, 1996) and establish responsive interactions with babies.

Despite diverse views on the contributory role of qualifications, the UK Government advocate higher qualifications correlate with better outcomes for children (Nutbrown, 2012; DfE, 2013; DfE, 2021a). Though often approaching qualification delivery from competing visions and priorities (Bonetti and Akhal, 2019; Bonetti, 2019) which has resulted in a fragmented and inconsistent array of qualifications (Cameron and Moss, 2020), there remains a statutory requirement to upskill the workforce with government reports associating qualifications with better educational experiences for children (Bonetti and Blanden, 2020). Calls to sustain ongoing training, with a specialist focus on promoting high quality interactions is recurrently emphasised (Nutbrown, 2012; Ofsted, 2022). However, shortfalls in funding and tensions surrounding the purpose of early education remain widespread and have added to the erosion of the workforce in a time where investment in early childhood services is vital (EPI, 2019; Moss, 2022; O'Sullivan, 2022).

2.13 The Key Person Approach in England.

Goldschmied and Jackson (1994; 2004) identified the dearth in literature concerning babies' experiences in formal day care environments and sought to stimulate dialogue across the sector and challenge rhetoric attitudes towards babies and toddlers. In their second edition of 'People under three. Young children in day care', Goldschmied and Jackson, (2004), they note the transformation of early childhood services since the mid-1990s but highlight the enduring lack of recognition given to babies and toddlers.

There is continuing resistance to the idea of a rights-based approach to children in this country...we need to accept that even the youngest children should be given the opportunity to express their opinions and share in decision making as soon as they are competent to do so.

(Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004, p. 12)

Observing institutional challenges and building upon extensive observations of babies in her earlier work, Goldschmied's concept of the Key Persons Approach (Goldschmied, Selleck and Elfer, 2012) reimagined the constructs of relational care and demarcates young children's statutory right to receive individualised care in early childhood settings (Goldschmied, Selleck and Elfer, 2012). The Key Person Approach (DCSF, 2007) (altered in practice guidance from Key Persons Approach, (Goldschmied and Selleck, 1994), is grounded in the belief children have a right to receive special, individualised care from an available and responsive person, who lets the child know they are cherished and valued in an early childhood setting (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2012). The approach encourages settings to work in harmony with families to create 'close triangular attachments between the child, the key person and the child's parent/guardian' (Nutbrown and Page, 2009, p.34). It aligns earlier calls from Dalli (1999) to source strategies that place relationships at the heart of practice through 'relational pedagogy' (Dalli, *et al.* 2011).

Not without its critics (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007), the approach's connection to attachment theory is evident, providing mandatory endorsement of 'positive relationships' within the early years framework to promote the independence and wellbeing of young children (DfE, 2021a; Ofsted, 2019). Page and Elfer (2013) assert sourcing attachments in nursery is not always straightforward and evokes a myriad of complex emotions. Concerns surrounding the intensity of key attachments have been noted with scholarly commitment to determine the key person should not be attempting to compete with parental attachments as this can constrict and placate infants' social agency (Degotardi and Pearson, 2009). Nevertheless, the approach centralises relational care and is viewed favourably as strength in English early education pedagogy (Dalli, *et al.* 2011; Degotardi and Pearson, 2014; OECD, 2020). Within the context of this study, the key person presents opportunity to connect the strands of a baby's relational encounters in early childhood settings. The way in which they afford consistent, reciprocal care giving indicates they are best placed to elevate constructs of voice as they materialise and should feature in research seeking to investigate babies' voice contributions.

2.14 The Baby Room project.

Between 2009-2012, Gouch and Powell (2009; 2013; 2016) led The Baby Room Project which remains one of the only comprehensive studies to have examined baby room pedagogy in England. Differing from the objectives of this study, The Baby Room Project aimed to examine and

improve the quality of formalised childcare for babies with regards to the 'professional knowledge and understanding of babies' needs' and increase opportunity for reflective practice in ten early childhood settings in socially deprived areas of southern England (Goouch and Powell, 2013, p.12). Employing a hybrid methodology, the study explored the connection between quality, professional standards, and reflective opportunities for the workforce. While the study offers a rich narrative of everyday baby room events, key findings exposed 'closeness', 'stillness' and being 'in the moment' with a baby seemed to be rare events' (Powell and Goouch, 2015, p.4) coming second to routine activities and organisational tasks. Further, intersubjective exchange between adults and babies remained underdeveloped, situated largely within a context of 'performance of care' over sustained closeness and intimacy (Powell and Goouch, 2015, p.5). The absence of attuned moments of care was attributed to a lack of workforce understanding and confidence to elicit and extend such events (Goouch and Powell, 2012). The project emphasised professional opportunity for dialogue and collaboration with others with Goouch and Powell (2012, p.89) determining 'a professional development script needs to include talk, stories and practice narratives' which will contribute towards the baby room educators 'developing professional identity and a sense of professional worth' and this remains an intrinsically linked to their ability to respond appropriately to babies' voice advances.

The Baby Room project provides important context to this doctoral study in the way it has influenced national and international dialogue. Goouch and Powell's (2012) contribution offers a valuable springboard for this study's aims and objectives and acts as stimulus for further investigation into the persistent concerns surrounding the opportunity for educator, baby interactions and importantly highlights gap in research affording space for babies' voice contributions. The study continues to act as a persuasive account of the everyday occurrences in baby rooms and draws attention to the societal and political issues that continue to frame baby room pedagogy today (Goouch and Powell, 2012; 2013).

2.15 International baby room pedagogy.

International contributions to literature concerning baby room pedagogy offer a broader perspective in comparison to current available sources in England. Whilst social, economic, and cultural contexts of the studies included in this section differ substantially from England, their contributions align many of the societal and political issues arising from local literature. Evolving

from the Baby Room Project, Sacha Powell and colleagues conducted an international study examining pedagogies of care from four countries adopting a Froebelian perspective (Cooper *et al.* 2022). The study concluded that meaningful pedagogy with young children is a culturally specific phenomenon. Baby room practices will always be nuanced to the specific social and culture it arises, though is typically characterised by warm, responsive, and respectful 'deep' care giving moments (Cooper *et al.* 2022, p.21). Universally babies are 'always in a relationship with others' and this should be the starting point for research investigating babies' early childhood experiences (Cooper *et al.* 2022).

Dalli *et al.* (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of literature examining quality early childhood education for under two-year-olds in New Zealand. The review summarised three key messages in relation to quality care for the under twos which align to the findings described in The Baby Room Project. Provision for under twos must be underpinned by responsive care giving and dialogic relationships that position the baby as an equal contributor during interactions. Extending these tenets, White *et al.* (2015) conducted an exploratory investigation reviewing the intersubjective interactions between babies and teachers in New Zealand childcare provision. The study employed visual methods to capture encounters between educators and babies on cameras, framing interactions as a social event, an act of mutual consciousness evolving as encounters unfold (White, *et al.* 2015). Examination of the subtle gestures employed by a sample of two babies including momentary gaze and hand and arm movements to initiate a response from an adult was the focus, strengthening the body of research examining babies' communication attempts outside the home. The data set quantitatively deduced that a combination of verbal and nonverbal adult initiations drew more infant responses. Teacher-baby dialogue appeared to be a priority to the small sample involved in this research project with participants commenting that their primary concern was to be in tune and 'fully present' (White *et al.* 2015, p. 167) with the babies. Teachers involved emphasised the importance of establishing eye contact with babies and reflected on how this added intimacy to social encounters, promoting opportunity for the baby to lead the interaction.

On the surface White *et al.* (2015) presents an optimistic insight into baby room provision in comparison to The Baby Room project (Goouch and Powell, 2013; 2015) which noted the discordant interactions and a lack of educator confidence to extend communications with babies.

However, White *et al.* (2015) present a comparably limited study with a small sample (2 baby-teacher dyads) and generating data through participants wearing head cams. It would be fair to deduce educators would have been acutely conscious and alert to baby cueing due to the nature of how the data was generated thus, increasing reactivity and awareness to the camera (Lavrakas, 2011). The level of rich encounter recorded are encouraging but may not fully reflect the reality facing many educators in England. In contrast, Gooch and Powell (2009; 2013) employed a longitudinal multi perspective methodology, which undoubtedly presents a more reliable depiction of life in the 'baby room'.

Nevertheless, findings from White *et al.* (2015) emphasise the importance of two-way gestural communication to strengthen the quality of cues and subsequent interactions and shared experiences, reiterating what research already acknowledges; that communicative exchanges are all encompassing, words, gestural and eye gaze are equally important to intersubjective exchange and highly responsive pedagogy. This supports earlier work by Vallotton (2009) in America which sought to assess if some babies received 'more or less' (Vallotton, 2009 pg. 5) responsive care in a group setting and if infant gestural signs contributed to the level of caregiver responsiveness. Comparable to White *et al.* (2015), Vallotton (2009) employed video recording for timed moments of routinization and a measure of caregiver responsiveness was developed from attachment literature. In contrast, a larger sample size, quantitative data set determined babies' gestures comprising motor and vocal to be intentional, communication tools (Vallotton, 2009, p. 6). Results indicate a baby's temperament and characteristics affected their relationship experiences in nursery and the use of 'clear communicative behaviours' in response to caregiver cues afforded greater adult responsivity (Vallotton, 2009, p.13) rather than the variety or frequency. Significant findings indicate that contrary to other studies, caregiver responses did not appear to correlate with time spent together or staff qualifications but did increase when the children responded physically to caregiving initiations (Vallotton, 2009).

These studies raise important questions concerning the optimal conditions for voice to materialise in everyday life. Moreover, the underpinning knowledge and understanding educators hold about individual babies contributes significantly to the responsivity and sensitivity of unfolding interactions.

2.16 Caregiving moments.

Mitchelmore *et al.* (2017) explored the richness and potentiality in everyday moments between babies and caregivers in nursery provision. Drawing on Lefebvre's (2004) concept of 'rhythmanalysis' to seek meaning between the beats of everyday rhythm, '*moments are not an anchored event, rather they have duration, resonating and reverberating across days, weeks, and years, shaping the culture of spaces*', Mitchelmore *et al.* (2017, p.91), recognise the connectedness between interactions and the social environment. Moments of care were seen as a continuum, building in depth and richness at each occurrence, which aids the potential for intersubjective experiences to materialise. Mitchelmore *et al.* (2017) assert that across the duration of daily practice, there are potentiality of moments, or 'islands of intimacy' (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004, p. 46) which present opportunities for babies and caregivers to construct meaning and connect the unseen qualities in the pedagogical space.

Comparatively, Mitchelmore *et al.*'s (2017) findings highlight 'potentiality' to source the absent features of quality pedagogy observed by Goouch and Powell (2012; 2013). The Baby Room Project noted how educators lacked confidence in their own abilities to 'talk' and share moments of synchronicity with children out of the usual 'routine' or rigid encounters (Goouch and Powell, 2013). In contrast, Mitchelmore *et al.* (2017, p.97) argue it is the everyday moments that offer significant opportunity to add 'rich value' to care practices. Conversely, Bradley *et al.* (2012) study of interactions in nursery refers to the 'linearity' and the lines that weave through the contexts of a child's daily life. Linearity assists the child's mechanisms for interrelations, predicting and regulating during positive and sensitive interactions. Bradley *et al.* (2012) applies Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) 'zag zig lines' as events that appear within the uniform lines of routinisation of provision. Idiosyncratic moments within routines should be viewed as opportunities to act and co-create moments of meaning, or something new. Interactions are an innovative opportunity to go on 'an adventure' (Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen, 2020) together to co-construct dialogic moments through meaningful encounters.

Expanding this, Bussey, Perryman and Martinez (2021, p.23) position care moments as a vital part of under two's pedagogy, citing that they offer 'opportunities for connection, learning about bodies, language and communication...'. While the voices of babies are not explicitly the focus of the

study, the professional learning that arose led educators to become more attuned to children's cues and 'recognised the emotional impact' that enacting consistent care giving moments had on children. This offers significant insight into the close association between professional learning opportunities and the way in which babies' contributions in early childhood settings are recognised. Bussey, Perryman and Martinez (2021, p. 28) determine it is 'the way in which attachment relationships are built and maintained through intentional, consistent, respectful care moments that facilitates respectful attuned attachment relationships'.

The reiteration of the importance of 'unhurried' care giving moments indicates that these offer powerful opportunities for babies to source confidence of voice in connection with a responsive and sensitive adult (French, 2021 p8).

Reading these signals, or cues, requires sensitivity, responsiveness, and intimate knowledge of each baby. It means listening and watching and thinking about what the baby is trying to 'say' and basing our care on this.

(Fleer and Linke 2016, p. 4).

Babies need respectful moments of 'extraordinary care' (Shin, 2015, p.498) care that are co-constructed with attentive and available educators who take time to 'be with' the baby. In her seminal work, Noddings (1984, 2002) maintained that to truly 'care' embodies more than performing dutiful tasks but requires total immersion in a relationship.

The evidence considered above resonates with the respectful care pedagogy denoted in the Pikler Infant and Toddler Education and Care Approach (Pikler, 1979) and the calls to adopt a 'Slow relational pedagogy' (Fleer and Linke, 2017; French, 2021; Clark, 2022). Emphasising 'slow and careful movements' during care giving moments (Gutknecht and Bader, 2021, p.5), akin to the moments of 'deep care' Cooper *et al.* (2022) offers potential for babies' voice to become visible and supports baby room pedagogy to flourish. Cekaite and Bergnehr (2018, p.954) recommend 'reciprocal interpersonal touch' lays the foundations of attuned and intimate engagement with babies and facilitates a culture of trust and compassion (Lipponen, 2017). This assertion underlines the importance cultivating opportunities to 'tune in' to babies through moments of unhurried and respectful, intimate care (Page, 2011). These moments, Cooper *et al.* (2022) assert,

foster opportunity for babies to source 'freedom' to contribute to pedagogical practices alongside responsive educators should be at the core of every early childhood setting.

2.17 The professional context of working with babies in early childhood settings.

Work associated with the care of babies is a delicate, and fragile undertaking, yet the broader structure of nursery provision is notoriously turbulent (Colley, 2006; Elfer, 2012; Page and Elfer, 2013; Clark, 2022). For decades working in early childhood education has struggled to distance itself from the connotations of providing low level, basic skilled work 'caring' for babies (Peeters, 2008; Jung, 2013). Predominantly female and often the least qualified in a setting, recurrent studies identify the lack of value attributed to the role of the early childhood educator (Colley, 2006; Gooch and Powell, 2012; Shin, 2014). Traditionally, caring for young children has been viewed as a natural extension to mothering, characterised as an 'ordinary' skill requiring very little thought or specialised training (Lalley, 1995; Jung, 2013). In contrast, Goldstein, (1998) asserts caring for young children is an emotional and intellectual undertaking. A notion corroborated by Blochliger and Bauer (2012) and Page and Elfer (2013) who identify working with young children to be an emotionally intense, stressful endeavour associated with one of the highest levels of workplace stress and occupation related health issues (Løvgrén, 2016; Elfer *et al.* 2018).

Competing tensions associated with qualifications, the presence of emotionality and dichotomy of policy regulation depict a level of ambiguity for individuals working with young children and determine the organisational culture of a setting (Hu *et al.* 2018; Cooper *et al.* 2022). Løvgrén (2016) study on early childhood workforce emotional exhaustion in Norway notes having clarity and transparency in job expectations was a leading contributor to lowering stress and wellbeing in the workplace. Persistent role confusion undermines the educator and devalues their agency, leading to heightened stress levels or detachment from elements of the role (Løvgrén, 2016).

Completing administrative tasks led to less exhaustion in comparison to face to face contact and enactment of care tasks which drains staff resources as it requires them to draw deeply on 'ideas and thoughts' (Løvgrén, 2016). The study proposed a correlation between workplace culture and cultivating supportive practice between co-workers and management and overall fulfilment, corroborating earlier work by Leena Sorjonen and Perakyla, (2012) who maintain emotions are manifested when people interact with one another and are a central part of everyday relations.

Dunn and Davis (2018) suggest the emotional nature of relationships between babies and care givers is given very low prominence and marginalised in policy context. They allude to issues surrounding the subjectivity of emotions which presents an uncomfortable dichotomy for policy makers. It could be presumed that the concept of emotions is too elusive and do not correspond with the structure of policy and accountability in education. A 'culture of caring' (Osgood, 2006, p. 8) is challenged in favour of a more governable context for provision. Further, Murray (2019) alludes policy directives overpower educator ability to be emotionally available and responsive to children thus shaping organisational culture in favour of accountability (Cameron and Moss, 2020). From this, we can understand where external influences such as policy and routinisation prescribe the acts of educator behaviour. Subsequently, the emotional presence required to sensitively tune in and interpret baby's communicative gestures are weakened.

These contributions are significant to our appreciation of the complex dimensions associated with working for long periods of time with babies and adds to our comprehension of the tensions associated with balancing the care and educational needs of young children. Furthermore, the tensions highlighted appear not to be exclusive to England, though the current English early years system, associated with deficient funding and neo liberal agenda, adds another layer of complexity.

2.18 Paying attention to the emotional complexity of working with babies.

Early childhood educators' ability to respond and offer an attentive presence to babies is notoriously entangled with long hours, a shortage of sustained professional development and low monetary gains (Colley, 2006; Goodfellow, 2008; Whitebrook, Phillips and Howes, 2014). Significantly, international scholarship illustrates a consistent picture in keeping with a burnt-out workforce attributed to poor working conditions and the requirement to development sustained close contact with children and families (Taggart, 2015; Elfer, *et al.* 2018). However, the absence of policy guidance appreciating these intricacies and acknowledging the bearing emotional attunement has on educator ability to respond to babies is striking (Page and Elfer, 2013). Guidance available to early childhood educators persistently indicates strong practice with the under twos finds its roots in establishing intersubjective encounters (David *et al.* 2003; Dalli, *et al.* 2011; Early Education, 2021). However, research emphasises the absence of attention to

emotions and underlines the complexity and 'unspoken feelings' (Page and Elfer, 2013, p. 560) arising from establishing such deep encounters in a professional context (Elfer, 2012; Elfer and Page, 2015; Brace, 2020).

It would be reasonable to suggest the guidance available to educators encouraging the simulation of intersubjective exchange (Bertram, Pascal, and Rouse, 2019) fails to recognise the complex nature of working with babies. There is a clear disparity between the ideals promoted in sector guidance and what is practicability and emotionally attainable for staff and babies. Deficient emotional attunement has the potential to obstruct a responsive and sensitive reaction to children's intentional cues which can lead to positioning of babies through a deficit lens (Burr and Degotardi, 2021) and subsequent 'multiple indiscriminate care' (Hopkins, 1988) characterised as depersonalised, hurried, and mundane interactions (Maslach, *et al.* 2011; Degotardi and Sweller, 2012; Page and Elfer, 2013; Andrew, 2015; Torr and Pham, 2016). Consequently, it is likely that the deficiency of emotionality may bear relevance to the absence of how voice is seen, heard, and characterised by staff and the stress levels and wellbeing of the children (Hopkins, 1988; Brace, 2020).

Datler, Datler and Funder's (2010) emotive narrative of a child settling into a non-familial environment demonstrates how a child's multifaceted voice can be disregarded and undervalued by the staff resulting in the child becoming 'lost'. Datler *et al.* (2010, p.1) raise concerns that staff avoided connecting with the child as a feature of 'institutionalised defences' to protect themselves from the emotional strain of interacting with unsettled children. Consequently, the child was not held 'in mind' nor has any emotional connection with the staff team. Their discoveries are consistent with Menzies Lyth (1988, p.51) who asserts, 'the closer and more concentrated' the relationship, the more likely the carer will experience a sense of emotional anxiety and avoid interactions. From this, we can assume that perhaps when staff appear not to notice a child, they are in fact restricting their own capacity to get too emotionally involved to safeguard themselves from painful situations that are too uncomfortable (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Elfer, 2014; Elfer and Page, 2015)

Menzies Lyth (1988) concept of 'social defences theory' highlights how organisations are oriented to promote efficient working practices and mitigate against emotionally triggering situations. Elfer

(2006, 2014) has been pivotal in applying notions of social defence theory to the early childhood sector. Elfer and colleagues (Elfer, 2009; Elfer, 2015; Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018; Elfer and Wilson, 2021) draw attention to how nursery 'culture, systems and collective practices, facilitated or undermined individual endeavour' (Page and Elfer, 2013, p.562) to emotionally attune to children's needs. Brace (2020) builds on Elfer's work and hypothesises individuals working in early childhood settings opt to engage individual defence mechanisms to avoid confronting uncomfortable emotions associated with establishing relationships with babies and families. Brace (2020, p. 134-135) suggests, '...unconscious defensive processes obstruct a more contingent and containing response, as they enable an escape from straightforwardly being in touch with the child's feelings, leaving him or her alone with their undigested emotions'. The depth of intense emotions is internalised to diffuse the complicated reactions one might have and 'act' their way through the moment and be professional (Hochschild, 1983; Bain and Barnett 1986; Datler *et al.* 2010).

2.19 Professional reflection.

Discourses associated with facilitating the voice of very, young children commonly call for urgent attention to be paid to the professional reflection opportunities available to those working with babies (Lundy, 2007; Wall, *et al.* 2019; Lawrence, 2022). Literature examined in this chapter highlights the interconnectedness between seeing voice in the context of close, responsive interactions in early childhood settings. With such demands on affection and closeness brings 'highly sensitive delicate work' that requires opportunity for reflection and contemplation (Elfer *et al.* 2018, p. 894).

Lawrence (2022, p.86) reiterates,

Children's voices and sensibilities can contribute to current challenges if adults understand children in moments of competence and in their moments of vulnerability. This will include working with emotions in professional ways.

Here, Lawrence (2022) accentuates the irrefutable connection between increasing babies' contributions and educators who are emotionally mature and reflexive in their work. Elfer (2012) developed a Work Discussion Model (WD) which aims to promote deep reflection of emotions

evoked in the workplace, supporting opportunity for educators to 'tell it like it is' (Klaueber, 2008: xxi) within a safe and reassuring environment. The model appears to grant educators opportunity into 'thinking more deeply and more objectively about the children' (Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018, p.200). The potential for educators to deepen their understanding of children's development, reconstruct their image of the baby and ultimately feel empowered and valued in their work appears closely correlated with opportunities to reflect with others (Degotardi and Sweller, 2012; Gouch and Powell, 2015; Elfer *et al.* 2018). Moreover, recent evaluation of the WD model suggests educators' welcome opportunity to share and reflect with others, and it presents 'an optimal way of meeting the statutory requirement for reflective practice for nursery practitioners' (Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018, p 201; Elfer and Wilson, 2021).

Arnott, McGowan and Delafield-Butt (2021, p.143) propose an observational method to encourage educators to 'tune into' babies' embodied communications. The authors suggest,

...everyday observation of play and babies' and toddlers' experiences can be refined to produce data for research projects or to inform practice and to offer a unique insight into babies' perspectives.

By applying a structured framework to observational analysis, Arnott, McGowan, and Delafield-Butt (2021) suggest educators can learn how to interpret the meaning underlying babies' intentional communications. While this model appears to be a promising addition to the narrative seeking to elevate babies' voice contributions, it is unclear how educators are to be suitably trained and supported to pursue meaningful judgements.

Based on these contributions, it could be argued the optimal conditions for educators to reflect deeply about babies' voice contributions in early childhood settings is a combination of the two models considered above. Elfer (2012) affords important attention to the role of the facilitator to note 'not only what is openly said but what may appear to lie just beneath the surface of discussion' (Elfer, 2012, p.133) whilst Arnott, McGowan, and Delafield -Butt (2021) emphasises observing the 'critical moments' in children's everyday experiences and intentional communications. If working to 'see' babies' voice contributions entails 'tuning in' to very, young children's patterns of communication through close and responsive moments of relational

engagement, then underlying obstructions, including institutional characteristics and personal dispositions such as emotions must be studied (Elfer *et al.* 2018, p. 894).

2.20 Conclusion.

Evidence presented in this literature review asserts that the embodiment of voice in infancy is inherently relational. Babies are '*very proud performers who put energy and emotion into actively engaging other people around them in their theatre*' (Trevarthen, 2004, in Salamon, Sumsion and Harrison, 2017, p. 363). Studies recognise parental efforts to learn and understand their babies intentional voicing, noting it to be a messy, arbitrary process, underpinned by warmth, responsiveness, and loving intention (Goodfellow, 2008; Elfer, 2012; Page, 2014). Educators working in the context of nursery provision embark on a more complex undertaking, they are not biologically related to each child and multiple external influences seem to impede their ability to hear and respond consistently to babies' efforts.

The chapter identifies some growth in literature concerning the voices of babies (Arnott and Wall, 2021; McFadyen *et al.* 2022), but notes knowledge and understanding of how voice materialises in early childhood settings remains scarce. While voice can be viewed through multiple lenses, conceptualised as a statutory right, mode of communication or strategy to source a sense of belonging in unfamiliar surroundings, reframing the baby as a competent, social agent, with a voice, remains a crucial step towards amplifying the position of babies in nursery provision and beyond.

Theoretical definitions of voice outlined in this chapter are helpful to align the context of this study and inform position on voice in infancy. As such, this study draws directly from literature contributions when it defines voice to be an observable pattern of communication emerging from within the child (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967) that seeks to connect with another. Voice acts are rooted in a child's relational history, carrying the 'imprint of close others' (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007, p. 176) and culturally bound within the space and time it evolves (Bakhtin, 1992). Voice is always dialogic, drawing the baby out into the social world via intentionally structured multimodal narratives comprising gestures, movements, and silences characterised in children's communicative behaviours with others (Wall, et al, 2019). Babies have a right to have their voice contributions acknowledged and answered by others.

Goouch and Powell (2015) perfectly encapsulate the complex world of baby room encounters to which this study seeks to consider,

While routines, feeding babies, washing, changing them, providing resources for them to play, and settling them to sleep, may be the recurring elements of every day of practitioners' lives in baby rooms, how such routines are considered, enacted and played out are dependent on how babies are viewed and understood by each practitioner, by each nursery, by local and national authorities. These constructions then inform whether or not babies are recognized individually, spoken to, respected, listened to, engaged with and so on. (Goouch and Powell, 2015, p.85)

Conversely, the review of literature highlights the extensive and complex issues encircling baby room environments, shaped by political, cultural, and social dimensions which alter the everyday environments where voice reveals itself (Cooper *et al.* 2022). For that reason, this study commits to examine babies' voice contributions and consider how broader contexts influence how voice is validated in early childhood settings.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter acts as a natural extension to Chapter Two, the literature review, and a bridge to connect to Chapter Four, the methodology. It presents the theoretical underpinnings that inform this study and shape its design and implementation.

Despite an increased plethora of research focussing on early childhood, no unified theory guides how researchers should study the intricacies of young children's lives (Alderson, 2016). This presents opportunities to empower a creative and innovative opportunity to derive new constructs and approaches to studying the lives of young children but also challenges, leaving studies vulnerable to criticism for lacking empirical evidence of its success (Alderson, 2013). Broad issues presented within the literature review made evident the challenges associated with examining the lives of babies which can never be explicitly neutral, despite contrary claims from positivist proponents to pursue objectivity (Alderson, 2013; 2016). Reflecting on this, my study is underpinned by the belief that babies take on an equally active role enticing adults and peers into conversation (Reddy, 2008) and therefore should not be located in a positivist framework to avoid their contributions being obscured. Therefore, positioning them in a socially constructed frame offers potential to fuse several theoretical dimensions determining the most suitable model to shape the research design, data collection and data analysis (Thomson and Walker, 2010).

This chapter introduces the three main theoretical components that have been fused together to underpin the research project. Friedrich Froebel's (1782-1852) education philosophy positions the baby as an 'intensely active' and 'independent human mind' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 75-76) and is foundational in repositioning the baby as an active research participant. Building upon learning from the literature review, it furthers the theorisation of voice in young children, drawing specifically from Bakhtin's Dialogic concept of utterance, authorship, and answerability (Bakhtin, 1986). Cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2002; 2008a) completes the theoretical frame, and provides space for informing and analysing children's contributions within the socio-cultural space of nursery whilst tending to other influences on development. Regard for the distinct position of the researcher is considered, drawing specifically on Hedegaard's (2008a, p.207) principle of seeing

the researcher 'as a participant in research activity' who's theoretical conceptions shape and influence the research journey. All three theoretical influences are examined in this chapter and present an innovative framing to investigate the voices of babies in early childhood settings. The chapter concludes by drawing together learning from all three theories and indicates how they inform the design of the methodology presented in Chapter Four.

3.2 A Froebelian perspective.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a German philosopher and educationalist regarded the development of children to be intrinsically linked with their earliest social experiences and emotional connections with others (Tovey, 2020). Development is not a fixed or linear undertaking, but an evolving state of 'becoming', responsive and sensitive to the environment (Wasmuth, 2020). Froebel's writing frames this study by emphasising the baby as an 'independent human mind' who is 'conscious and aware of himself' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 75). To Froebel, a young child's behaviours are too often dismissed by adults as arbitrary and meaningless despite the baby striving for 'sensory proof of a self-existence' through spirited movement and action (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p.77). A baby's physical and verbal actions are considered herein as their voice, advancing themselves into the social space, which should be understood as valued contributions. To this end, Froebel provides a lens to orient this study, celebrating the competence of young children, positioning the baby as an active and sensitive, independent individual capable of offering valuable contributions to research.

Froebel's legacy remains influential in contemporary early childhood education (Bruce *et al.*, 2019; Wasmuth, 2020; Tovey, 2020; Bruce, 2021). His philosophy is enshrined within a set of principles that seek to influence early childhood practices and education and endure his legacy (Bruce, 2021). Particularly pertinent to the framing of this study is Froebel's principle of unity and interconnectivity where he recognises the way in which humans are connected to those around them, their environment and wider world (Werth, 2018; Bruce, 2021). Originating from his foundational concept of 'spherical law' Froebel points out that during infancy, the 'invisible becomes visible' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 74), the child moves through a gradual unfolding into the world. Spherical law starts with the whole 'self', and the way one expresses oneself, arising 'from within, from the centre', a gradual evolving of identity, draws the 'inner outer and the

outer inner' (Liebschner, 2001, p.8; Bruce, 2021, p. 69). Froebel understood the self to be influenced by individual external actions, the environment, particularly nature and the relationships formed with others. Whilst the concept of spherical law is deeply complex (Whinnett, 2012), its evolution to the law of opposites and ultimately Froebel's portrayal of seeking 'unity in all things' (Liebschner, 2001, p.33) adds depth to the foundation of this doctoral study in the way Froebel perceived children's actions to be the 'driving force' towards achieving meaning to life (Whinnett, 2012, p. 62).

In this study, babies are viewed holistically; the connection between their body, emotions, communicative attempts emphasised. Conjoined to these facets is their interconnectedness to relationships with family and the newly formed relationships with caregivers in the nursery environment. To this end, children's early relational experiences are formative in the way in which they become conscious of their own actions of self in the social domain.

In every activity and deed of a man, yes, even in every activity of the smallest child, is expressed a relationship. (Froebel, 1896, p. 237)

The child is connected to all dimensions of life, they are always seeking relationships and linked in relationships with others. Babies have agency to shape and influence the environment they are situated. Froebel cautions that dismissing the child's communicative attempts devalues the child's identity and position in society (Froebel, cited in Lilley, 1967). This emphasises the necessity to examine babies interacting with others, particularly those who care for them and to reflect on the responsibility of those caregiving adults. Aligning Froebel's notion of seeking unity in both internal and external life, I argue throughout this thesis babies' external voice expressions shared in a social space can be perceived as 'arising from their inner life' (Froebel, cited in Lilley 1967, p. 110) to connect with another. Development and learning are rooted in social encounters, and it is through these moments where children are encouraged (or discouraged), to recognise how they are intrinsically connected to their family and wider environment as this ultimately shapes their existence in the world or more specifically in this study their existence in nursery (Werth, 2018).

A Froebelian lens aligns this study's premise that voice can only be understood through close observation of elicited communication patterns with others, and it is through relational encounters

babies begin to understand their unique personality and achieve a sense of belonging. Bruce *et al.*, (2019, p.268) write, 'When children feel at home in a setting, they are likely to function at their highest level, to truly be themselves'. To this end, a Froebelian approach maintains children need to feel rooted to their surroundings to flourish and foster a sense of belonging. Tovey (2020) reiterates how connectedness remains rooted from birth and early connections contribute to wellbeing throughout our lives.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two highlights the importance of close, loving relational experiences in early childhood, drawing from Gratier and Trevarthen (2007) who suggest the baby finds their voice as part of the 'family chorus'. These reflections, from a development psychological perspective align Froebel's writing and reiterate his progressive philosophy. Froebel placed great emphasis on the child's family roots, stating they are 'the sun which draws him out; and when he establishes other relationships within and beyond himself, these are the climatic conditions, the broad sky, under which he grows up' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 78). Such positioning elucidates the need to acknowledge the importance of family in research design but to grant attention to the foundation of voice which emerges from established relationships in the home. Adopting this view requires attention to be paid to the climatic conditions surrounding voice materialisation.

The way in which babies acclimatise to early childhood settings has roots in their familial encounters and will undoubtedly have implications for any interpretation or analysis. There is a marked difference between home and early childhood settings. Reflecting on Froebel's terminology, the 'climatic conditions' and 'broad sky' encountered in nursery will bring new challenges and anxieties for a young child. To ascertain a sense of unity and connectedness with their new surroundings, babies will need sensitive and highly trained educators to tune into and extend their voice expressions during moments of care.

3.2.1 The role of observation in Froebelian practice.

Emphasised throughout all of Froebel's writing is the critical role close observation plays in increasing understanding of children's behaviours (Bruce, 2021; Louis, 2022). His refined accounts of baby development remain one of the earliest and most vivid records of children's development

(Liebschner, 2001). In *Education of Man* (1826), Froebel describes the child as absorbing the conditions of life that surround him. The child's first 'utterance of power' promotes entry into a social community with family and all of humanity. By all accounts, Froebel describes the baby as striving for freedom, enacting purposeful movements, though lacking knowledge as to how to penetrate the adult domain.

In his soul the child wants to break the barriers put up against him and he is impatient at this inability to communicate.

(Froebel, cited in Lilley 1967, p. 76).

The way in which Froebel characterises the baby as determined and cognitively mature has left his writing open to criticism on account of his preoccupation with a baby's 'free activity' which he claimed would 'free him from these mental and physical shackles' (Liebschner, 2001, p.67). His detailed observations of babies were unfamiliar to accepted opinion of the time, but nevertheless, overtime, his literature has offered a helpful narrative to reposition babies' the potential developmental competencies, aligning accepted conceptualisation of infancy in contemporary research (Tovey, 2019).

Froebel's unwavering belief that observation should form the basis of education informs this study, offering potential to increase sector wide reflection regarding babies' contributions as well as their experiences in early childhood settings (Weston, 2002). Close observation of babies' external actions gives us 'valuable insights' (Louis, 2022) into their inner desires and what is most important to them (Bruce, 2021). Froebel argued adults should commit time to close observation of children as it underpins the essence of learning throughout life (Froebel, 1897). Forming a significant feature of the research design will be reflections from early childhood educators who will embark on close observation of their interactions with babies via a professional development tool. While further details explaining this process is outlined in Chapter Four, the rationale for involving the educators derives largely from Froebel's preoccupation with teachers being highly trained and skilled to enrich the child's early learning experiences. Furthermore, Froebel's writing leads us to understand that working with young children requires ongoing self-reflection and a commitment to sourcing strategies to think deeply about children's contributions (Tovey, 2020). Hence, fostering a

theoretical frame informed by Froebelian principles warrants the contributions of highly skilled educators to be given due regard.

3.3 Bakhtinian theorisation of voice.

Bakhtinian philosophy positions human knowledge as epistemologically intertwined with how language is used (Holquist, 2002). Mikhail Bakhtin is well known for his theorisation of linguistics and argued language has no meaning if it is not considered as communication (Holquist, 2002). Bakhtin (1984, p. 293) contends 'life by its very nature is dialogic...' and knowledge stems from engaging in active dialogic engagement with others. It is participation in dialogic interaction that gives meaning to life. Notable in *The Problem of Speech Genres* (Bakhtin, 1986, p.67) is Bakhtin's reference to speech as 'communion' which implies his commitment to recognising moments of dialogue to be collaborative and promote social bonding between two (Haye and Larraín, 2011). From this, dialogue can be understood to be not a singular event, but constantly evolving in response to the dynamic culture of social events. White (2016) views social encounters as a tool for learning and determines what the child learns socially, and emotionally from moments of meaningful interaction advance their developmental trajectory and contribute to their overall wellbeing. Truth and knowledge of everyday life differ from one moment to the next and is 'twofaced', requiring careful interpretation to legitimise meaning making moments (Bakhtin, 1986).

Important here however, is Bakhtin's supposition that dialogue derives its meaning in the moment, not afterwards (White, 2016). This is an essential consideration when shaping research that claims to examine dialogic moments in early childhood. Research design must find ways to bring to life the essence of dialogic moments in analysis processes.

3.3.1 Voice as utterance.

Bakhtin's writing refers to several components of dialogism which can be useful to support research orientation. This study specifically examines his concept of 'utterance' (*vyskayvanie*) (Bakhtin, 1986) which refers to a 'fundamental unit of analysis' rooted at the core of dialogue and should be considered when studying any form of communication (Holquist, 2002). In the context of this study, 'utterance' offers a conceptualisation of 'voice' as a 'unit of communication' (Bakhtin, 1986, p.67) including verbal and nonverbal, gestural, and emotional which are always 'performed'

and 'is always an answer' to something that precedes it (Holquist, 2002, p.60). Utterance is authored by an individual and comprises a series of communication forms which are individual, and context bound (Bakhtin, 1986). Voice can take many forms but 'reflects the individuality of the speaker...', 'possesses individual style' and is connected in a 'communication chain' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 63; White, 2016, p.24). Viewing utterance in this way positions voice acts as a motivated 'social act of bonding', seeking to express oneself to another (Haye and Larraín, 2011, p. 45).

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a social specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation and as a rejoinder to it-it does not approach the object from the side lines.

(Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276-7)

Distinct to Bakhtin's theorisation of utterance was his recognition of the impact of past events on utterance formation (de Vocht, 2015) which draws comparisons with cultural historical theory and Froebel's assumption everything in the child's life is linked. Each utterance retains 'language crumbs' (White, 2013, p. 69) from the past preserved within in it, which supports its structure and materialisation into the environment, aligning Hedegaard's (2004) emphasis on historicity in children's learning and development. In keeping with this view, Gratier and Trevarthen (2007, p.176) assert voice carries,

...cultural meaning, like flowing rivers, though ever changing, have memories, carrying minerals and sediments from other places and other times.

A Bakhtinian lens affords opportunity in this study to make connections between the social experiences' babies have prior to entering early childhood settings and the significance of the relational threads preserved in a baby's voice efforts. As it is culturally derived and responsive to time and space, utterance is a not a fixed entity and will derive different meanings from different perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981; Haye and Larraín, 2011). It is active and 'enacts values in and out of speech through the process of scripting our place and that of our listener in a culturally specific social scenario' (Brandist, 2015, p. 850). Experiences encountered in the past will shape a child's

anticipation of how their voice utterance will be received in the social world. For example, banging on the highchair at home may result in their parent joining in and singing, whereas repeating this action in nursery may result in attempts to pacify the action by educators, causing confusion for the child and a conflict of motives (Hedegaard, 2008a). Moreover, voice expressions become visible in response to environmental influences, revealing themselves in several overt and subtle ways (White, 2016).

Babies seek to 'script' themselves a place in socially and 'culturally specific scenario' which aligns the familiarity within a concept bound with seeking a sense of belonging as they settle in new social environments (Bakhtin, 1986; White, 2016). Haye and Larraín's (2011) interpretation consider utterance to comprise aspects of tension arising from conflict in the environment. Such a perspective presents opportunity to afford greater meaning behind babies' voice expressions and offers a useful conceptualisation to consider external influences in the surrounding environment that affect how voice is received. Examining utterance affords opportunity to learn more about the 'language of life' and therefore, should be studied in the context in which it arises (Bakhtin, 1986, p.63 and 67).

3.3.2 Moral answerability.

Utterance becomes visible when it is received by another and is situated in a 'two-sided act of dialogue' (White, 2016, p. 24). Accordingly, utterance is shaped by the individual speaker and the way in which they seek to 'address' others. Meaning therefore, arises between the speaker and receiver, which in turn conditions a response from the other, both are viewed as active partners in dialogue.

Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.

(Bakhtin, 1984, p.110)

In his writing, Bakhtin upheld the view that individuals only come to understand their own existence through engaging in encounters with others. His term 'answerability' (Bakhtin, 1990; 1993) assists understanding of the 'ethical process of trying to understand 'other' as an unrepeatable, non-transferable act of evaluation through answer and response' (White, 2016, p. 21). The concept offers a useful perspective that can be applied to the relationships between adult and children and

research participants and researchers. According to Bakhtin (1990), every act of utterance is answerable, and assumes a response from 'other'. Essential to this perspective, is Bakhtin's explanation of utterance as an 'active response' to preceding acts of utterance, that build a 'backward and forward' exchange akin to contemporary 'serve, and return' (Center for the Developing Child, 2018).

To Bakhtin:

To ignore the nature of the utterance or to fail to consider the peculiarities of generic subcategories of speech in any area of linguistic study leads to perfunctoriness and excessive abstractness, distorts the historicity of the research, and weakens the link between language and life (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60)

The active listener or partner plays an imperative role in providing a response to the multiple utterances, the active relationality between the speaker or listener. Therefore, adopting an attentive presence to unfolding dialogue, to become 'answerable' to each other sits at the core of Bakhtin's concept. White (2016, p.55) refers to creating a 'shared physical and emotional space' where emotional investment underpins efforts to 'linger lovingly' with children. She elevates Bakhtin's concept of answerability by taking into consideration the need to establish a culture of listening whereby educators take an active responsibility for 'what they see and hear and the way it is interpreted' (White, 2015b, p. 56). Therefore, educators must give priority to tuning into babies' utterances and assume a place of moral accountability to respond to and engage with dialogue in baby rooms. This framing reinforces my rationale for positioning this investigation around the interactions that manifest between educator and child. Examining how 'answerable' adults are to babies' advances bridges the gap between what is known and not known about babies' voicing endeavours.

3.4 Cultural Historical Theory.

Cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2002; 2008a) guides this study by offering a foundational frame to study babies' voice contributions in early childhood settings. Marianne Hedegaard's (2002; 2008a) cultural historical theory and principles of a 'wholeness' approach adds depth to the theoretical frame, by reiterating Froebel's belief that the child's interconnectedness with the world shaped their development (Werth, 2018). To Froebel, 'Link always link' (Bruce, 2021, p.33)

governed the way in which his writing situates the child as a 'whole', emerging through 'sustained connection' with others and the environment. To that end, Hedegaard's (2008a) cultural historical wholeness approach complements the view that children's learning and development arises because of their participation with the environment and their relationships with others and this is foundational to their growth (Hedegaard, 2012). Applying this approach, depicts the child's development in its 'wholeness', it cannot be separated and should be theorised from multiple perspectives (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2012).

3.4.1 The origins of Cultural Historical Theory.

Originating from Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Vygotsky; 1978; 1998; Leontiev, 1978; Davydov, 1999; Engeström, 2008), Hedegaard's (2002; 2008a) cultural historical theory offers a unique and distinct contribution to a Vygotskian perspective of children's learning and development. Fundamentally, a cultural historical approach seeks to affirm the complex interrelationship between the psychological, biological, and cultural dimensions of learning and development to instigate a new way of understanding the human mind (Fleer, 2014).

Hedegaard's (2008a) contribution scaffolds this study by encouraging research,

... to try to understand the child as she or he engages with the demands and opportunities for action in activities that occur within institutional practices, which are themselves embedded in local and national histories and societal expectations.

(Edwards, Fleer, and Bøttcher, 2019, p.2)

No human can exist outside of or prior to a relationship with their environment and cannot be studied in abstraction from this relationship (Winnicott, 1957; Vygotsky, 1978; Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2010). Hedegaard (2008a) believed children's development to be 'anchored in concrete historical settings, institutional practices, and general conditions of daily lives of children and their families' (Hedegaard, 2010, p. 51). The child and their surroundings are interconnected and rooted in nuanced history and customs, belonging to, and contributing to a dynamic social system (Vygotsky, 1998). Adopting this theoretical approach centralises human development and encourages examination of the bi-directional relationship which connects the individual to the demands of the environment (Hedegaard, 2008a).

Cultural historical theory provides a helpful axis to examine how a baby is situated in nursery and how their contributions shape events in the nursery space. Applying this perspective, the human mind is viewed to be indirectly shaped by the interrelations in social situations and the 'social relations of development' (Vygotsky, 1998, p.199). This belief grounds the epistemological roots of this study. From an ontological standpoint, the theory unites the barriers between the internal and external worlds in the way it regards the human mind as originating from a direct influence of external activities and cultural practices such as social interaction (Stetsenko and Arieviditch, 2010).

3.4.2 A wholeness approach to theorising voice in infancy.

Examining the voice contributions of young children is 'not without its pitfalls', and research design should acknowledge the manifold of variables that comprise voice and its wider influences (Geertz, 1973). This aligns with calls from researchers to attend to multiple variable and broader context when examining children's voice contributions (Wall *et al.* 2019). Therefore, to learn more about a baby, the environment they experience should be examined and considered as part of the research process.

Hedegaard (2008a) was concerned with how babies direct their own participation within a social space (activity setting), this, she believed forms the basis of meaning making and development. Individual activity offers insight into their 'hierarchy of motives' (Leontiev, 1978), presenting opportunity to consider how voice orients and manifests within a social space in response to new experiences. Thus, motives are goal directed (Vygotsky, 1978) and 'social instruments' to increase one's social influence in institutions (Mills 1940, p. 911). Motives shape an individual's participation and become visible through observing how the individual engages in activities in an institutional space (Edwards *et al.* 2019).

Leontiev's theory of children's activities starts with concepts of primary needs, but when a child finds its object, the object becomes the needs.

(Hedegaard, 2012, p.16)

This theorisation promotes the view voice can be understood to be an act directed toward another, a way to relate and connect socially to others (Davydov, Zinchenko and Talyzina, 1983).

At the core of Hedegaard's (2008a; 2012) cultural historical framework is the necessity to adopt a 'whole child perspective' seeing the child's learning and development situated within the practices of institutions experienced (Edwards *et al.* 2019). A wholeness approach promotes examination of the context's development arises but attends to the historical values and customs such practices are anchored within. Such a view is particularly helpful when developing this doctoral study as it encourages attention to be paid to the children's relational histories as well as examining the institutional practices and societal conditions framing their interactional experiences.

Hedegaard (2008a) sets out three different perspectives; the societal, institutional, and personal which she argues influence how a child's development and learning advances.

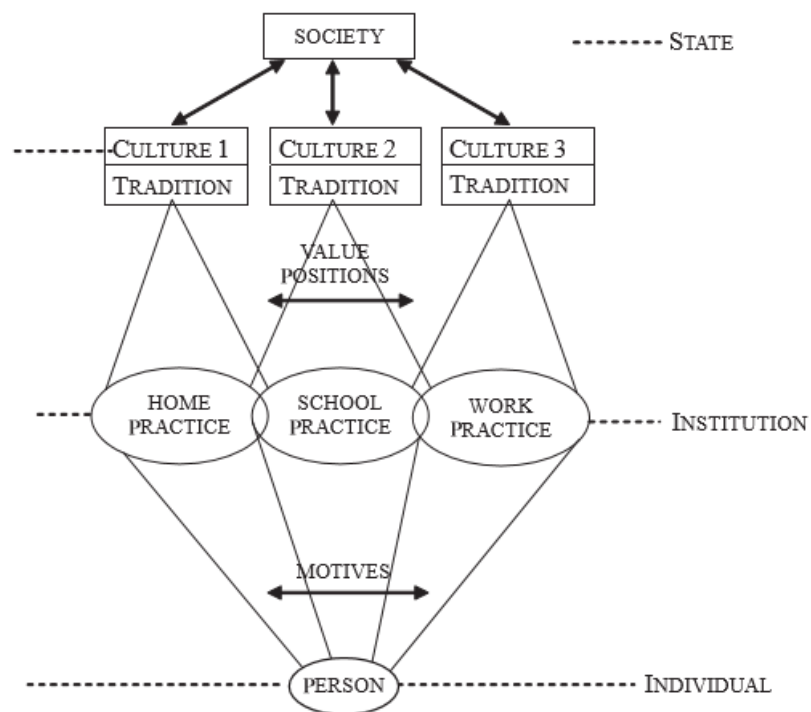


Fig 3.1. Hedegaard's model of Cultural Historical Theory (2004; 2008a; 2009). Illustrating the inter-related strands of human development.

It is impossible to understand a child without attending to their position in practices, it is a dialectical process recognising the person and society (Hedegaard, 2008a). Therefore, a wholeness approach situates children's development as occurring through participation between the baby and practices within the environment (institution) (Hedegaard, 2012). Shared values, beliefs, and expectations are formed over time because of the dynamic influence of societal

conditions and human interaction (Stetsenko, 2008). Continuous interactions between the individual and institutional practices create a culture that collectively informs and shapes everyday occurrences which influence a child's learning and development.

Adopting this framework encourages examination of the knower and the known (Stetsenko and Arievidt, 2010) distinguishing the dynamic relationship between the individual's inherent characteristics and their 'activity' (behaviours) within the external social world. The baby takes on a role within the wider collaborative social practices established between the family, staff team and general nursery environment. It is the 'children's intentional...interactions in which they take part in their everyday social situations – and how other participants contribute to these situations through their interactions- that should be studied' (Hedegaard and Flear, 2008 pg. 5). In addition, the context of the environment, expectations, policies, and practices are considered to situate development and its dynamic connection with the socio-cultural world.

Cultural historical theory makes a distinction between voice and perspective, claiming that they are two differing entities (Hedegaard, 2020). While this study concurs with that premise to an extent, it does not make any claim to know with certainty the babies' perspectives, it does however position voice within the constructs of motive development, bound within the socio-cultural domain.

Vygotsky's (1978) theorisation of tools as a cultural feature of development aligns the premise that voice acts as a tool to support a baby's assimilation into social environments. Emerging from a socio-cognitive view, the dynamics of human learning and development are argued to be concerned with cognitive and affective content, associated with human need and intention (Wartofsky, 1979, p. 205-206).

Viewing voice through a cultural historical lens (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2012), promotes a position of babies, as active agents and presents opportunity to examine how their motives and competences materialise in cultural practices. How voice patterns orient into the environment will offer clues into what is important to the child, and it is from this stance that I hope my study ignites interest and dialogue concerning how best to shape pedagogy for very, young children.

3.4.3 The role of conflict and crisis.

Vygotsky (1998) refers to the demands placed on children's learning and development as they encounter conflict in different social situations. Hedegaard (2009; 2012) draws attention to culturally and historically formed traditions claiming they materialise as institutional practices and encourages researchers to consider how a child develops across differing institutions.

Significantly, as a child moves between settings (home, nursery), they encounter new demands arising from practices, which create conflict or a crisis for the child (Hedegaard, 2012). Vygotsky (1998, p.191) points out existing developmental patterns (motive) will be challenged which will necessitate deconstruction, reconstruction and mastering, triggering 'neof ormation' where new motivate orientations adjust to the demands of the setting. Hedegaard's (2012) conceptualisation of conflict expands this, asserting moments of conflict create the social situations where development arises.

The personal histories and established rituals in family cultural traditions contribute to the child's perception of the social world and influences their expectation of new social experiences, for example in early childhood settings. Individual knowledge and constructs of reality are founded in interactions that occur with others and environment but are grounded in established customs in the home (Hedegaard, 2009). Sharing time between home and early childhood settings will present new challenges for any child, but will be more acute for very, young children. From this perspective, motive orientation can be understood to be shaped by prior experiences which inform a baby's initial motives in a new setting. However, if new environments qualitatively differ from those the child has become accustomed then the child will need to learn a new way of behaving and participating (Elkonin, 1999). Customary and familiar known practices will be challenged and will unsettle their development trajectory. Vygotsky (1998) and Elkonin (1999) term this a 'rupture' resulting in tensions arising and deconstruction of prior knowledge and skills. Disconnect between the child's experiences and the opportunities offered within a new setting is likely to occur and persist until practice affords time and space for interactions between the child and caregivers to materialise.

Typically, the practices in early childhood settings are complex, situated between notions of care and education (Noddings, 2002; Page, 2011). What is valued in these environments is influenced by curriculum guidance (DfE, 2021a), but shaped by the cultural dimensions and values of individual settings which are often rooted in long traditions. What remains less clear is how babies

navigate the interwoven strands of early education practices and if the practices enacted create conflict for young children. Vygotsky (1998) points out encountering moments of conflict has the potential to enrich and transform children's learning capacities. If this is the case, then institutional practices offer potential for babies' voice expression to be advanced to enhance children's social and emotional development. In contrast, Hedegaard (2008a, p.24) claims children's motives are not always in line with institutional practices, and this is where problems occur which can lead to 'permanent conflict' for the child and long-term discordance between adult and child motives. Such view is relevant to this study as it opens the potential to examine how voice motives play out in nursery environments and to consider how aligned institutional practices and adult responsivity are to babies' patterns of voice.

3.5 An opportunity to disrupt discourses concerning voice in infancy.

All three theorists contributing to the theoretical frame are thought to radical thinkers committed to altering the narrative of thinking in their fields (White, 2016; Cavada-Hrepich, 2019; Bruce, 2021). This offers potential to disrupt current discourses concerning voice in infancy and establishes opportunity to create new ideas and possibilities.

Froebel was a notoriously controversial figure in educational philosophy, depicting a new way of thinking that unsettled notions of thought at the time (Bruce, 2021). Documented to be 'one of the most remarkable men of his time', on account of his 'gift' as an educator (Leibschner, 1992, p.14), his ideas were also met with vilification and heresy (McNair and Powell, 2020). Suspensions surrounding his beliefs on free thinking and agency of the human mind resulted in Froebel facing opposition from many and resulted in his kindergartens being banned (Leibschner, 2001; Tovey, 2019). His thinking at the time appeared to surpass general understanding between early childhood experiences and later life so much so, his conviction to attend to needs of the very, youngest children as the tool to regenerate society was disregarded (Tovey, 2019). Persistence and resilience determined many of his ideas endured and accelerated after his death (Leibschner, 2001; Bruce, 2021). Froebel's legacy endures globally, driven by contemporary Froebelian scholars who, as part of a 'community of practice' (Bruce, 2021, p.129), retain Froebel's 'moral imperative' to advocate for a principled approach to early education that swims 'against the tide of

educational doctrines that promote reductive and transmissive' (McNair and Powell, 2020, p.1176 & 1183).

Like Froebel, Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) is recognised as a controversial figure in literature, whose writing was fragmented and convoluted but impactful in several fields (Wegerif, 2011; White, 2016). Averse to 'authoritative' supremacy', Bakhtin's writing is grounded in his early life in Soviet Russia (Holquist, 2002; White, 2015a). His engagement with a wide range of radical thinkers including other scholars, artists, and creatives, known as 'The Bakhtin Circle', unsettled establishments and led to a political movement to remove 'dangerous dialogues' from society (White, 2015b). During his time in exile, Bakhtin developed many of his ideas which have since gone on to revolutionise thinking around literary and wider domains. Though his work did not attend to educational doctrines, it has been revitalised in the contemporary world and is now readily applied to educational thinking (Brandist, 2015).

Marianne Hedegaard 'brings a very special, rich conception' of cultural historical theory (Libâneo and Marra da Madeira Freitas, 2019, p.336). She is credited as enduring the 'shifting landscapes and permutations' (Stetsenko, 2020, p.6) of Vygotsky's work by advancing its concepts but retaining allegiance to its origin. She elevated Vygotskian notions through detailed ethnographic observations of children in different settings, adding a theoretically rigorous layer to earlier assumed principles. Challenging earlier contributions (Leontiev, 1978) she draws attention to gaps concerning the 'conceptualization of the historical institutionalized demands' that mediate children's learning and development (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2013, p. 200). Extending this, Hedegaard argues for a 'wholeness' approach to promote a dynamic view of children's development, determining development to be rooted across several 'planes' which shape children's motives and intentional actions (Hedegaard, 2004). Unlike her predecessors, Hedegaard advocated for the researcher to be 'explorer, quester and questioning', (Cavada-Hrepich, 2019, p. 2) encouraging a unique perspective to traditional psychological research.

Together these contributions present opportunity to frame this study which seeks to disrupt current thinking around how babies are positioned in baby room pedagogy and contribute to dialogue surrounding children's rights in early childhood.

3.6 Framing the role of the researcher.

The three theoretical lenses constructing this framework conceptualise the role of the researcher in their writing and present the role to be morally and ethically accountable (Bakhtin, 1990; Hedegaard and Fler, 2013). To learn about babies, their voice endeavours and social surroundings, the researcher must commit to absorbing themselves in the children's existence in nursery and join them as they navigate their social interactions (Fler, 2008b). Froebel positioned observation as foundational for 'giving valuable insights' into children's worlds and understanding how we contribute can to children's development (Louis, 2022, p.7). From a cultural historical perspective,

...research always implies from interaction and that every kind of interaction implies a kind of communication where meaning is created between the researcher and researched persons in the social situation. (Hedegaard, 2008a, p. 49)

To strengthen this position, I suggest combining Bakhtin's concept of moral answerability to enhance and validate the researcher's responsibility to afford meaning to every encounter during the research process. Albon and Rosen's (2013, p.99) application of answerability points out that to be truly answerable to research participants, researchers should be 'engaged with' and 'caring about' participants. Central to achieving this is the role adopted in everyday occurrences within the research context. Conceptualisation of the 'doubleness of the researcher' (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 205) affords greater meaning to the research process, affording a lens on the personal and professional aspects of research with participants. Hedegaard advocates reliability and validity of research are strengthened with the inclusion of researcher perspectives (Fler and Veresov, 2018). Accordingly, Bakhtin's notion of answerability when applied to research goes 'beyond' relationships with participants but endures across the 'critical dialogue' with data that unfolds across the entire research process (Albon and Rosen, 2013, p.133).

3.7 Uniting the three theories into one frame.

Whilst I acknowledge there are several established theoretical approaches that could offer a helpful lens to expand aspects of this study, I maintain uniting the three outlined above provide an optimal framing to investigate the voices of babies in early childhood settings. I am also not naïve

to contention surrounding employing a framework where Vygotskian strands straddle Bakhtinian philosophy (Wegerif, 2011; White, 2014). I chose to draw on the similarities that unite the philosophical components rather than discredit a theory offering potential to improve and advance thinking. Moreover, the dynamic meshing of the theories retains babies voice contributions as a central prominence that alternative theories may have overlooked. All three unite on the premise that children are agents in their own learning experiences, capable and self-aware of how their voices can intentionally increase participation in a social context.

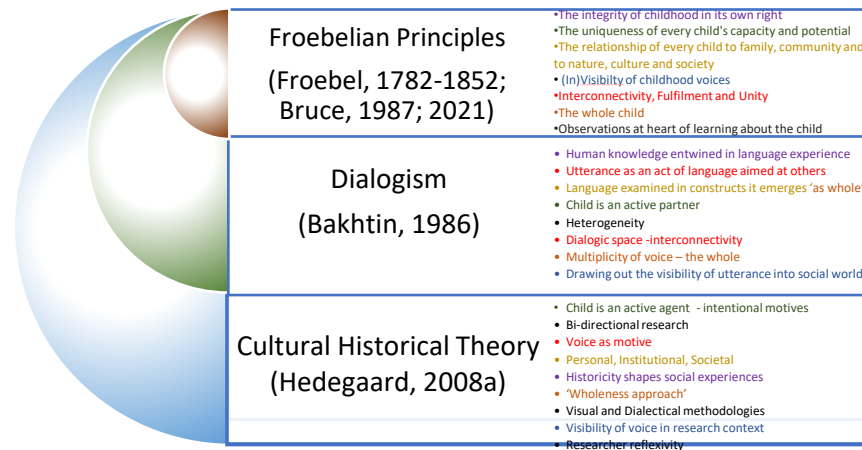


Fig. 3.2 Uniting theoretical strands as one frame.

I navigated through the theories cautiously, taking time to reflect if all three perspectives reflected the research objectives fully. More importantly I considered if opting for one lens would uphold the seminal aspects of my study or fairly reflect the complexity of the areas of investigation. I resolved opting for a single theory would likely omit core foci and engaging only two presented limited structure to the study overall.

Figure 3.2 represents my thinking and union of theoretical strands across the three domains. To me, it was important to retain a Froebelian lens at the core, to guide and underpin the projects' main philosophy. The inclusion of Bakhtin's Dialogism was certain from the outset as I considered his conceptualisation of 'utterance' offered a depth and richness to capturing the minutiae of infant communications. From expanding reading across his text, I conceded other features of his work including 'answerability' and 'authorship' enhanced my thinking in this area. Finally, despite uniting two theories, I still felt my study was missing a clear structural influence to ground its movement across the research project.

I was introduced to Cultural Historical Activity Theory in a seminar in the first year of my study and this was a 'light bulb' moment for me. Hedegaard's (2002; 2008) application lends itself to consider the influence of broader issues on voice structure which I maintain would always encompass organisational culture, policy influence and the unique relational history a child brings to the setting. It also presented opportunity to conceptualise voice as motive driven, aligning closely with the literature attending to intentional communication in infancy (Reddy, 2008; Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt, 2017). Additionally, many researchers who have applied cultural historical theory advocate the use of close observations through visual methods to generate data, which was a vital ingredient to this study (Fleer, 2014; Li, 2014). To me cultural historical theory acted as the final piece of the puzzle and offered a structure to inform elements of the methodological approach as well as enhance the analytical process.

3.8 Summary.

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinning framing this study. The study presents an original and innovative structure to attend to the nuances and multiple variables associated with examining the voice of babies in early childhood contexts. The roots of this study emerge from three theories that are built upon advocacy, change and hope. As such, the learning opportunities fusing the three together offers potential to alter dialogue and shift the landscape for babies and early education settings. In applying Bakhtin (1981) to her own research, White (2015) propositions that there is no 'right way' to apply Bakhtin, and suggests we are all 'answerable' for our own interpretation. The design of my study arises from my own interpretation of the three theories outlined above. I defend that the three theories work to complement one another and generate opportunity to enrich knowledge and understanding of voice in infancy.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction.

Chapter Three presented the theoretical framework conceptualising the philosophy and theories surrounding the literature reviewed, indicating how theory underpins the research aims. This chapter will further strengthen the theoretical strands, illustrating how these inform the methodological framework. The research aims and objectives seek to increase scholarly understanding of babies' social experiences and act as a platform for their voices in nursery settings. Often repressed through concerns of ontological, epistemological, and methodological rigour (Johansson and White, 2011), babies have remained relatively powerless in social sciences research (Coady, 2010). Epistemological quandaries such as 'are we getting a true picture' of the 'real lived' experiences of very young children remain complex and multifaceted, with researchers yet to really determine the best way to document their experiences (Bradley *et al.* 2012).

Literature reviewed in Chapter Two ascertained babies to be deliberate and intentional with their actions seeking connection with their special adults in the social sphere (Trevarthen, 2011).

Johansson and Emilson (2010) advocate focussing on the 'actions, reactions, vocalisation, gaze, and facial gestures' (Elwick *et al.* 2014a, p. 200). However, difficulties arise when researchers begin to make claim that they know the intended meaning behind infant gestures resulting in 'ambiguity' (Komulainen, 2007, p. 15). This study sets out to challenge some of the assumptions presented above pivoting the investigation around babies' intentional communications and seeking to examine the concurrent relationship between the babies' contributions, adult responses, and socio-cultural environmental context.

Undoubtedly, the interpretation of these cues will be variable which brings a sense of uncertainty to the research process. Every interactive experience paves the way for a baby to continually construct and reconstruct a new understanding of their world that underpin any future encounters (Bruner, 1990). Therefore, it is difficult to determine a definitive view of their social world, there are many worlds and many ways to interpret them (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Consequently, a methodology that promotes flexibility to be responsive to real life situations is warranted (Johansson and White, 2011). Designing an appropriate theoretical and methodological approach to investigate how the voices of babies materialise in early childhood settings is arguably

an ethical and moral undertaking (White, 2016). The journey will encompass relational and subjective dimensions requiring sensitive immersion into the unique, interpersonal worlds babies encounter in early childhood settings (Salamon and Harrison, 2015; White *et al.* 2015).

This chapter commences with consideration of the researcher positionality and how personal and professional consciousness have potential to shape the research process. The study is then located in the research paradigm and the research context presented. Attention is given to the research design, specifically introducing the research methods adopted for data collection. I set out a clear rationale for the inclusion of all components but pay particular attention to the inclusion of visual methods for eliciting the voices of babies and the purpose behind developing a professional development tool, Video Interaction Dialogue (Guard, 2023) to promote early childhood educators' participation. Following this, the complex network of ethical challenges, emotional dimensions and data analysis processes associated with the study are also considered.

4.2 Positionality.

Ferraz *et al.* (2023, p.2) point out that involving children in the research process is a peculiar and transient undertaking which sees 'biological, cultural and social' dimensions simultaneously collide. Unravelling these dimensions in a meaningful way is dependent on how the conscious affective positioning of the researcher becomes visible through the research process (Quiñones, 2014; Ferraz *et al.* 2023). Part of this involves examination of the researcher's own motivations, positionality, and epistemological influences as the researcher's own paradigm acts as a web connecting all aspects of the research journey, driving inception to design and implementation (Bateson, 2000; Alderson, 2016). Principally located in a cultural historical approach (Hedegaard, 2008a), this study is informed by Hedegaard and Fleer's (2008) assertion that the researcher becomes part of the research community, their contributions remain essential in the research process and a worthy area for inquiry (Degotardi, 2011).

As the introductory chapter explained, experiences gained during my career in the sector have shaped my values and beliefs and will influence my position as a researcher. Examining the lives of babies heightens the need for me to interrogate my role and the influence my previous experiences personally and professionally will have on emerging data and analysis (Coffey, 1999; Denscombe, 2010). I have spent many years observing children and guiding students how to tune

in and learn about children's play and development. This has affirmed in my mind that there is no single way to describe, experience or explain a situation, particularly through the eyes of a young child (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), reality is viewed as multiple and constructed (Bakhtin, 1986). Children, indeed, all humans are unpredictable, their experiences are personal, multifaceted and determine their perception of reality (Alderson, 2013). We are all informed by preceding experiences which motivate our contributions in the world (Edwards, Fleer, and Bottcher, 2019). Bakhtin (1986) points out, whilst 'truth differs across time and space', meaning can be found in moments of shared understanding with others, corroborating the philosophy of this study.

Involving babies as participants places great responsibility on a researcher to portray the voices of those previously unheard (Alderson, 2013). Sensitive immersion (Edwards *et al.* 2019) in children's natural worlds is required to deeply reflect how they are positioned in relation to broader contexts of society. Hedegaard (2008b, p. 204) highlights the 'balancing act' researchers precariously navigate to ensure positions of power, trust and authenticity are maintained. I approach this study with an 'insider and outsider' perspective (Ergun and Erdemir 2010, p.16). I do not enter the research setting with neutrality, but as a professional with 'insider' knowledge of the sector acquired from my life experiences. Juxtaposed, I enter the environment as an 'outsider', a researcher unfamiliar with the community of each setting and personality of individuals encountered, thus increasing the need for reflexivity and interrogation of my own potential biases (Asselin, 2003). Researching human behaviours involves admission of possible biases and subjectivities, consciously making visible the uncomfortable nature of research and affective dimensions encountered (Quiñones, 2014; Ferraz *et al.* 2023).

Researcher and participants are not neutral, and are shaped by historical, cultural, societal practices encountered which will alter the environments in which research is undertaken (Hedegaard, 2008b). Involving children in research is an acknowledgement that the researcher is not the knower of truth but rather the recorder and interpreter of 'multiple social subjectivities' (Beazley *et al.* 2009, p. 369). All individual's involved in research hold a personal and ethical accountability towards one another (Bakhtin, 1984; White, 2016), and this is particularly acute during the research process. Meaning can be afforded by examining the worth of social interactions, seeing children as social constructs, able to contribute to the world around them,

rather than passive objects under the control of adults (Elwick *et al.* 2014b). To strengthen these meanings, I consciously acknowledged my position in the research process, monitoring interactions, reactions and reflections within field diaries and professional discussions with the supervisory team.

As a researcher, I am not claiming to 'know' the perspectives of babies, but to recognise them as a separate entity, adopting an ethical responsibility to be accountable for them (Elwick *et al.* 2014a). I am sensitive to the unknowable entity that very young children bring to the research field and at no point make a claim to know with certainty their perspectives (Elwick *et al.* 2014b). Undertaking to design a study which respects babies and is ethically sound, requires significant consideration, reflexivity, and open mindedness (Alderson, 2016). The process of examining children's voices is 'complicated and time consuming' (Wall *et al.* 2019, p. 3). Thus, a multimodal methodological design has emerged to incorporate shared histories, opportunity for reflection and longitudinal observations of babies' voice cues (Hedegaard, 2008a; Veresov, 2014). This abets shifting the interpretation of data sources away from solely a researcher construction towards a multifaceted co-construction offering a new alternative to learn about the lives of babies.

4.3 Determining a Research paradigm.

Identifying a research paradigm is a crucial step in determining the underpinning philosophical framework that guides the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). A primary aim of this inquiry is to increase scholarly understanding of babies' social experiences in their everyday lives, in undisturbed, ordinary environments (Urwin and Sternberg, 2012, p. 7). Essentially there is no favoured theoretical approach to developing research methodologies when involving young children in research (Alderson, 2016). Theoretical framing comfortably locates this study in a cultural historical domain (Hedegaard, 2002; 2008a), interwoven with strands of Bakhtin's (1986) Dialogism and Froebel's (1827) principles of early education. A tripartite theoretical frame views the social conditions young children experience as unique and unpredictable, where meaning arises within the constructs of dialogue and interaction with others (Bakhtin 1986; Hedegaard, 2008a).

To employ a quantitative methodology which derives numerical and measurable data (Hammersley, 2013) conflicted with my deep rooted ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Moreover, it would rotate the conceptualisation of babies towards an objectified and measurable entity that social sciences researchers have advanced away from in recent times (Dalli and White, 2017).

The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions, and disjunctions. It is multi-layered and not easily susceptible to the atomized or aggregated processes inherent in much numerical research. It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments if true understanding is to be reached. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 288)

The contradictions and connectedness Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) consider aligns the essence of Bakhtin's (1986) thinking where truth and knowledge 'may be very different from one moment to the next – even for a group of people who share an experience at exactly the same time' (White, 2016, p. 2). Individual situations or encounters can never be replicated, human behaviour is not passive and controllable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Attempts to replicate unpredictable social encounters in controlled environments would distort naturally occurring moments, diluting the uniqueness which ultimately strengthens them (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Consequently, this study adopts a relativist position, seeking to capture the subjective nature of human interactions through interpretivist inquiry (Alderson, 2016). Identifying with Vygotsky's (1978) ontological belief system viewing knowledge as a result of co-constructed experiences, this study highlights any findings will be contingent upon social and cultural contexts which they are founded (Brock Utne, 1996). This study embraces a qualitative interpretivist design and promotes opportunities to record through a holistic 'wide angle' (Hammersley, 2013, p. 29) lens to scrutinise multiple, intersecting interpretations of events and the meanings given to social events.

Hedegaard and Fleer's (2008) framework offers a dynamic methodological perspective to promote study of children in their everyday lives focusing on children's own motives, projects, and intentional actions. Research can be enhanced by paying attention to other perspectives in the same societal and institutional context of the child's social situation, as all are interrelated (Hedegaard, 2008a). Therefore, integral to this design is to embrace a 'wholeness approach' (Hedegaard, 2012) viewing every child from multiple perspectives to closely examine their history

and rich funds of knowledge (Gonzalez *et al.* 1995). Such perspective strengthens the rationale to adopt an interpretivist paradigm promoting a multidimensional research design to study everyday interactional experiences of babies in early childhood settings.

4.4 Ethnography.

The nature of human interactions is subjective, motivated by individual perceptions, cultural activities, and values, which form the basis of interpretivist inquiry (Hammersley, 2013).

Interpretivist phenomena are contingent upon individual perceptions and do not claim to determine a lasting truth of reality can be generalised (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). Instead, it looks to grow knowledge and understanding through applying 'particularisation' (Stake, 1995) in relation to drawing out rich data. In this case, how voices are heard in natural social contexts, such as nursery settings is the research focus. To fulfil that objective, I must spend time within settings, sensitively immersing myself in their culture and witnessing first-hand the changeable, complex experiences young babies have each day (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Veresov, 2014).

Interpreting the ordinary occurrences humans can assume an ethnographic or phenomenological context as both approaches make similar assumptions and offer characteristics to strengthen this project (Lukenchuck, 2013). That said, there are subtle differences to which have guided the methodological development, aligning theoretical motivations of ethnography more favourably (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). The core aim of the study is to document babies' voices and to pay attention to the everyday socio-cultural influences of the social practices encircling the child. Traditionally this would situate the study comfortably within a phenomenological approach (Frey, 2018) pursuing close examination of the subjective 'lived experiences' of individuals (Ary *et al.* 2002). While this study will examine individual behaviours elicited by a small group of babies, it seeks to examine the collective experiences of these children and the influence their behaviours have on the wider environment and vice versa. Babies' voice orientation is the starting point of any emerging interactional moments and are influenced by broader circumstances within the context of the setting. The environment and quality of young children's experiences are culturally situated, shaped by characteristics and structural organisation of the baby room, staff motivations and broader nursery environment (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2008; Pinto *et al.* 2019). Sensitivity to 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez *et al.* 2005), and a 'wholeness' approach (Hedegaard 2012) promotes

examination of the interculturality of social spaces and for histories of individuals to be valuable components to this inquiry.

An ethnographic inspired methodology stimulates the exploration of several characteristics within the setting including those of children and staff. Paying attention to these features through an ethnographic lens promotes immersion in patterns of human behaviours via wide range of data generation from multiple methods (Gertz, 1973; Guest *et al.* 2013). Qualitative inquiry promotes a flexible, unstructured approach to generate data and facilitates opportunity for rich descriptions of social contexts to emerge (Hammersley, 2013). Whilst Josephides (1997) explains that experiencing individuals' social situations will undoubtedly shape ethnographic strategies adopted throughout the data process, Ferraz *et al.* (2023, p. 14) point out it has potential to 'transform the researcher as a human being' in the way it promotes expansion of the researcher's own subjectivities.

Ethnographic research encourages researchers to discover the social world through first-hand experience of the 'social processes' that can occur in everyday situations. Ethnography affords methodological flexibility by way of examining the wider cultural context, which undoubtedly characterises the need to be responsive in the worlds of young children (Hammersley, 1992, p. 12). This is consistent with cultural historical approach set out in Chapter Three.

To participate in the researched persons' social situation and get some insight into the interactional patterns, the researcher has to be in this situation for some time and repeat his participation, so that children continue to engage in their everyday projects (rather than be distracted by the observer.

(Hedegaard, 2008b, p. 55)

Ethnography raises several challenges including the crucial component regarding the longitudinal approach to data generation. Immersing oneself in a setting for a period can distort any information extracted, increasing the need for reflexivity and integrity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The researcher can become too familiar in surroundings, overlooking the reality of the situation, seeking to see the positive or negative depending on their own impression and response to the environment. Notes in my early field diaries revealed contrasting experiences,

'After waiting on the doorstep for longer than normal, the front door flew open, and I was greeted by the office administrator. 'Hello? Can I help you? Oh, are you here for the training?' I was taken aback slightly and said 'No, I am Caroline, from Roehampton, your researcher? I have been visiting for over a month every Wednesday?' 'Oh right, of course, come on in. I felt immediately prickly, and unwelcome. I seem to have a similar experience every week, which is getting a little tiresome and unmotivating...'

(Field diary, 09/10/2019)

To overcome distortion of any data, it became crucial to reflect and share these moments with my supervisory team; initially by way of 'letting off steam' but also to examine the interrelations between the 'head and heart', and affective dimensions accompanying me on the research journey (Gottlieb, 2012; Quiñones, 2014). Moreover, this supported greater awareness of how the culture of each setting ultimately shaped the research experience and influenced my fieldwork experiences (Fleer, 2008b). I found my perspectives of staff altered as time progressed, from observing situations when staff were not 'tuned in' to recognising the barriers to their ability to slow down and offer 'presence' to the children (Goodfellow, 2008).

Typically, ethnography encounters criticism from alternative research methodologies due to its traditional small-scale approach (Silverman, 2005). In contrast, endorsing a smaller sample strengthens this study as it promotes deeper examination of phenomena, which seeks not to generalise, but to examine the socio-cultural contexts babies experience in their real lives in nursery through close, careful observation to deepen our understanding and interpretation of human behaviours.

4.5 Identifying research design - methods.

The research design offers a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Walliman, 2016), thus influencing how phenomena can be generated. The design connects researcher belief systems, philosophical underpinning, and ascertains clear guidelines to resolve to connect the threads of philosophy and reality in a bid to address the research questions (Cresswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It acknowledges the multidimensional social contexts the babies experience will be 'socially situated... and context bound' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 288). Researchers who claim to speak on behalf of children can fail to represent their voices

honourably or lose sight of them to privilege research ambitions (Johansson and White, 2011). Therefore, a varied and multifaceted research framework, locating observation at its core, was developed to explore the uniquely dynamic realities of each situation, encouraging depth of data by drawing together phenomena from several data instruments (Sturman, 1999).

Core data was derived from naturalistic observations of babies in settings and additional sources of data generated through reflective dialogues, interviews, and field notes. A phased process for data generation was fostered, mapped out in a fieldwork schedule which aided transparency for participants, particularly the families involved (Appendix 11). This initially created a rigidity to the fieldwork which was revisited and modified dependent upon the setting culture, staff, and children following initial settling in processes and piloting of methods. Piloting the methods in each setting provided an opportunity to test and review strategies employed for suitability.

4.6 The research context.

Originally the study was planned around recruiting four individual nursery settings to include the following participants over a six-month period.

- A maximum of three infants under the age of 12 months
- One baby room staff team (up to four educators)
- Three parents (one for each child participant)

In March 2020, the global Covid-19 pandemic resulted in field work suspension for the second two nursery sites. Subsequently this study presents the findings from two field sites where data collection was completed.

The following instruments were employed to generate core data across all four sites and were used to triangulate findings, drawing out an honest and reliable (as far as reasonably practicable) picture of infant experiences:

- Observations of infants interacting with educators documented via video and narrative methods.
- Individual reflective dialogues with staff following collection of video data, employing Video Interaction Dialogue.

- Semi Structured interviews with parents.
- Researcher field notes.

4.7 Recruitment of participants.

Recruiting participants to this study fostered a progressive trajectory. There were several tiers of participants requiring consent before any study could commence. Early childhood settings had to be identified and, following agreement from providers, parents and staff approached.

Recruiting four nurseries from one company was a primary aim to limit variables such as staff recruitment/deployment policies and child's settling in policies. Nurseries were recruited from privately-owned providers accommodating baby rooms. The reason for this was twofold. A purposive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) sample of settings was sought that accommodated babies as it was vital all settings housed baby rooms and cared for children under two years old. This immediately eliminated settings offering only pre-school enrolments. Growth in the private sector provision for very young children has seen rapid expansion and contribute over 80% market value share (Laing Buisson, 2021) of childcare places available in England, 53% of these being situated within larger corporate companies (Simon and Penn, 2019; Laing Buisson, 2019). Although figures are inconclusive, it is recognised a significant proportion of settings offer care for babies from 3 months old, therefore prioritising recruitment from private provision was a logical step.

Eleven nursery chains consisting of a total of 402 settings in South England were contacted directly via email inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix 1). Three nursery chains responded, and all were visited for an informal discussion (Appendix 2). Two chains offered enrolments for babies but had no children under 18 months old at the time of recruitment. One chain did have babies enrolled and following a meeting with the Senior Management team offered four settings to participate in the study. All four accommodated large baby units and were selected by the company due to the consistency of management, and OFSTED ratings of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' at their most recent inspection (DfE, 2022). This leads the sample to be homogeneous in nature as all settings follow the same policies and company ethos (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, it provides opportunity to consider how the characteristics of each setting, directed by senior management, influence the role of interactions.

I determined the sample of children by prioritising the youngest enrolled in each setting. This was deliberate to attend to research claims the communicative overtures of children under 9 months old are insufficiently documented in early childhood settings (Goouch and Powell, 2013a). Potential families were invited to participate following dialogue with the Manager with whom they were comfortable and familiar. Therefore, sampling was reliant upon families volunteering (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) which inevitably ran the risk of having no respondents. While families were keen to participate, and many did respond, to some degree this limited my control over children's ages. The oldest child recruited turned one year old in the first month of the study which will have bearing on the developmental trajectory documented. It should be noted all families accessing the settings privately funded their own fees. This leads the sample to intensely focus on representing the experiences of babies from high income families, aligning Moss and Cameron (2020, p.7) assertion that 'children from more advantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend private day-nurseries than their disadvantaged peers' and therefore will not be representative of all babies accessing nursery provision in England.

Staff were invited to participate in the study and conversations were had with individuals to reinforce they were within their rights not to participate if they were uncomfortable (BERA, 2018). It was important to make explicit that, despite management consenting to setting participation, individual educators should not be pressured or 'railroaded' into joining the study as this would go against their rights as informed, consenting participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.125). As it was, a small number of staff from each setting consented early on, and gradually more staff 'snowballed' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 220) into the study over time. One could speculate this was attributable to educators' initial suspicions of the researcher diminishing and increasingly being accepted as a trusted, supportive presence, not one of judgement (Rahiem *et al.* 2016).

4.8 Data Collection.

The following sections examine the process of data collection and evaluate the effectiveness of each data source.

4.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews with parents.

Semi Structured Interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992) were conducted with parents of each focus child and formed an integral source of evidence to answer research question three that seeks to understand how any observed patterns of communication may relate to patterns of interactions elicited within the home environment. Involving parents was viewed as an invaluable 'gift' (Limerick *et al.* 1996) to illustrate the child's earliest experiences within the home and obtain insight into the baby's wider communicative world. It was a crucial aspect to the methodology as research indicated there was a strong possibility that babies employ subtle communicative cues to engage educators that they have developed within the home (Vallotton, 2009). It was important to explore, the child's life outside the setting (Hochschild, 2009) to consider how 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez *et al.* 2005) may influence children's increasing social skills in the setting, whilst maintaining research boundaries. Without parental insight, observations of how children used their voices would take on a different, limited interpretation. Morally, as a researcher, I viewed the parents as valuable contributors to the research, knowing the child best and offer a vision of the child's character to provoke new insights into the observational data (Kvale, 1996).

It was not appropriate to observe each child in their home, this was not a comparative study. As such, an open-ended interview framework was designed to provide an outline in advance to promote 'uniqueness' (Silverman, 1993) and individuality of responses. Whilst the primary focus was to increase researcher knowledge of the child's identity within the home environment, I was keen to promote dialogic communication to share a socially dynamic moment (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Questions posed were categorised as 'experience and background' questions (Patton, 2002) to promote conversation about each baby individually. Consideration was given to a highly structured interview schedule but was rejected as it did not reflect the dialogic nature of the study. Adopting a semi-structured interview framework allowed for a social interaction to be 'co-constructed' (Walford, 2001, p. 90) between the interviewer and interviewee. Yin (2018, p. 118) views interviews to be 'guided conversations' that promote a fluid stream of inquiry (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). However, care was taken to maintain the characteristics of an interview framework, paying attention to vocabulary used, and ambiguity of questions (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Carrying out an interview with rigidity limits the organic nature of emerging conversation fostering a different researcher/participant power dynamic. Rather than being intrusive, a guided conversation

or semi-structured approach encourages opportunity to elicit, for example, how the child used behaviours to attract parent's attention in the home. As with all research instruments, a risk of researcher bias cannot be avoided in totality (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Being conscious of these potential subjectivities as a researcher is important to help balance research objectives (Rahiem *et al.* 2016; Ferraz *et al.* 2023). The interview framework was carefully constructed and agreed with the Ethics Committee at Roehampton University. This was piloted with colleagues and slight adaptations to the flow of questions were made. While interviews would present data that was variable, and individual to the family and child in question, this is seen as a strength, enhancing, and adding a meaningful dimension to the interpretivist nature of this study (Fleer, 2008a).

Interviews afford an openness and honesty to phenomena (Kvale, 1996), delving into the private life of each focus family, asking about events in the child's earliest months. Accessing potentially sensitive data requires careful management and trust between the researcher and parent (Guillemin *et al.* 2018). Trust was nurtured through adopting a natural, comfortable interview environment as well as building a rapport with parents before the interview took place. Care was taken to foster an environment which did not intimidate parents or take up too much of their time as interviews can be associated with a commitment of time (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) and power dynamic relations. Parents were offered two options; a face-to-face interview or telephone interview if every day constraints impeded meeting in person. This promoted a balance between the interviewer and interviewee, fostering a mutually agreed moment to develop interpersonal dialogue, recognising the essence of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1986). Mostly, parents suggested the nursery building, a familiar environment providing them with childcare whilst committing to the interview. Face-to-face interviews were preferable to promote human interaction (Silverman, 2005), a central tenet of this study. The relational context of an interview is often driven by reading the verbal and nonverbal cues of the interviewee and vice versa (Miller and Cannell, 1997). The interview process is mutually powerful and a shared 'dynamic social moment' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.274). Therefore, removing the opportunity to read moments of kinaesthetic dialogue can change the nature of the interview data.

Telephone interviews have a contentious body of literature, with many agreeing conducting interviews by telephone can undermine the 'salient conduct' of the social engagement of face-to-

face interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.275). Ary *et al.* (2002) see strengths in a telephone interview, proposing interviewees may disclose more information than they planned because of the pressure of an intimate face-to-face encounter being removed. During the research period, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in nurseries closing and families self-isolating to protect their health. As such, the interview schedule was altered for some families to participate via telephone interviews. Undoubtedly this altered the interview experience but afforded opportunity for research to continue short term.

From my perspective, I was approaching the interview as a mother on an epistemologically sensitive journey, privileged to information imparted by the participants (Gottlieb, 2012). As an ethnographic researcher, it was important to me to share a little of my life, to promote opportunity for natural dialogue and to help align the power between each party. Pelzang and Hutchinson (2018) suggest interviews should establish 'cultural integrity and trust' through an association between 'self and other' with the interviewee. Important to this, was to distinguish that any discussion was not a usual 'everyday conversation' and required continual review and reflection on my part. Sharing too much as a researcher can shift the power to the interviewee or lead to disclosure of personal information that participants are not comfortable to share (Kvale, 1996). The onus is on the interviewer to maintain a supportive rapport during interviews, by way of fostering dialogical and interactional dialogue where both partners are positioned equally and ethical standards are maintained (Wegerif and Mercer, 1997; Fler, 2008b).

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. There is some criticism as to the value of audio recorded interviews on the potential of losing depth to the context of data, typically recorded via video (Yin, 2018). To counter this, intonation to speech and pauses were noted in the transcription process by way of capturing a more authentic record of discussions with participant. Audio recording was an important step to record these conversations, enhancing accuracy and allowing the researcher to maintain interest and attention during conversation. All necessary consents were sought, and participants were required to confirm this on audio prior to the interview commencing. Interviews lasted no more than 1 hour and took place within the first four weeks of data gathering.

4.8.2 Observations.

Research questions one and two seek to document the patterns of communication babies use to stimulate interaction with adults in the nursery environment and the reactions they encounter in response to these overtures. Children's delicate and intricate ways of communicating are best viewed by adopting an observational inspired methodology, resonating Froebelian constructs that encourage close, subtle observation of children's personalities (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967). Children are not ours to objectify nor draw comparisons from. They are distinctive, individual and should be afforded the opportunity to be presented through respectful and authentic methodological lens. As such, the babies are positioned in this study as 'knowers', constructing meaning as they 'co-author' of their own observational narratives (Coyne and Carter, 2018; Quiñones and Cooper, 2021; Degotardi and Han, 2022). Several studies reviewed in Chapter Two highlight the advantages of embedding sustained, close observations of babies' interactions with educators in early childhood settings (Sumsion and Goodfellow, 2012; Degotardi and Han, 2022). This study seeks to build on those contributions offering observations of two kinds, written narrative form and video recorded to promote the generation of raw and 'live' material (Wellington, 2015) associated with babies' communication patterns. Connecting two methods of observation is theoretically driven and promotes validity and offers opportunity to meticulously document multiple aspects of reality, including the subtle cues of both babies and educators alike (Vallotton, 2009).

Initially, it was thought naturalistic observations, inspired by Adapted Tavistock Model of Infant Observation (ATOM) (Elfer, 2017) would be best suited to the project. Following piloting, it became evident that this style of detached observation was not compatible with the industrious environment of the baby room. The children I encountered were tactile and inquisitive, often inviting themselves to sit on my lap during observational periods. Some tried to entice me into their worlds holding out their hand to lead me over to where they were playing. Health and safety occurrences necessitated me moving from my observer role to participating in the setting, encounters that raised conflicting judgements for me. Early field notes detail an incident where I came across a baby eating a stone in the garden.

"Before I approached the child, I contemplated whether I should bring this to their attention and then my 'mother' role rang through, and I instantly couldn't restrain myself. I remind myself of the fact that I could not live with myself if the child started to choke, and I had

been bystander to the situation and not stepped in. Again, McMullen (2016) was sat on my shoulder, what are my responsibilities here? Did I overstep the mark? What was the alternative?"

(Field diary, 20/08/2019)

Navigating the fine line of balancing researcher orientation and remaining actively responsive to the everyday incidences arising in practice remained a necessity but weighed heavily in my conscious reflections of not overstepping or undermining the staff (Hedegaard, 2008b). I contemplate this delicate and complex undertaking in more depth in section 4.8.8. Based on these reflections, I determined that adopting an 'observer as participant' stance (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) would acknowledge my outsider position but offer flexibility to participate on the periphery of events including, singing along with rhymes, supporting staff if a health and safety incident occurred or conversing with children or staff who approached me.

Adopting an observer as participant role heightened the level of ethnographic positioning, enabling me to experience day to day occurrences whilst retaining a level of detachment where required. I chose not to involve myself heavily in the setting organisation or initiate interactions with others as I felt this would cross boundaries and increase confusion for the children. I determined that I required flexibility to act where needed, whilst remaining on the periphery of events to absorb the intense moments of social encounters. It was essential to retain a level of openness and approachability to support the children's familiarity with me entering their world and to foster trust with staff, a principal component of ethnographic research (Hammersley, 2013).

4.8.3 Video recorded observations.

The use of video recordings allowed for the 'unique' (Marshall and Rossman, 2016) unspoken voice of the children to be documented, recording the momentary subtleties of the affective interactions taking place with adults in the surrounding environments. This sought to strengthen and authenticate the richness of babies' varying voices (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007) to address research questions one, two and four.

Cultural historical theorisation actively promotes the use of video tools and provides a 'contemporary and powerful tool for studying young children' (Fleer, 2016, p. 31-32). Difficulties and criticism arise when interpretations of such visual methods are presented from the perspective

of the adult researcher, claiming to understand the 'voice' of the child. White (2011) calls for a multiple angled approach when designing methodologies, to consider all perspectives of social contexts the child is experiencing. Adopting 'multiple modes of communication' (White, 2011, p.79), not only adds to the richness of data generated but presents opportunity for the researcher to 'look and listen in' (Sumsion and Goodfellow, 2012, p. 315) to moments of social action between babies and educators. This increases potential to intensify 'productive dialogues' about infant experiences, whilst acknowledging the personal histories, cultural contexts and institutional circumstance encircling them.

Determining the most appropriate use of video recording equipment required reflection and deep consideration. I previously disregarded adopting body cams as it evoked my own anxieties concerning 'over stepping' and unnecessarily invading participant privacy (Aarsand and Forsberg, 2010). To me, physically placing a camera on a child raises moral and ethical challenges regarding the power researchers assume to have over children in plight to 'see' things from the child's perspective. I was, and remain, acutely aware of intruding the nursery and the babies' safe space. Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989, p. 276) suggest involving video research 'inevitably carries with it an unsavoury whiff of...intrusion, surveillance and expanding technologies of social control'. No matter the approach, the use of video recording within sensitive research requires caution and cannot avoid contention surrounding researcher neutrality (Robson, 2011).

Subsequently, I determined to remain in control of a small handheld camcorder to facilitate recording as unobtrusively as possible and afford me control to start and pause recording when I encountered a sense of intrusion (Johansson, 2011). Adopting the use of a smaller camcorder aided movement around the environment affording opportunity to be flexibly responsive to voice initiations and emerging interactional moments.

Accordingly, video recording every day encounters may alter the organic nature of interactions as participants 'act up' or become consciously 'reactive' to the camera presence (Luff and Heath, 2012). Reactivity was diluted as far as possible by factoring a 'settling in' period in each setting which offered opportunity for adults and children to acclimatise to the use of video in their social spaces (Jordan and Henderson, 1995), though I admit this cannot be totally divorced from the research process. Acquainting myself with setting practices, everyday 'norms' as well as the children's behaviour was primary in this settling in phase.

4.8.4 Refining the use of video recording.

Considerable discussion took place to determine how video footage would be documented and how the interpretation could remain meaningful for the child, educator and research aims and objectives. Central to the core aims of the study is how a baby's voice is expressed, heard, and acted upon by educators. Literature recognises the innate motivations of babies to interact and attract the attention of others (Reddy, 2015; Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen, 2020). This can be unpredictable and arise at any time. Combining written observations with moments of video footage felt reasonable to ensure educators and children were not subjected to ongoing filming which could cause undue stress and pressure in usually calm moments. Therefore, it was determined video recordings would be managed sensitively, and be responsive to the arbitrary nature of interactions, yet controlled ensuring they did not inundate settings, or data, with unnecessary footage.

Video recorded observations took place a maximum of twice weekly per child, recording routine situations which would last up to 15 minutes³ per activity. These routine incidences included:

- mealtimes
- bottle feeding
- nappy changing
- sleep settling routines
- transition times, e.g., moving into the garden.
- focussed adult/child time such as a story time over the research period
- Natural play encounters

The central focal point of each observation commenced with the child's voiced motive orientation characterised by engagement of bodily movements, facial expressions, and verbalisations. Any one-to-one interaction between baby and educators were also recorded as they occurred.

Recording ceased when interactions came to a natural end or when any of the following arose.

- either the adult or the child broke (physically moving) away from the dyad
- the child displayed prolonged disengagement cues (Gottesman, 1999). Although recording did continue for a period after this to monitor adult responses to these moments

³ Some flexibility was applied where interactions were sustained and intense. A total of three video clips extended beyond 15 minutes.

- the child became distressed and could not settle.

Recording was also halted if the situation became inappropriate. E.g., one incident saw a family on a show round of the nursery enter the room who were not aware of the study or given consent to being filmed the background.

4.8.5 Video Reflective Dialogues.

A crucial aspect of transforming video observations into purposeful data was to engage them as a stimulus for dialogue between the researcher and educators. To further strengthen the validity and plausibility of video extracts, Marshall and Rossman (2016), recommend sharing video clips with participants to offer their interpretations of encounters recorded. This aligned with the study's theoretical frame which advocates for greater professional self-awareness and reflection surrounding the moral accountability associated with working with young children (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967; Bakhtin, 1990). Furthermore, sources of literature exposed several issues concerning educator sense of agency and empowerment within their job role as well as the stressful working conditions staff may experience, whilst trying to maintain a sense of continuity and quality to the care practices (Taggart, 2011; Løvgrén, 2016). Staff contributions were valued and seen as vitally important to the emergence of the constructs of infant voicing. Educators became a 'participant as observer' (Whiting *et al.* 2016), offered the chance to remove themselves from the context of the setting and observe babies' voice expressions.

Extensive literature searches revealed several models of visual methods have been combined with participant reflection in research methodologies (Fleer and Ridgeway, 2014) that had potential strengthen this project. An established model developed by Hargreaves *et al.* (2003) called Video-stimulated reflective dialogue (VSRD) has a strong following. Used within a study exploring interactive teaching within literacy hours it aimed to promote pedagogical development through teacher reflections on practice and to deepen staff understanding of their practices (Hargreaves *et al.* 2003). The VSRD model was implemented to help teachers to deconstruct their practice and engage in the reconstruction with a supportive partner, thus increasing the opportunity to evolve practice. Within this model, participants were given the ownership to review video footage alone and return to a dialogue with researchers where they could raise reflective questions from a predetermined reflective dialogue framework. Its intention was to stimulate professional reflection

and increase critical awareness of their own teaching methods. Ostensibly, this model may have worked effectively to stimulate discussion in this study. However, I was concerned the model was not focussed enough to examine the intricacies of social encounters and in particular the relationships underpinning the conceptual framework, including the babies' own contributions. In addition, leaving educators to independently review footage without any specific training or guidance may be challenging and emotive for them, particularly where levels of training and understanding of children's development and reflexivity of their own behaviours may be limited.

Further investigation uncovered a therapeutic intervention method called Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) (Kennedy, Landor, and Todd, 2011). This model promotes reflection of the attuned patterns of interaction and responses that may emerge during the parent-child 'communicative dance' (Trevarthen, 1979) within natural environments, usually the home. Essential to the model is parents' role in reviewing the footage, with a guide to identify positive moments of interaction in a bid to make long term change in their behaviours. The VIG model appeared to complement my vision of how to document the subtle 'moments of vitality' (Stern, 2002) that may occur between educator and baby. Furthermore, I was struck at how the VIG model aims to empower and celebrate positive moments between adult and child, no matter how small. This model had potential to provide a unique opportunity for educators to step out of the frame and gain a 'realistic perception of their role' (Fukkink and Tavecchio, 2010, p.165; Jilink *et al.* 2018) which could lead to increased self-efficacy and agency in staff. This was integral to my study and aligned early years sector discourses highlighting baby room workforce sense of disempowerment and feeling undervalued (Manning-Morton, 2006). Moreover, in VIG, the child remains an equal partner throughout the process, co-constructing intersubjective moments, reinforcing the centrality of the child's voice in this study.

4.8.6 Challenges in adopting Video Interaction Guidance.

I enrolled onto the Introductory training for VIG at the Tavistock Clinic in January 2019 and it became evident the model would not support the research methodology in the way I hoped. In addition to the lengthy mandatory training programme (up to 18 months with six clients) before a VIG trainer could practice independently, the underlying aim of VIG was to seek to modify behaviours (Kennedy *et al.* 2011). With its origins in therapeutic notions, VIG was not designed as

a research method but strives to change parent-child relationships, contrasting with the crucial role of research which is to uncover and enable new understanding and knowledge (McNaughton *et al.* 2010). Traditionally, VIG requires the therapist, or in this case, researcher, to preselect video extracts or stills to stimulate dialogue with the staff member (Kennedy, *et al.* 2011). This raised an issue of transparency and challenged the assumptions of researcher positionality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In addition, selecting the clips would affect the naturalistic nature of research, altering its reliability and validity leading to 'transcriber selectivity' (Kvale, 1996, p. 163).

4.8.7 A reconceptualised model - Video Interaction Dialogue.

Following extensive literature searches that accentuated the incompatibility of established video reflective models to this study, I felt there was space to reconceptualise aspects of VIG (Kennedy *et al.*, 2011) to align with tenets of my study. Fler and Veresov (2018, p. 240) suggest that there are times in research when, 'new problems may also create the need for new research tools'. This study aimed to offer a unique and fresh perspective on the contributions babies make in baby room provision and sought to find strategies to engage educators in this process. Whilst there are established models designed to facilitate work-based discussion concerning the emotional dimensions of work with young children (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Elfer, 2012), without engaging the use of visual tools, I felt strongly that such models would not offer scope to consider the babies' own contributions nor provide educators individual space to reflect deeply on the broader institutional and political contexts affecting their work with babies (Guard, 2023).

Video Interaction Dialogue (Guard, 2023) was inspired by VIG philosophy (Kennedy *et al.* 2011) and retains some of its foundational strands but makes a purposeful shift away from a therapeutic lens, in a bid to focus on professional encounters whilst still acknowledging the emotional dimensions associated with fostering close, responsive interactions with babies (Elfer, 2012).



Fig 4.1 Video Interaction Dialogue Themes (Guard, 2023)

Three core themes act as a frame to shape the VID process and are reinforced by three principles model which embody the relational process shared between the researcher and educator. At the heart of the process is dialogic equality and openness between the researcher and participant, underpinning the dialogic characteristics familiar in educator: baby interactions. VID aimed to empower and generate knowledge through co-constructed dialogue to generate greater understanding of babies' voice patterning (Whiting *et al.* 2016). Involving educators in the process afforded opportunity to see what is usually unseen during engagements with babies and promotes opportunity to become a 'reflective insider' as part of the ethnographic process (Bancroft *et al.* 2014).

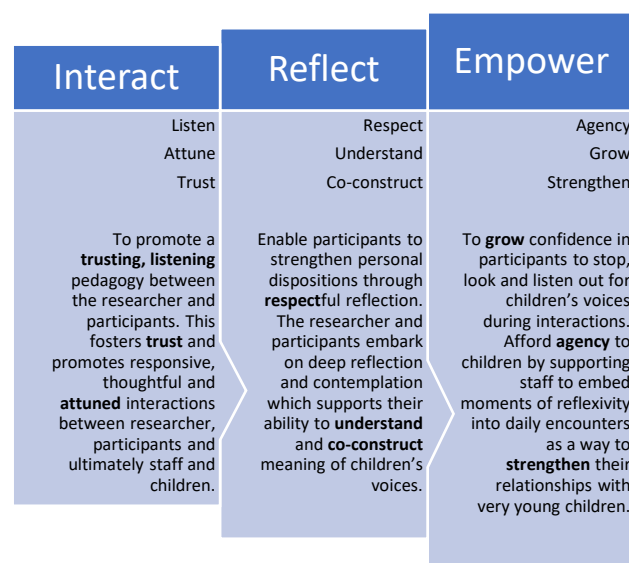


Fig 4.2 Principles of VID (Guard, 2023)

Video Interaction Dialogue was intentionally characterised by the reflections of individual educators, viewing only footage involving themselves and focus children. Although there is a rich collection of research advocating for parent involvement during video reflections in research (Li, 2014; Lawrence *et al.* 2015, Lawrence, 2019), with the aim to reinforce trust between professionals and families, I felt strongly that this process should remain between the researcher and educators. The reasons for this were rooted in evidence relating to educator positioning in society as 'undervalued' and lacking professional status (Taggart, 2011, Harwood *et al.* 2012) and the fragility of parent/professional partnership (Brooker, 2010). Whilst a collective dialogic approach between educator, parent and researcher may have enhanced conceptualisation of voice initiations, the prospect of parents viewing video clips where baby and educator intentions

were in conflict from a deficit position, may have resulted in a problematic dialogue where trust and confidence in the quality of care for their child may have been interrogated and relationships with the individual educator or setting frayed rather than strengthening parent/setting relationships. Video Interaction Dialogue aligns to VIG principles that it is fundamentally a strength-based process, to grow confidence and empower, thus risking entangling parent opinion of practices with the emotional dimensions of work with babies needed to remain separate for this study.

To ensure a strength-based process from the outset, the first step in early analysis was to review video footage in advance of discussions with educators. In addition to verifying content and quality, this intentional phase ensured video footage was not viewed in its 'raw' format by educators. This was important to avoid educators feeling judgement or viewing weakness in their practice and was a distinct step in the VID process, distinguishing it from other models such as VSRD (Hargreaves *et al.* 2003). The intention to grow confidence and empower educators to take an active role in the analysis process was at VID's core (Kennedy and Underdown, 2018) and was facilitated through careful planning by the researcher. Micro sections of video showcasing momentary intersubjective encounters were selected by the researcher as an initial stimulus for reflective dialogue.

Integral to how this model differentiates itself from Video Interaction Guidance (Kennedy *et al.* 2011) is in the way staff were invited to contribute to viewing and selecting clips for dialogue, leading towards a collaborative analysis and 'situated practice interpretation' (Hedegaard, 2008a, p. 58). In addition, it encouraged a balance in power dynamics (Whiting *et al.* 2016, p.330) and moved participants on from feeling the process is 'invasive'. Tobin, Mantovani and Bove (2010) state video clips alone are not data sources, data emerges because of dialogue shared about the footage. Making 'meaningful insights' (Hedegaard, 2008a, p.44) is only achieved through the researcher finding balance between interactions and emerging discussions with participants. In this case, prompts were devised to stimulate and guide emerging discussion encouraging meaningful moments of discussion. The design was purposeful, to facilitate co-construction of meaning and promote agency in educators, stimulating a confidence to 'think outside the box' and allow deeper meaning and new concepts to emerge. Care was taken every step of the way to ensure the process foregrounded babies' contributions initially before progressing towards disentangling educator position on the wider nursery culture (research question five). The VID

process has been further explained in Guard (2023) in which I attend to the process and evaluation in more detail.

4.8.8 Field diaries and reflexivity.

Field diaries are seen as a central component of ethnographic research, adding depth and richness to data collection providing opportunity for the researcher to engage reflexively with data collection experience (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011). Field diaries 'serve many functions' and are encouraged in qualitative research as they enhance data cultivating a rich context for analysis (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017, p. 381). In this study, the inclusion of a field diary was essential to document the relational and subjective nature of research with young children (Ferraz *et al.* 2023). Their inclusion helped to promote a reflexive approach, empowering me to reflect consciously on my presence, the role of power and possible influence on participants and data generation (Bakhtin, 1984; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Ferraz *et al.* 2023). Further, it assisted with contextualising the entire social research situation, resonating with the multiple lens promoted within a cultural historical approach (Hedegaard, 2008a).

Finding space to reflect on my purpose and position as a researcher started as a transient process which graduated into more purposeful reflections within field diaries and journals each day. Field diaries promote 'practice of continuous, intentional and systematic self-introspection' (Brannick and Coghlan 2007, p. 144). They are consistent with expectations of an ethnographically inspired methodology and are thought to enhance the quality of qualitative research practice and give visibility to the subjectivities associated with emotional dimensions of research (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013; Ferraz *et al.* 2023). Aside from observational data, I noted information such as conversations with staff, and my own personal thoughts and 'jottings' (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017, p.381). These transcripts provide rich descriptions of the social encounters, that may have been unwittingly missed in formalised observations (Punch, 2013). This adds rigour and credibility to the research and contributes to 'destigmatising the emotional and personal struggles of fieldwork' (Punch, 2010, p.87) as well as considering my own affective response to situations faced.

...researchers are not flies on the wall and absent from the research context, nor are they play partners or members of the institution being researched; rather the researcher always holds the position of a researcher and is always in this particular role.

(Edwards, Fleer and Bottcher, 2019, p.9)

Edwards, Fleer and Bottcher, (2019) highlight how it is naïve to contend a researcher is divorced from the research process. Responsibility falls to the researcher to maintain a state of 'critical awareness of their own subjectivity and influence in the research process' (Rouse, 2018, p.145). Field diaries were essential throughout this study to co-construct meaning and remain critically aware of my own ascribed positioning and effect on emergent interpretation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Reflexivity necessitates a critically reflective process, which from the outset, is a continuous process built into the research design through field diaries (Johansson and White, 2011). Morrow (2005) contends that qualitative research studies that fail to embrace the constructs of reflexivity leave themselves open to criticism and lack in rigor and credibility. Therefore, drawing from cultural historical principles that affirms researcher reflexivity is essential to validating the research process adds authenticity and strengthens the ethnographic approach (Hammersley, 2013).

Fieldwork experiences seeped into every aspect of my life, from driving home from research sites to my dreams at night. Coffey (1999) attests field work to be a deeply embodied process which reflects the corporeal reactions I still have revisiting some of the data from this project. Hedegaard (cited in Edwards, Fleer and Bottcher, 2019) refers to the researcher as an 'exploring, questing and questioning' and I would add 'dreaming, deliberating and dissecting' to those characteristics. One would argue they epitomise the subjectivity of the research process, something one tries to reduce in the research process to remain 'neutral' (Reed and Towers, 2023). I contend, these are vital tenets of the reflexive processing required to 'identify the recurrent demands on the practices' (Edwards, *et al.* 2019) encountered in research sites with children. The 'doubleness of the researcher' combines 'individual sense making' with 'analyses of the research process' (Hedegaard, 2008b; Edwards *et al.* 2019, p.9). This remained an implicit part a wholeness research approach in parallel with becoming answerable for our own role in the research process (Bakhtin, 1984; 1990). Further, Coffey (1999) affirms examining the intimate, emotiveness of fieldwork and its influence over the private self, significant others and the research field strengthens our understanding of the process of fieldwork. Reflection, and reconstruction of the self, our personal and professional identities, occurs during and after fieldwork and this process should be embraced and openly presented as a feature of analysis (Coffey, 1999).

Fundamentally, reflexivity is seen as a crucial step to increasing the 'confirmability' (Morrow, 2005) of a qualitative study. It aligns with expectations set out by Guba and Lincoln (1985) who assert qualitative research should concern itself with transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability to increase its validity and rigor in the eyes of scientific researchers. Morrow (2005) expands deeming 'trustworthiness' as an essential goal of qualitative study. That is, any emerging data is grounded in contextual detail, explicating data sets from the perspectives of participants as well as through the researcher's eyes. Findings should represent the situation being researched rather than the researcher's own bias and beliefs. Integrity of any findings lies in the collaborative, multifaceted strands of 'togetherness' which sees the researcher firmly interconnected with the research process, which ultimately exudes 'goodness' (Morrow and Smith, 2000) in any new meanings constructed.

4.9 Data analysis procedures.

A strength of adopting a theoretical framework with roots in cultural history theory is the way in which it places emphasis on the renewal and expansion of knowledge (Fleer and Ridgeway, 2014), unlike alternative methodologies, including those rooted in positivism, which limit the growth of new ways of thinking. Patterns of communication, behaviours, idiosyncratic routines, and reflective dialogue were central to any emerging theoretical paradigm with coding used to categorise and conceptualise data allowing for a detailed theoretical framework grounded in data to evolve over time (Patton, 2002). Data analysis processes derive two theoretical origins: Cultural historical theory and Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995). While it is unusual to see traditional grounded theory combined with alternative theoretical concepts, Charmaz, (2006) remodelled it as a flexible approach, loosening it from its traditional inception fostering a contemporary and adaptable interpretation. Lee and Fielding (1992) assert constructivist grounded theory can mean different things to different researchers, therefore it can be applied to reinforce alternative theoretical assumptions, encouraging careful data interpretation and innovative discovery, and strengthening the research process. Merging two types of analysis encourages data collection and analysis to progress simultaneously, as each have potential to inform the other (Hedegaard, 2008a).

4.9.1 Applying a cultural historical perspective to data analysis.

Hedegaard (2008a; 2012) has written comprehensively about analysis within a cultural historical framework and determines the '*planes of analysis*' are interrelated and can be different entry points for researchers looking to analyse data.

Entity	Process	Dynamic
Society	Political economy	Societal needs/conditions
Institution	Practice	Values/motives/objectives
Activity setting	Activity/situation (with potential for individual learning)	Motivation/demands
Person (Baby)	Actions (learning arising from individual engagement with activity)	Motive/intentions

Figure 4.3. Planes of analysis -Hedegaard (2012, p. 19)

Entity	Process	Dynamic
Society	Political economy	Societal needs/conditions
Institution	Practice	Values/motives/objectives
Activity setting	Activity/situation (with potential for individual learning)	Motivation/demands
Person (Baby)	Actions (VOICE-use of body/expression/vocalisation)	Motive/intentions

Figure. 4.4. Adapted Planes of analysis for this study - adapted from Hedegaard (2012, p. 19)

Hedegaard's (2012) interpretative analysis guides researchers to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all the planes, reading horizontally to define an entry point and vertically to determine the interrelationship between each analytical plane (Edwards *et al.* 2019). I have highlighted the entry point for this study (baby) on Figure 4.4 and the pathway across the planes which supports the interpretation and analysis process. The baby's voice actions or 'motive orientations' (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2012) were the entry point for analysis, which fed into

examination of other planes, such as educator activity and institutional practices to add depth and validity to voice intentions.

Crucial to framing analysis in this study is to examine the relationships between the child, environment, and individuals they associate and the agency they (the child) exhibit, hence the rationale for observing the context of interactions in alignment with the individual baby. Hedegaard (2008b) originated a dialectical-interactive analytical process laying out several steps requiring researchers to embark on a deep level of analysis of data via a three staged protocol analysis frame.

1. Common - Sense Interpretation
2. Situated Practice Interpretation
3. Thematic Interpretation

(Adapted from Hedegaard and Fler, 2008)

These three phases (Fig 4.4) guide interpretation of data and drive forward a deep level of analysis which is explained comprehensively in Chapter Five.

4.9.2 Applying Constructivist Grounded Theory to data analysis.

Constructivist grounded theory, similarly, to cultural historical theory relates to constructing theory in rich, dynamic social situations (Porter, 2003), with the aim of constructing new theories and meaning (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010). Constructivist grounded theory is now a widely applied theoretical framework for many qualitative researchers (Bryant and Charmaz, 2010) due to its systematic, inductive approach and aim to build new theories. Constructivist grounded theory remains subject to criticism from traditional positivist approaches which commence data collection with a pre-existing theory to 'test' (Mills, Bonner, and Francis, 2006). Nonetheless, it was adopted in this study for the primary intention that grounded theory '*starts with data which are then analysed and reviewed to enable the theory to be generated from them. It is rooted in the data and little else*' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 714).

A constructivist approach still honours the receptive nature of grounded theory but promotes researchers to consider the nature of participants' narratives in the context in which they are discovered, considering their history, cultural and individuality (Charmaz, 2006). These echoes

principles of cultural historical theory which advocate looking at the 'reciprocal relationship between culture and human interaction' (Seaman, 2008, p. 5). Seaman poses a combination of both approaches opens greater 'context-analytic possibilities' (2008, p.4), 'broadening the cultural and historical context of the study' while reminding the researcher of their responsibility for, and close awareness with the data. It promotes an attitude of letting the 'data speak for themselves' rather than preconceived ideas of institutional history or personal experiences obscuring analysis.

Traditionally constructivist grounded theory calls on researchers to remain neutral and objective to approaches to research, removing the needs to conduct literature reviews prior to fieldwork in a bid to diminish any corruption of data and to what really exists (Glaser, 2002). This is difficult to achieve in any research context, considering the wealth of knowledge accessible, particularly in relation to young children's development. Broido and Manning (2002) note how difficult it is for researchers to remain entirely independent of prior assumptions. Hedegaard and Fler (2008) counter this argument setting out the essential contributions' researchers can offer to research processes. Moreover, examining any data associated with the voices of babies necessitates the researcher to 'create space' to afford deeper understanding of data analysis procedures as they unfold (Elwick *et al.* 2014a).

Conducting observations for up to six months in settings resulted in a large quantity of rich qualitative data. Settings were visited one to two days a week, stipulated by the children's attendance patterns. Analysis of observations, writing up field diary notes and surveying video footage took place on weekly basis. Combining two data analysis approaches assisted with managing the potential overload of qualitative data. Grounded theory encouraged inductive, flexible analysis of data whilst retaining transparency and richness (Glaser, 2002) whilst Hedegaard's research protocol analysis promoted immediate interpretation via common-sense interpretation by combining researcher notes with the context surrounding the activity setting (Hedegaard, 2008b). The study is concerned with validating the experiences of young children, and uniting both concepts involved, in part, abandoning known concepts to allow for new understanding to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). The complexities involved in analysing and reviewing data sets required triangulation across the multiple methods which aided seeing things from 'shared frame of reference' (Urwin and Sternberg, 2012) adding rigour and strengthening the validity of any emerging theoretical concepts.

4.10 Ethical considerations.

The ethical considerations associated with including babies in research are complex. Sections 4.2, 4.8.8, and 4.10.2 address some of the issues related to the ethical challenges encountered across this study. This section explicitly focusses on general issues which arise from designing research with young children, addressing distinct ethical challenges relevant to this study.

This project is methodologically unique in the way it proposes to combine naturalistic observation and Video Interaction Dialogue to capture what lies 'beneath the surface' of everyday life in a baby room (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009) and generate data. Effort to represent children's voices in research is a delicate and complex undertaking (White, 2011) and should begin with 'a principled sensitivity to the rights of others' (Bulmer, 1982, p. 810). McNaughton, *et al.* (2010) suggest participants in interpretivist studies can become vulnerable and need to be respected and protected from harm. Involving children in data generation, emphasises their vulnerability and increases the need for strict and transparent ethical processes which are responsive to cultural norms (Aarsand and Forsberg, 2010).

The decisions made in this study are underpinned by the British Education Research Association's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) and The University of Roehampton's Ethic Guidelines (2019). Primarily, as a researcher, I operate with an 'ethic of respect for others' (BERA, 2018, p. 6), retaining integrity and privacy of those involved, including myself. Ethical approval from the University of Roehampton's Ethics and Research Integrity committee was granted following a rigorous process (Appendix 3).

Consent for all adult participants was obtained following:

- an informed discussion with the researcher
- distribution of a Plain Language Statement to explore a clear overview of research aims and objectives (Appendix 4).
- invitation to sign a consent form which permit individuals to participate and fully informed as to how to withdraw their contribution to the research if required (Appendix 5).
- Parents of children were asked to sign on the behalf of their children and supplied with the same information above

- An additional consent form was used to obtain explicit permission for the inclusion and use of images and video recordings. (Appendix 9)
- A debrief form was distributed to all adult participants following field work completion (Appendix 6-8)

4.10.1 Consent for children.

Legal consent for infant participants was sought via their parent/legal guardian, adhering to the outline presented above. Despite their age, babies are still valued and respected participants who have the right to consent to partaking in any research (BERA, 2018). While legal protocols in the UK require researchers to obtain consent from legal guardians to conduct research 'on' children (BERA, 2018; Huser, Dockett, and Perry, 2022), upholding babies' 'assent' is an integral and ongoing part of the research process which respects the child's own right to participate in research (Cocks, 2006). A significant feature of researching alongside minors is for the researcher to take on responsibility for continuous monitoring the wellbeing and assent of the children involved, in addition to informed consent. Tuning into babies' idiosyncratic behaviours, gives clues to their continuous assent affirming their rights as research participants in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989; Flewitt, 2005).

The following indicators were used to make ongoing, informed judgements when conducting observations:

- Behaviour
- Reactions
- Emotional expressions

To capture momentary interactions elicited by the baby or motivated by the adult required careful examination. Being alert to moments where the baby tired of interaction and disengaged from the adult or situation was important, particularly during the piloting phase to differentiate if the child was becoming tired of being filmed or from the interaction itself. I liaised openly with educators to determine the difference between disengagement from interaction or withdrawal from the research process. Disengagement cues such as withdrawal, crying and turning away were noted.

Additionally, mobile infants crawled away from the interaction, or protested in ways such as

refusing to respond to adult engagement during observations were all noted as cues to end recording. Prolonged, or successive staring at the observer followed by turning toward familiar adults in the room or gaze aversion were regarded as cues that the baby was uncomfortable with filming or the intensity of observation. This list is not exhaustive and was differentiated for each child but provided indicators to children's dissent and avoid any ambiguity during fieldwork (Huser, Dockett, and Perry, 2022).

The pilot study explored individual children's reactions more in depth. For example, one focus child, Yolanda conveyed her unease during an early filming session when I had arranged to film a nappy change. The nappy area in the room was in a smaller, adjacent room and I followed the educator and Yolanda in with the video camera. Yolanda became distressed and glanced back and forth between the camera and educator. It was a very clear indicator she was not comfortable in that situation, so filming ceased immediately. As a researcher, I had overstepped the mark and become 'intrusive' (Pink, 2006) during a usually calm and intimate moment. The educator and I shared dialogue afterwards and she shared her surprise at how distressed Yolanda had become during a time in which she usually was playful and chatty. From my researcher perspective, this was an invaluable lesson in children's assent and respecting their privacy whilst navigating the 'hyphen' and 'ethical' spaces (Whiting *et al.* 2016, p. 322; Huser, Dockett and Perry, 2022, p. 58) of researcher interplay and reality. Fostering this open dialogue between myself and the staff team mediated an ongoing, transparent process which upheld sensitivity and integrity throughout the project.

4.10.2 Ethical dilemmas.

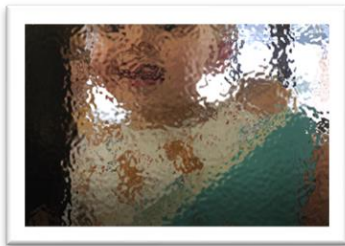
The trajectory of this study encountered several ongoing ethical challenges that could not be forecast during the ethical application process, some have been alluded to in preceding sections. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) requires researchers to remain sensitive to potential ethical issues that arise during the research process and hold a moral accountability beyond data being captured (Johansson, 2011). From the outset I was acutely aware of my presence in the field and worked hard to adopt an inconspicuous existence. Initially I was conscious about adding to the number of adults moving around the room and noted in my field diaries my sense of feeling 'too big' sitting on the floor, attracting unnecessary attention as a novel entity. All the children remained fascinated by my presence and distracted by my equipment

throughout the research period, at no point did their fascination waver. With this came challenges including older children crawling onto my lap, seeking to draw in my notebook (Figure. 4.5) and moving in front of the camera and attempting to hold the camera to see their friends (Figure. 4.6). Not only did this raise issues around filming consent but at times, staff



Fig. 4.5. Scribbled research notebook

Fig. 4.6. Nonparticipant child asking me to read a book.



seemed candidly frustrated with the

children's distraction from normal everyday practices. To counter this, the older children were sourced cameras from the preschool room and paper and crayons to note take alongside me. Balancing the relational demands associated with researching in a 'live' environment is seen to be essential in a cultural historical

approach (Hedegaard, 2008a; Fler, 2014). The researcher will always be heavily intertwined in the research context, balancing responsibilities to the research objectives and unfolding relationships with participants and others (Hedegaard, 2008b, p. 204). Over time, I sensed the children saw me as part of the nursery team, but different in the way I remained situated at their level, physically close, but emotionally distant and somehow removed from their habitual routines. Dialectically shifting between interactions and retaining a sense of distance with the children was challenging for me and possibly confusing for them (Hedegaard, 2008b). My role brought a sense of ambiguity, and constantly evolved in response to situations encountered. I wanted to communicate a friendly and responsive position but endeavoured to remain detached from day-to-day events. I was also intensely conscious that sustained interactions with the children may bring painful detachments when the research period ended, potentially adding to their emotional confusion. In the early days of field work there was little by the way of animation in educators' faces and limited physical contact with babies outside of moving them from place to place. I reflected in my field diary that perhaps the babies were attracted to me as I afforded animation and smiles and remained rooted on the floor.

Open plan rooms made it difficult for me to keep distance and typically, with one camera and excessive background noise necessitated the need for me to be relatively close to unfolding interactions to authentically capture dialogue. Sensitive navigation of the research aims coupled with

deep immersion in intense moments of communication arose a profound emotional journey for me shifting between absorption into the babies' moments of emotionality and a sense of deficiency at my powerlessness to 'step up' and support institutional demands. Navigating this 'inner conflict' of affective and research dimensions was exhausting (Delari Jr. 2011; Hedegaard, 2012). Quiñones (2014) suggests emotions are part of the affective path researchers circumnavigate and Fler (2014, p. 27) affirms, stating the 'emotional energy' arising research with young children is heightened through the video lens. Deeply ethical dimensions I encountered arising from witnessing the challenges of everyday experiences for babies and educators in settings challenged me immensely. According to Ferraz *et al.* (2023, p. 4) these contradicting dimensions 'provokes a complex creative activity based on the relationships formed between the researchers and the research field...and is neither the starting point nor the end of the investigation, but it permeates the entire research process'.

4.11 Storage of data.

Throughout data generation and analysis, every effort was made to maintain the anonymity of all participants and settings featured in the study, adhering to expected BERA (2018) and University of Roehampton Data Protection and storage guidance. Pseudonyms for all settings and participants were applied from the point of first meeting. Any field notes made in notebooks, diaries or word-processed documents were recorded as pseudonyms or coded from the outset. This safeguarded the personal data of all participants from the outset.

The use of visual methods complicates maintaining anonymity and additional permissions were sought to ensure participant consent to store and handle this data. Embedding the use of visual methods adds value and richness to the study, resulting in a detailed and authentic image of situations observed (White, 2020). However, the individuals' involved were visually identifiable. To manage this, additional layers of informed consent were sought affirming if parents and educators agreed for images to be used in the thesis and any future publications or conference materials. Electronic data was encrypted and stored in password protected system and only accessed by the researcher. Options were available for images to be partially or fully pixelated to protect identities as far as possible. Any data stored on personal devices, such as laptops, was also encrypted, and password protected as per the University's data storage policy. The video camera was stored in a

lockable box, and footage downloaded and encrypted each day. No footage was shared via email or on the Internet to minimise the chances of the data being distributed outside the research project. Where I presented at international conferences, images were either pixelated or the audience were asked not to take photographs of my presentation.

Company logos on staff uniform were pixelated in all images utilised and participants were requested to complete an additional consent form to confirm if they were happy for images and no traceable features to be included in any documents (Appendix 9). To manage the expectations of adult participants featured on camera, I worked with them to review the footage which sought to alleviate any concerns regarding how the footage is used. Hard copies of raw data such as transcribed interview scripts, written observations and discussion notes from reflective dialogues were also stored in a lockable unit and encrypted when stored electronically.

4.12 Summary of the chapter.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview and rationale for the study's methodological design. It has made illustrated how the methodology has been informed theoretically and determined the study context and systematic research design. The chapter has considered the challenges associated with determining a sound research design and contemplated the intricate processes required to implement a study of this kind. I have interrogated my position as researcher, and reviewed the advantages of adopting a qualitative ethnographic design to examine the role babies' voices have within the interactions occurring in nursery provision. The complex ethical implications of this project have been considered and reference has been made to the relevant ethical codes of practice.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis - Making sense of the data.

5.1 Introduction.

This chapter justifies how I worked through the data sets to bring sense and meaning to the voices of babies attending nursery settings and draw out broader cultural and social influences shaping voice expression. The chapter does not intend to convey findings emerging from data sets; these will be presented in subsequent Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The comprehensive nature and enormity of text emerging from the analysis process deemed it problematic to include examples within the scope of this chapter. Appendices 13-18 present working examples of the analysis process and reference is made to them across the chapter.

Chapters Two and Three considered how documenting the voices of children, particularly those who are very young, must acknowledge the space, time and culture in which voice is situated (Johansson, 2011, p.1). Specific to the methodological approach, cultural historical theory concerns itself with examining the process of development and the conditions it materialises (Fleer and Veresov, 2018). As such, data generation took account of the 'social environment not just as a factor of, but as a 'source of' voice' (Fleer and Veresov, 2014, p. 232). Central to this approach was to examine the social position of each baby and bring together the voices of those close to the child to learn more about how the baby responds and exhibits their voice in different environments. This was achieved by incorporating parents' accounts of their child's voice via semi structured interviews and inviting those who work closely with the child in the setting to take part in a series of reflective dialogue opportunities where visual data were reviewed with the researcher. Combining other voices promoted a multiplicity of voice (Bakhtin, 1986), multivoicedness (Hedegaard, 2008a) and opportunities to create a shared dialogic space with others who knew the baby best. The methodological approach, rooted in cultural historical theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Hedegaard, 2008a) nestled 'theoretical tools' (Veresov, 2014), within a conceptual system which facilitated voice to be examined within the social space it materialises, the baby room. Data gathering tools were designed to examine the hidden elements of voice and to scrutinise the dynamic relation between the child's voice, the adults, and the social environment in which it is constructed.

Across the field work, five research tools generated data:

1. Parent Interviews
2. Written observations focussing on the baby and staff members in the setting.
3. Visual Data – video recorded observations of the baby and staff members in the setting.
4. Video interaction Dialogues between staff members and the researcher
5. Researcher Field work diary.

5.2 The Process of Analysis.

The study aligns characteristics from Hedegaard's wholeness approach (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2009), examining voice in the context of *how* it is positioned within the social context from which it emerges. It cannot be understood without consideration of their family life, the nursery context, and societal and political expectations (Edwards, *et al.* 2019). Employing Hedegaard's (2008b) planes of analysis, the babies' patterns of voice acted as an entry point for analysis which led into interrogation of the dynamic relationship between voice and the demands of the social environment. Pivotal was deep analysis across the planes which followed Hedegaard's (2008) three staged protocol analysis frame.

1. Common - Sense Interpretation
2. Situated Practice Interpretation
3. Thematic Interpretation

(Adapted from Hedegaard, 2008a)

Common-sense interpretation was a starting point for observational analysis which led dialectically through the other stages (further details below). This promoted systematic interpretation from multiple perspectives and a gradual unravelling and (re)construction of each child's voicing encounters in relation to the adults they encounter and the wider social space of the nursery.

It is important to highlight all data sets were interpreted via a spiralled or staged process (Fleer, 2014), working to the same principles but adopting a slightly different approach due to the amount of data generated each week and the distinct data collection methods employed. Spirals were applied with slight variations to individual data sets, but the approach remained systematic and dialectical to maintain reliability of analysis and examine the interplay across emergent findings.

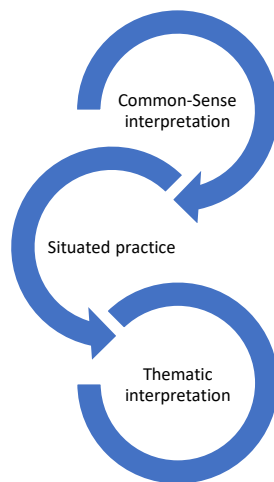


Fig. 5.1 Spirals of Hedegaard's research protocol analysis.

Other data sets warranted a slightly different approach (parent and educator transcripts), drawing from Charmaz's (2006; 2014) Grounded Theory model to apply initial and focussed coding. This afforded interpretation across data to be a concurrent and iterative process which stimulated a relationship and opportunity to 'fuse together' data and construct a reality of the voice of babies and its social positioning (Charmaz, 2006).

Following initial data analysis on individual data tools, all five data sources were then connected using data analysis frameworks emerging from Hedegaard's (2009; 2020) Cultural Historical Wholeness approach supported by Charmaz's (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory. The process of drawing meaning from data is a messy and non-linear undertaking (Li, 2014), consequently, examining the interplay between emergent findings from multiple perspectives was imperative to consider the implications for the personal, institutional, and societal lens and complex realities of babies' voice positioning (Hedegaard, 2009). Moreover, as this project examines a relatively original area of study, I wanted to promote newer conceptualisations of voice and the cultural tenets of nursery provision to emerge holistically, yet grounded in data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017) and retaining roots in the theoretical characteristics of this study's methodological approach.

Each of the subsequent sections provide a summary of how each research source was analysed individually and includes extensive extracts to illustrate the process of data interpretation and analysis. The extracts included and referred to in the appendices are a representation taken from

across the six children involved in the study to show how each data source progressed through the data interpretation and analysis stages.

5.3 Parent interviews.

From the outset, the aim of parent interviews was to learn more about the baby in the home environment. Dialogue focussed on the baby's history and sought to talk with and listen to the parents about the way in which interactions in the home may have shaped the baby's voice in the nursery environment. Understanding the baby within the context of home required a framework of questions (Appendix 10) to help guide the semi structured interviews to frame the child historically within the context of the study and to consider how their voice orientation may emerge from the home environment.

Interviews took place either in the nursery environment or on the telephone. Hviid (in Hedegaard, 2008a, p.140) positions interviews as a process comprising '*more than questions and answers*' which offer opportunity to share and construct knowledge through dialogue. To me it was crucial the interview progressed as a dialogue, replicating the theoretically grounded dialogic process of co-construction repeated throughout all stages of this study (Hviid, cited in Hedegaard and Fleer, 2008; Bakhtin 1986). There were initial challenges securing contact details for parents from the nursery settings, particularly at the second field site. Nevertheless, once contact had been made, a mutually agreeable time was diarised for the interview to take place. It was planned for all interviews to take place in person, but logistical challenges to meet with parents at the nursery resulted in four interviews taking place on the telephone. The interview process took between 40 to 60 minutes depending on the location (face to face promoted longer dialogue whilst telephone interviews were quicker). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interview. In many ways the information shared regarding the baby's presentation of voice was interpreted immediately as this fed into the responsive nature of the interview dialogue.

Audio recordings were listened to in full prior to transcription and the notes documented during the interview and personal reflections after were also reviewed. Descriptive material including prolonged pauses, intonation and speech timbre were noted to aid deeper meaning beyond the text. Transcribing verbatim was a lengthy process and resulted in transcripts ranging from 3000-

5000 words. Once complete, transcripts were read several times holistically before moving through a systematic line-by-line interpretation. Moving iteratively between holistic immersion and methodical annotation encompassed the interactional process required in cultural historical methodological approach (Fleer, 2008a). Sifting through conversational dialogue to extract information about the baby's character, home situation and emerging tenets of voice was a generative process which informed the observational approach. A process of making sense of the data (Charmaz, 2014) followed which involved reading through the transcripts and reducing the dialogue down to create one single narrative for each parent/child. I found this useful to help speed up the process of interpretation, and the reduction in conversational dialogue brought coherence and relevance to the subsequent analysis. I wanted to be cautious not to erase any relevant dialogue between researcher and parent, so took time over this process and as a result, a proportion of interview narratives retained some of the researcher dialogue to retain context and authenticity (Nutbrown, 2021). Appendix 13 provides a working example to illustrate the process of reducing conversational dialogue to a simplified narrative, and highlights where it was impossible to remove researcher contributions without compromising context of discourse.

To continue to make analytical sense of the interview data, initial codes were developed to help develop a deeper relationship with the data and emerging comprehension of child's voice. Codes arose from the overall research aim to seek out information relating to the baby's use of voice in the home, therefore anything parents shared associated with communication, drawing attention, response to parents/routine were highlighted as an initial code. These provisional codes, although informed by the research aim gave me something to work with and were later refined to reflect theoretical concepts. Provisional codes were a starting point, a tool to begin interrogation and sorting of data which acts as a pivotal link (Charmaz, 2014, p.113) toward a deeper understanding of the child, their family context and history entangled in their voice presented in nursery. Interview data were framed by the following codes: parent view of child's character, parent view of child's voicing motives, dialogue relating to nursery provision, dialogue relating to relationship between child and staff.

Appendix 17 provides a working example detailing how interview data was coded then transferred into tabular form and compared to the narratives emerging from educator video interaction dialogue transcripts. This was not to draw definitive comparisons between voice tenets arising in

home and nursery, but to seek systematic patterns of commonality which would inductively assist the conceptualisation of how voice was distinctly embodied for each baby in the setting (Charmaz, 2002). Together the data would contribute to answering research question three - *How do the observed patterns of communication in nursery relate to parents' descriptions of patterns of interactions in the home?*

5.4 Observations.

Observations of the babies and staff were documented in both written and visual methods with the aim of addressing research question one, two and four. My presence at the settings was for one full day and one-half day per week, determined by each setting's commitments and how much data were gathered each day. Some days several observations for each child were recorded and other times due to children's absences less was gathered. At times, days were cut short if I deemed the setting/staff or children had 'had enough' of the camera or my presence. I began to learn cues from staff and children that my presence may have impacted the context of the setting or situation so, in a bid to avoid participant research fatigue (Ashley, 2021), I would make a choice to leave the room or leave the setting for the day, which I feel helped contribute to a respectful relationship develop with participants. Field diaries were invaluable for assistance in reflecting on where I felt situations had led to me leaving or cutting short my trip. Field diaries are discussed in section 5.6 in more depth.

Aligning to cultural historical theory, common-sense interpretation is the preliminary statement/thoughts made by the researcher following on from the observation and acted as the first layer of data analysis (Li, 2014). Within this study two different types of observations denoted slight differences in how common-sense interpretation was applied. Written observations were lengthy and often led into or out of a video recording. Therefore, written observations were recorded in a notebook whilst onsite and notes and reflections were made alongside to 'make sense' of what had been seen. Notes were initially recorded in the same notebook to validate my understanding of event and to extend reflection of the researcher 'affective positioning' (Quiñones, 2014, p.111). Notes were transferred onto the word-processed transcript as soon as possible with additional annotations and reflections from the researcher perspective were also documented. Hedegaard determines real interpretation of data should take place away from the 'real life' event

when there is 'no longer any personal relation to the activities or person involved' (Hedegaard, 2008a, p.56). A shift in thinking moved me from reflecting on the situation which entailed contemplation of the researcher position and impression of the situation, to driving the interpretation forward with the research questions as the leading interpretation framework.

It is worth noting that working through a common-sense interpretation was a delicate undertaking. Acute sensitivity was required to minimise a 'surface level' supposition of each baby's pattern of voice. While traditional common-sense interpretation requires researchers to 'comment on his/her understandings of interactions in the activity setting' (Hedegaard 2008, p. 58), I moved through this process cautiously, mindful of knowledge gained from parent dialogues, but cautious not to let this lead my interpretation. Individual children's intentions 'on the surface' could easily be categorised as superficial and indiscriminate. Assigning superficial meaning without acknowledging the implication for the baby would compromise my ethical stance as a researcher and further disempower the children's social positioning (Elwick, Bradley and Sumsion, 2014). Moreover, being unable to see beyond the surface of the data conflicts with Froebelian (1897) and Bakhtinian (1986) notions that inform this study. My specific concern related to how 'submerged' (Gottlieb, 2012, p. 9) I had become in the babies' affective experiences and if my researcher gaze would mistranslate the recorded reality. This apprehension illuminated the ambiguity associated with the interpretation of data sets including young children and foregrounded the implicit need for me to remain alert to this prospect (Elwick *et al.* 2014a, 2014b). As such, I moved through common-sense interpretation with great care, engaging reflexivity, re-examining other data sets concurrently.

Following transcription and common-sense interpretation I moved fluidly between holistic immersion of data and a systematic line-by-line analysis which heightened my sensitivity toward extracting possible meaning of voice. This was loosely framed by the research questions but stimulated by 'situated practice interpretation' (Hedegaard, 2008a) which aimed to bring together threads across observations and interpret the dominating practices within the nursery setting in relation to the children and adults. Informed by theoretical aspects of cultural historical theory (Li, 2014), this stage sought to tease out the dominating patterns of interaction, motive orientation of individuals and the setting and identify any potential conflicts emerging (Hedegaard, 2008a). The first stage identifies where each child's motive orientation and intentional use of voice is apparent,

and this becomes a code/theme on its own. Next, any point of interaction between the child and others was noted as a second theme and any potential conflicts or opposing influences are recorded. This systematic part of the analysis was crucial to see themes unfold and make connections across the research questions.

Situated practice interpretation requires the disentanglement of the interrelations between the child's voice, motive orientation and dominating practice in the setting (Hedegaard, 2008a). This phase is closely connected with the previous two and requires the researcher to go over, revisit and reformulate categories over time (Hedegaard, 2012). Written observations gathered in this study were analysed adhering this process along with the visual data from recorded observations. Evidencing educator commentary alongside my interpretations was a necessary adaptation to the situated practice process and deemed integral to capturing the *multivoicedness* of this study and honouring educators as co-enquirers in this investigation (Appendix 14).

The final spiral in research protocol analyses requires a thematic interpretation to follow the reduction of the data sets via stages one and two. Patterns of relations, the baby's voice and themes re-emerging from practice are examined closely adopting a theoretical lens. This 'goes beyond' (Fleer, 2014, p. 29) the individual data sets and strives to bring together themes across the data to build an overall picture of the babies' lives in nursery and of course how their voices are situated in the social space. In addition, this phase was repeated across all case studies to find meaningful patterns, not generalisations, across the research questions overall.

Initially, each spiral was developed in isolation until I realised, I was duplicating written aspects of the study, which was timely consuming and superfluous. Consequently, combining each stage in one grid helped to manage the data more succinctly and streamline storage and organisation reaffirming Hedegaard's (2012) guidance that analysis should be interrelated and connected (Edwards, *et al.* 2019).

5.4.1 Visual Data (video observations).

Video recorded observations are derived through a different lens and warrant a slightly different analytical approach (Li, 2014; Hedegaard, 2018). Engaging visual technologies as part of the research process is an emotional undertaking generating 'emotionally charged data' and

'researcher emotionality' (Fleer, 2014, p.26). This is more apparent when the researcher is connected physically to the camcorder and should be acknowledged and conceptualised within the analysis process. As such, a minor adaptation of common-sense interpretation was employed to conceptualise the role of the researcher in conjunction with video data (Fleer, 2020) and engage reflexivity. This is an important component of cultural historical theory interpretation, as the 'doubleness of the researcher' (Hedegaard, 2008a) shapes much of the interpretation and analyses that occurs and aids validity. Again, field diaries were invaluable to aid reflection and manage the emotionality that surfaced by continuous re-examination of footage (Fleer, 2014).

In total, 22 hours of video footage was recorded across the two field sites. 1.5 hours of this was taken during piloting sessions and it was agreed with the sites this would not be used as data in the study. 28 minutes of footage was unusable due to movement, sound, or low quality. After review, 18 hours and 2 minutes of video footage was deemed usable data, and this is broken down per child as follows:

Baby	Setting	Video recording period
Ritchie	Little Birdies	3 hours 15 minutes
Taylor	Little Birdies	3 hours 12 minutes
Yolanda	Little Birdies	3 hours 25 minutes
Frank	Little Pandas	3 hours 21 minutes
Anna	Little Pandas	2 hours 4 minutes
Nina	Little Pandas	2 hours 45 minutes

Table. 5.1 Breakdown of video recording times per child

Following recording, video clips were watched without sound to encourage full immersion in the material and to illuminate relational elements in the footage (Fleer, 2014). This promoted opportunity to examine different events that took place across the video recording and move with fluidity between frames to examine the body language, facial expressions and intentional movements of each child and any adult in the clip, leading toward interpretation.

A micro layer of the first stage followed where footage was re-watched but slowed down to observe on a deeper level the 'hidden voice' (Bakhtin, 1986) of the baby, elucidating voice acts in situ. Following this, the video clip was repeated, with sound and dialogue and significant events off camera noted. Key moments defined by emerging aspects of the child's voice motive, intentional behaviours or points of response or interaction with the adult were recorded in a notebook and acted as a guide for the subsequent video interaction dialogues. Additionally, distinct moments where dominating motives for baby and staff misaligned were also documented (Menzies Lyth, 1988). This provided an opportunity to consider the relations between the child, adult, and environment concurrently and to add to any additional comments to aid dialogue with staff.

The layers of video analysis were extensive and drawn out, frame by frame starting with the video clips used as a dialogue catalyst within the video interaction dialogue series. Each clip was viewed several times, with and without sound which ensured any elements of babies' voice or moments of interaction were viewed within the social construct from which they emerged. The three spirals of analysis (Hedegaard, 2008a) were carried out concurrently, and presented as the written observational data, as one process. All data were interpreted, aligning with Fleer's proposed analytical framework which calls for raw video data to be examined as a 'relational whole' (Fleer, 2014 p.28) working simultaneously across the layers to establish where voice emerges in the context of space and time, whilst acknowledging the complex nature of visual interpretation which leads to deeper conceptual framing as analysis takes shape. This process is elucidated in a working example of video analysis presented in Appendix 15.

5.5 Video Interaction Dialogues.

Video Interaction Dialogues acted as a central feature to the study and the analysis. The voice of staff and their perspective on the child's voice were documented through this dialogic process and integral to the validity and reliability of any emerging findings.

The amount of data emerging from each transcript was significant. Each educator engaged in two-three video interaction dialogues, in person which lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Individual transcripts were between 5,000-8,000 words in total and required a detailed and careful interpretation, correlating with the process followed with the parent interview transcripts detailed in section 5.3. I made a choice with all transcripts to type these up myself which was time consuming and drawn out. However, I found this an 'invaluable analytical exercise' promoting a chance 'attend to the details of the strip of interaction' (Bezemer and Kress, 2014, p.155) and as such, I fully 'immersed' (Wellington, 2015) myself in the data, and gained a 'wealth of insights' into how the dialogue was situated.

Transcripts were analysed in two distinct stages adopting a cultural historical lens (Hedegaard and Fleer, 2008) which was interlinked with Charmaz's Grounded Theory approach (2007).

Corresponding with the parent interview transcripts, initial codes were used to guide interpretation. The priority was to scrutinise data associated with the child's voice and to extrapolate educator perspectives through replaying the video clips to them. Indicators of the child's voice and educators' narrative surrounding this acted as a 'core code' category for initial interpretation (See Appendix 16). This entailed line-by-line scrutiny coding any data indicative of the child's voice or educator interpretation of this voice. Through this inductive process, transpired a distinct discourse revealing deep set emotions, dormant frustrations in the workplace and a sense of conflict between space, time and 'learning to notice' (van Es and Sherin, 2008, p. 245) babies' voice.

Consequently, additional codes emerged during data scrutiny of each transcript which guided the remaining interpretation. Examining dialogue from different educators, positioned in two different settings, and seeking interpretations of the voices of six different children resulted in several strands for investigation, the different codes arising at one point, were 88 (Appendix 12). The expanse of data was extensive and at times overwhelming so much, so I had to remind myself of the original research questions and revert to Hedegaard's (2008) social domains; person, institution, society to assist in the management of data. After refinement, core coding was as follows:

- **Child A/B/C voice indicators**
- **Interpretation of Child A/B/C voice (educator)**
- **Individual feelings/emotions (educator)**

- **Potential conflict and motive for child**
- **Potential conflict and motive for adult**
- **Setting/cultural indicators**
- **Policy/procedural**

Data extracts from across the transcripts correlating with the above coding were tabularised to ascertain connections across the data from all educators. Data associated to each baby was organised concurrently to profile the child's voice from the point of view of the staff. Wider issues categorised within societal and institutional planes were separated, initially keeping field sites distinct and latterly scrutinizing both field site data as one to seek out common themes.

Moving through this process was generative requiring frequent iterative movement across original transcripts and latterly the extracted data. Data was vast and it was essential not to overlook even small nuggets of data which may hold significant meaning. Imperative was to centralise the babies' voices in addition to extracting tenets of cultural aspects of each setting which materialised through all data sets. There were several points where emergent societal and institutional strands overshadowed the babies positioning which concerned me. Consequently, I spent a lot of time developing various formats to present data and examine the findings to connect emergent breakthroughs and assemble meaning to voice.

As dialogue with educators developed, aspects emerged which shifted discourse into a reflection associated with practices, their own experiences, or entrenched feelings towards a child. It was obvious they held deep social relations with each child, and by engaging in this reflective journey these relations became tangible and very visible (Quiñones and Flear, 2011). To journey toward a consciousness of seeing the children's voice, educators had to partially rupture what they thought they knew about practices, the baby, and their own professional role and this rendered deeply reflexive moments which were conflicting yet empowering.

'...it could be so easy to watch the whole clip and to see something glaringly positive or negative but there could have been ten little things along the way that you have missed, so to reinforce those little things in your practice is just so powerful.' (Clare -N1 P3 RD2⁴)

⁴ (N1 P1 RD3) depicts coding assigned to data sets.

It was imperative the richness of data associated with social constructs of nursery provision were not absent in the process of analysis and findings. As such I documented educator reflections which intertwined voice, practices, and cultural elements of the institution, aligning the three strands of cultural historical theory. Appendix 18 gives an example of how this took shape in the analysis process.

Following completed analysis in individual field sites, strands were then interconnected with data across sites to seek correlations in findings relating to the social dynamic of nursery provision. From this, threads of new theory emerged enabling me to go 'beyond the surface' (Charmaz, 1995) of data and seek greater meaning between babies' voice, educator responsibility, institutional traditions, and societal demands, aligning with the grounded theoretical and cultural historical analytical framework.

5.6 Field diaries.

Field diaries were an essential component affording a lens on the ethical complexity of emotional elements of being 'present' and in the moment during the field work (Elwick, Bradley and Sumsion, 2014; Johansson, 2011). Central to the methodological design was to conceptualise the researcher within the research process (Fleer, 2014) and to capture authentic reflections to enhance understanding of the interplay between the researcher, participants, and the setting (Degotardi, 2011). Positionality and reflexivity can often become intertwined in research, yet they foster distinct roles enhancing rigour and authenticity of research (Denscombe, 2010). Positionality explores the practical facets including gender, class, professional history whereas reflexivity encourages overt acknowledgment of ethical responsibility and emotions experienced during field work (Punch, 2010). An imbalance of one can alter or 'obscure' important features that should be reflected in the research process (Punch, 2010).

Field diaries were recorded in several locations and acted as a forum to document my feelings, concerns about the research process and general thoughts day to day. Initially short, memos/notes were made in the books used for observations, a way of recording feelings, thoughts and situations that occurred in the nursery environment. Extended notes were documented often in the car prior to driving home and added to in the evening, or subsequent days thereafter. All notes were brought together on a word document but dated to ensure context and relevance. At times I found personal annotations were closely entangled within the observations documented offering greater insight into

the contextualisation of voice against the nursery landscape. Although field diaries can often form part of unstructured observational data in ethnography (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018), I was concerned that too much of 'myself' would alter the context of the observations. A decision was made to extract my cursory thoughts, which formed a crucial part of early analysis. Initially this impacted time spent on early analysis to ensure I retained the authentic elements of both records. It was also imperative they were stored separately but corresponded to associated observational evidence.

The situations I found myself in were, on the surface, archetypal of environments encountered in any children's nursery across the country. It was not a traumatic nor war torn field site, but the intensity of emotion I encountered was deeply acute. Prolonged concentrated observations of the children amid the active bustling environment circling around me was emotionally charged. As an outsider, I could see archetypal issues emerge that resonated with the established narratives associated with working in nursery environments, including long hours, staff ratios, culture of staff teams and so on (Goouch and Powell, 2012). My focus was on the children, engaging for prolonged periods of intense observation watching them watch the movement of the milieu around them. Moments where the children were 'missed' and moments where they were visible to others and engaging in warm, responsive interactions stirred the mother and early years professional in me, lurking invisibly '...in the shadows of the not-quite-known or not-here-now...' (Tamas, 2015, p.40), wanting desperately to react but caught within the restrictions of researcher boundaries.

'...I watched for a few seconds a child sitting adjacent to a staff member (they could not see his face as they were behind him), playing with a small object and putting it into his mouth...before I approached the child, I contemplated whether I should bring this to their (staff)attention and then my 'mother' role rang through, and I instantly couldn't restrain myself. I remind myself of the fact that I could not live with myself if the child started to choke, and I had been bystander to the situation and not stepped in'

Field diary, 20/08/2019

I found thoughts and reflections would enter my mind at strange times. The level of emotionality I experienced caught me unaware and I found it crucial these affective dimensions were contained and represented in written form. Many of my experiences were also shared, often unintentionally,

during supervisions when recounting the scenarios observed. My supervisory team supported me to rationalise and validate emotions (Punch, 2010; Flear 2014), and affirmed emotions are an important aspect of research. Not all emotions were negative, some were profoundly reflective and confusing. Conversations with the managers at each site took me back to managing settings myself, but also raised uncomfortable feelings about the trajectory of early education within the private sector. A conversation with a Development Manager from the company who was visiting one of the settings illustrates a preoccupation with Ofsted inspection ratings:

'She talked a lot about figures that last year 99% nurseries achieved good or outstanding rating, but only 35% of these were outstanding. She talked a lot about the training and workshops she offers to staff (all on her Saturdays) to get staff to think about how they are reading books to children and pick them up and hold the children correctly. She then asked me if I had any 'in' with Ofsted as the company needs to know how behind inspections are and that in her role, she is in a position to contest the grading as she has all the information about each nursery to hand, but the new Early Years Inspection Framework is limiting her ability to do this. I was slightly taken aback with this comment, and it reaffirmed my initial feelings meeting her that she had limited interest in my research objectives'.

Field diary, 13/01/2020

There is a body of works challenging the use of field diaries as a data source, particularly when the emotional aspects of research are depicted and research traditionally calls for neutrality (Punch, 2010; Reed and Towers, 2023). Punch (2010, p.87) determines that a more 'overt use' of field diaries will assist in the 'destigmatising' of the 'emotional and personal struggles' of field work. I felt reassured my study would be strengthened by the addition of field diaries, not only as an aspect of unveiling and legitimising 'hidden' ethnography (Blackman, 2007; Punch, 2013) but to 'explicitly theorise' (Flear and Veresov, 2018, p. 243), my role as a researcher in the context of a cultural historical framing (Hedegaard, 2008b).

Analysis of field diaries drew from a Constructivist Grounded theory frame (Charmaz, 2008) to move beyond my initial comments to illuminate and make sense of my reflections (Charmaz, 2014). Revisiting these records propelled me back to the moments encountered, bringing to the surface the internal feelings and reactions in space and time. It was an embodied experience (Coffey, 1999).

'My whole body is tense. The way they are rubbing the children's backs so hastily raises anxiety in me and I think back to settling Ava and Sammy and the moments of closeness and being snuggled up with them at home. This is not a calm, sleep environment, I can feel the children's emotions and see the desperation in the staff body language to get the children to sleep so they can go on lunch. I feel so uncomfortable that the babies are experiencing this. Would I be happy as a parent knowing this is how my child is settled to sleep?'

Field Diary, 09/10/2019

Field diary entries remained focussed on the social context and my own emotionality rather than the babies' voices. During analysis specific themes began to emerge which were categorised as follows:

- Being a mother
- My connection with the babies
- Research paradox
- Management culture of the settings
- Emotions and uncertainty

While there is limited scope in the thesis to explore the above themes comprehensively, the vignette above and others available in Appendix 19 highlight the kaleidoscope of emotions felt across the field work and the collision of personal and professional identities. I felt at times in a paradox world, desperate to intervene and support but restricted by an invisible researcher barrier. My diaries presented the embodiment of 'an emotional self and a physical self' (Coffey, 1999, p.192) and exposed a myriad of feelings which preoccupied my mind (Hume and Mulcock, 2004). Contrary to the babies' visible expression of voice coming to the surface through reflection with others, my experiences remained invisible, hidden from view only surfacing as I left the nursery building and was safely in my car. The affective impact across the research process remains raw and as I revisited my diaries even now, I find my feelings and deep reflections of my time in the field site shifts as I seek connections and validation for my experience (Punch, 2010; Quiñones, 2014). The depth and range of emotions documented accentuates the raw and personal elements realised during work with babies (Punch, 2012). Examining my entries heightened my awareness of the absence of opportunity for educators to do the same (Elfer and Page, 2015). Advantageous is the position of the

researcher to be able to exit the setting and source space to legitimise the emotional dimensions of field work systematically in a support mechanism including with a supportive supervisory team (Punch, 2010; Reed and Towers, 2023).

The practices witnessed and profundity of emotions felt as I observed the babies' experiences and watched staff grapple with their professional responsibilities resonated with the words of Mary McMullan *'I'm still left with questions, which I will pose to readers: What is or was my responsibility as a researcher in that room? What would you do under similar circumstances?'* (McMullan, 2010, p.12). I remain acutely aware of the records I hold of the babies' lives in the two field sites but also an immense responsibility to amplify their voices whilst retaining a respectful narrative to the committed educators I encountered.

5.7 Drawing the data together.

Several layers of analysis from different perspectives were connected to assist the interpretation and analysis of voice. The findings concerning each baby (detailed in subsequent chapters) were unique, their experiences of nursery were distinct. Yet, taken together, and considered alongside educator contributions, the dynamic relationship between the visibility of babies' voice within the social construct of typical nursery provision magnified similarities in early education pedagogy which were significant and warrant further consideration.

5.8 Reporting the findings.

Imperative to the success of this study is to report the findings uniquely valuing the contribution of all participants, in particularly the babies. Central to a wholeness approach is to conceptualise the dynamic between babies' voice and the environment from multiple perspectives (Hedegaard, 2020). Emotional dimensions of work with babies and the undertaking of researching in baby rooms is not absent in drawing out findings. Rather, this study acknowledges emotion as an essential feature of cultural historical methodological approach, used to strengthen analysis and interpretation of findings (Gonzalez *et al.* 2011). Developing a definitive structure for the subsequent chapters in this thesis was a prolonged process, with extensive reflection and rewriting. Careful consideration was given to preserving the babies' narratives, considering broader personal, institutional, and societal influences. Presenting the inner relations between the three influences required triangulation of data were

framed within the research questions framework as vignettes in subsequent chapters and in the appendices. The vignettes combine data together as a whole, representing educator dialogue, visual stills, and observational data as one. Where relevant, parent narrative and field diaries are also interwoven to illustrate deeper analysis of the emerging tenets of each baby's voice. Detailed findings depicting voice and findings associated with the cultural contours of each field site are discussed across Chapter Six and Seven.

Chapter Six: Introducing the Institutions

6.1 Introduction and background to this section.

This short section presents a brief overview of the institutions who participated in the study.

Following this, two separate chapters are structured to present the findings associated with each setting.

The potential to examine voice is entangled within the embedded cultural practices that take place in an environment (Hedegaard, 2008a). Each nursery occupies its own culture, defined by traditions, driven by policy, and shaped by the adults in the space, which place demands on the baby (Hedegaard, 2012). Cultural demands are established through a combination of shared values, social standards and systems which act as a 'social glue' (Kiley and Jensen, 2003, p. 80) that bonds individuals in the environment. Much research has considered adults within cultural environments, but very little is known about the position of babies within nursery culture. Drawing upon Vygotsky's (1998) belief that the environment should not be considered as something external to the baby, the cultural components of each field site have been examined herein to learn more about how babies' voice materialises within the demands of each social space.

6.2 Jolly Jungle Ltd.

Two institutions belonging to the same private (for profit) company 'Jolly Jungle Ltd⁵' were accessed for data collection. Both offered full day care to working families with children aged three months- five years 51 weeks a year. Nurseries fees vary from £383.50-£402.50 per week for a child 0-2 years in the area in which the field work took place. In other areas of the country, fees are variable with the Department for Education reporting average of £158.95 for a child aged 0-4years (DfE, 2023).

The company is established and has over twenty years' experience offering 'high quality childcare' across more than 100 nursery sites in the United Kingdom. Core values and a mission statement inform the company-wide approach to early education provision. The company promotes their values and beliefs as the foundation of all services for families. A central organisational value is to 'give every child the best start in life' and to offer 'exciting learning opportunities for children as 'they

⁵ All Field site names are pseudonyms.

prepare for school'. This aligns with directives from the Department for Education in England which mandates, *'Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential'* (DfE, 2021a, p. 5). Marketing across the company stipulate services align with relevant governmental guidance, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2021a) and there are several internal schemes to support the delivery of high-quality services for families and children. The company offers internal training for all staff to access regularly and schemes to support staff wellbeing.

Jolly Jungle was approached in early 2019 and offered four of its 100+ sites for the research project to commence in autumn 2019. The rationale for the recruitment of a private nursery company, as set out in the methodology chapter, was to minimise the broader variables, such as recruitment and staff training. Data from Childcare and Early Years survey to parents (DfE, 2022) indicated 47% of babies aged 1 and under were accessing formal childcare provision with, 30% of these reported to be attending private day nurseries. Approaching private providers increased the chances of recruiting families with babies under the age of 1 enrolled at the setting. Each Jolly Jungle setting had around six babies under one and eight babies under two enrolled, although this varied site to site.

Despite four settings being recruited for field work, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted completion of sites three and four and consequently only two sites had completed data sets and are presented in this thesis.

Jolly Jungle's nursery sites each occupy an individual site name, whilst still retaining the company branding, building on the foundations of the organisation's vision and culture. Little Birdies* and Little Pandas* align the company mission and core values but are registered separately with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and managed individually by different management teams, overseen by a Regional Director. Both Little Birdies and Little Pandas acted as field sites for this project and further details regarding the specific culture of each setting are detailed in subsequent chapters.

* All field sites and participants are presented as pseudonyms.

6.3 Introducing Little Birdies.

Little Birdies nursery was acquired by Jolly Jungle Ltd in 2014 and registered with Ofsted to offer full day care provision to children aged between 3 months and 5 years, 27 of those can be aged between 0-2 years, and is open between 07.30-18.00.

Little Birdies is situated in a residential area of a small village close to a larger market town. The nursery building is a converted primary school, thus purpose built to offer education and care to children, albeit not children under five. On entry there is an open reception area, containing a sofa, coffee table and various notice boards with information for parents. The manager's office and staff room lead directly off this space. The door leading to the main nursery area can be accessed with a key fob by staff only. The building is single storey, and four nursery rooms lead off a long corridor, each has access to a large garden area which wraps around the building. All rooms are large, light, and spacious with a range of colourful resources and display boards. The under 2's unit is a large room, with doors opening out into a garden area, accessed only by the babies. There is a separate kitchenette, cloakroom, nappy changing area, and small sleep room contained within the unit.

A large staff team of 24, including the management and administrators supports day to day practice on site. Staff qualifications are varied, with one staff member out of 22 educators holding an Early Years Degree, with Early years Teaching Status, who is based in the Pre-school room. Staff within the baby unit are either qualified to Level 3, Level 2, or apprentices in training. Staff work between 7.30am and 6.15pm, with many adopting a part time work pattern so may have one day off per week.

The setting was last inspected by Ofsted in 2017, achieving a 'Good' grading. The inspection report highlighted "*Staff develop strong bonds with children and know them well*". To achieve an outstanding grade, they were advised to "*improve the organisation and deployment of staff to reduce the impact of routine tasks on time spent with the children and to ensure that all children remain actively engaged in purposeful learning*" (Ofsted, 2017, p.1).

6.3.1 Management Team.

Since the last Ofsted inspection in 2017, there have been 2 complaints relating to staff deployment which has been investigated by Ofsted and as a result, there was a change of management team in early 2018. The manager, Rhian, was transferred from a sister nursery within the same company to

oversee quality improvement and day to day management of the site. Rhian has over 10 years' experience working in early years and has worked Jolly Jungle Ltd her entire career and holds a Level 3 in Childcare and Education and Leadership and Management qualification. My initial impression was Rhian is approachable, enthusiastic, and transparent with her communication to staff and parents. She embraces her position in the setting and offers an animated, relaxed, and reassuring presence. Staff and parents seem to warm to her, and the children actively seek her out to wish her good morning and goodbye each day, offering hugs as they go.

In my early visits, Rhian shares the nursery is on a journey, she is proud of the staff and progress they have made so far, disclosing that a recent internal quality audit awarded the nursery the highest-grade in the company. Rhian displays enthusiasm and passion for early education and is rightly proud of her achievements gained at previous sites within the company. She is complimentary about the staff team, emphasising relationships as central to the nursery ethos for staff and the children. Throughout the research period, Rhian is positive about the project and keen to hear about its progress, often inviting me into the office to chat and share her latest ideas for the setting. She was eager for me to attend a staff meeting to introduce the research project and encouraged staff to ask questions and contribute to the project. The staff room is often filled with cakes and treats for the staff and there are various notices about staff social events and photos of the team together.

Towards the end of the research period, Rhian was seconded to another nursery in the company and, as a result, there was a change in management with the Deputy Manager, Shahira promoted to Manager for the final 4 weeks of my field work. Similarly, to Rhian, Shahira was approachable, and had a good rapport with staff, parents, and children.

6.3.2 Staff Members.

The baby room has five permanent staff members, three of whom agreed to take part in the research study. The room leader is full time, other staff are part time. The room can have up to 15 babies attending at one time.

Name	Role	Qualification	Years at setting	Shift pattern	Participant

Beth	Room Leader and SENDCO	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	2 years	Full Time	No
Lucy	Early Years Educator	Unqualified	2 years	Part time – 4 days per week	Yes
Joanne	Early Years Educator	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	4 years	Part time/term time only 9am – 2.45pm	Yes
Clare	Early Years Educator	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	1 month (15 years in the sector)	Part time/term time 9.30am -2.30pm	Yes
Cathy	Early Years Educator	Level 2 in Childcare and Education	9 months	Part time - 4 days per week	No

Table 6.1. Overview of staff team

6.3.3 The Babies.

Name	Age at start of project:	Started nursery age:	Attendance pattern:	Family context	Key person (during research period)
Yolanda	6 months	13 weeks	Full time – 5 days per week	Lives with Mother, Father, and older sister (5)	Lucy
Ritchie	10 months	9 months	4 days per week	Lives with Mother, Father, and half-brother (4) (alternate weekends)	Joanne and Clare
Taylor	11 months	10 months	1 and half days per week	Lives with Mother and Father	Joanne, Cathy, Beth

Table 6.2. The Babies.

6.4 Introducing Little Pandas.

Little Pandas offers a full day care provision to children aged between 3 months and 5 years and is open between 07.30-18.15. It is a Centre of Excellence within Jolly Jungle Ltd, frequently hosting training events for other nurseries in the chain. The setting is registered with Ofsted to care for up to 104 children, 32 of those can be aged between 0-2 years. Little Pandas was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2019 when it achieved 'Outstanding' under the new inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019). The inspection report highlighted the effectiveness of the key-person system, quoting '*Children form strong attachments with the staff who know their routines and provide excellent emotional support.*' (Ofsted report, 2019). Additionally, the report comments on the manager's '*exceptional leadership skills*' and acknowledges all staff '*put the welfare of children at the heart of all they do*' (Ofsted, 2019 p.2).

Little Pandas is based in the centre of a large commuter town and attracts mainly working families as clientele. The nursery is a large, converted house, with a grand wooden staircase in the large entrance hall and extensive landscaped gardens to the back. The building comprises 4 floors, a separate Preschool building and large garden with access to a small Forest area to the back of the property. All rooms are large, light, and airy, adopting a neutral colour scheme, with open ended resources. The baby room unit is split across two floors, with babies under 16 months based in the basement and children 16 months-2years based upstairs in another larger room. The downstairs baby room has windows, and comprises three interconnecting rooms, with open access for staff and babies for play, messy play, and mealtimes. There is a kitchenette, nappy changing room, laundry and toilet area and access to the outside of the building. A fourth room, is a sleep area, separated by a door which is accessed frequently throughout the day. Babies do have access to a garden, although they must be transported in evacuation trolleys from the front to the back garden, through the car park.

6.4.1 Management Team.

The research takes place from late September 2019 and a new management team comprising of Manager, Zainab, and Deputy Manager, Stacey, have been in place since Autumn 2018 following the acquisition of the setting from another company. There are 23 staff members, 13 of whom are qualified Level 3 and Level 2 in Early Years. One staff member is an Early Years Graduate and is

based in the Pre-School room. Staff within the baby unit are either qualified to Level 3, Level 2 or in training. The room manager for the baby unit is currently shared between the upstairs and downstairs units.

In an early meeting with Zainab, the setting was described as going through a 'transition period' with a significant increase in enrolments (from 37 FTE to 78 FTE). As a result, the setting is recruiting for additional staff.

Examining my field diaries, I was caught by a comment from Zainab as I left the setting:

Zainab was at her desk when I went in to get my bag. She immediately said, 'I was covering upstairs which is why I wasn't about when you arrived. I hope everything has been, ok?' I said 'yes, yes everything has been fine thanks, it is busy downstairs today'. Zainab responded 'Yes, it is, it's great our numbers are rapidly going up but it's just one of those days, we are short staffed.' This struck me as contradictory and concerning. She seemed so pleased the occupancy was increasing, but seemed to show no awareness of the impact this was having on the staff and babies...

Field diary, 27/11/19

Zainab shared they are working hard to reinstate trust with parents following the nursery acquisition and she was employed to drive the nursery and children's learning forward. Additionally, Zainab revealed her confidence that the nursery was outstanding because they focussed on the education of the children as well as caring for them. Staff were regularly asked to engage in staff meetings and were well prepared for their recent Ofsted inspection. The Ofsted inspection took place as I commenced the field work, the final report highlighting Zainab's leadership skills:

The manager shows exceptional leadership skills. She demonstrates her high expectations for children's learning and ensuring they are ready for school.

(Ofsted, 2019, p.1)

Zainab shared recruitment for baby rooms was very important and she tried to recruit girls who 'got babies'. She was particularly proud of the new room leader who was a 'baby person' and was working closely with her to develop practice and organisation in the baby room. In addition, she preferred to recruit staff who had classroom experience and conducted themselves within company expectations as the education of the children was a personal priority. Several conversations took

place over the research period where Zainab communicated the importance of organisation and tidiness:

'I am adamant if they got themselves organised in the morning then they would be able to cope with the transitions and issues across the day more smoothly'.

Dialogue with Zainab recorded in field diary entry (08/01/2020).

It was evident from the outset Zainab was a fervent Early Educator, working in the sector for several years, having recently completed her Level 3 qualification. Zainab possessed a clear presence in the setting, often moving around the nursery rooms to support staff and check on routines. She talked frequently of her 'passion' for early years and particularly toddlers, although revealed she experienced irritation when staff members showed little passion for their work with children.

First impressions of the nursery were that it was imposing, organised and tidy, although on my first visit the administrator who welcomed me disclosed the nursery was '*crazy today*' as they were 2 children 'over' as they have 2 staff members absent and one who was '*work shy, shall we say*'. Zainab welcomed me assertively and professionally, offering me a detailed show around the entire nursery site reassuring me the voices of their babies and children were already heard by all staff members. Encouragingly, the Ofsted report noted all children 'develop highly secure emotional bonds with staff' and the 'key person system is highly effective' which promoted opportunity for children to 'form strong attachments with the staff who know their routines and provide excellent emotional support' (Ofsted, 2019, p. 2).

6.4.2 Staff members.

The baby room has 3 permanent staff members. A fourth staff member supports the room over lunch times/beginning/end of the day. The baby room can have up to 15 babies attending at one time.

Name	Role	Qualification	Years at setting	Shift pattern	Participant
Sally	Room Leader	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	Less than 1 month	Full Time	Yes
Josie	Early Years Educator	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	4 years	Full Time	Yes
Chloe	Early Years Educator	Level 2 in Childcare and Education	3 years but recently returned from maternity leave	Part time/term time only	Yes
Anne	Early Years Educator (not based in baby room)	Level 3 in Childcare and Education	Over 10 years	Full time	Yes

Table 6.3. Overview of staff team

A newly formed staff team led practice at Little Panda's baby room, the room leader commencing employment as the project began. Incidentally, data captured the gradual formation of the team and documented impact on emerging practices in the environment. In parallel, the nursery increased occupancy of the baby room rapidly during the research period, and as such, the babies and staff members were forming their relationships over the data collection period. This is considered when considering any emergent findings.

6.4.3 The Babies

Name	Age at start of project:	Started nursery age:	Attendance pattern:	Family context	Key person (during research period)
Frank	11 months	11 months	4 days per week	Lives with Mother and Father.	Josie
Anna	4 months	4 months	1 day per week, increasing to 5 days per week	Lives with Mother and Father.	Josie

			during field work.		
Nina	11 months	11 months	3 and half days per week	Lives with Mother and Father	Sally

Table 6.4. The Babies

6.5 Summary of the chapter.

This short intersecting chapter provides the reader with a summative overview of the field sites. Intentional was the design of this section to present a brief introduction to the settings to scaffold the reader's knowledge as findings are examined in Chapters Seven and Eight. Findings across the next two chapters are interpreted systematically and offer a rich depiction of emerging tenets of voice in the context of the nursery space.

Chapter Seven: Institution one- Little Birdies

7.1 Introduction.

Findings associated with research question five are presented first in this chapter, drawing directly from the Video Interaction Dialogue (VID) process to depict the culture of Little Birdies from the perspective of the staff team. The decision to structure Chapter Seven in this way was taken for two reasons.

1. To present a detailed insight of the nursery culture from the educator perspective to assist deeper understanding of findings presented in across research questions one to four.
2. To maintain an ethical lens when presenting findings concerning babies' voice patterning and educator response patterns and frequency.

Several redrafts of this chapter and following deep reflection with my supervisory team, I concluded that presenting research questions one to four without the reader appreciating the unique institutional cultural context risked the educator responses presented in research question four being prematurely evaluated and seen via a deficit lens. Subsequently, by representing the institutional culture prior to examining how babies' voices materialise and *how* educators respond promotes an ethically grounded methodological approach which I have endeavoured to maintain across this thesis. Subsequent sections examine findings associated with research questions one to four. These can be read in conjunction with the child profiles presented in Appendix 20. Each section below contains a summary which draws together salient findings in relation to the individual research questions.

7.2 An Early Years Educator perspective of the culture at Little Birdies.

The methodological design of this study purposefully sought to acquire a greater understanding of how the culture of institutional practice positions babies' voices. A 'Hierarchy of motives' (Leontiev, 1978) within an institution is characterised by societal traditions-policy or cultural traditions and it is these practices which may dominate day-to-day pedagogy and influence how voice is framed. As such, how the baby's voice is positioned or prioritised by adults will be affected, exposing moments where babies' needs, and educator practices misalign.

VID provided a dialogic space for staff to reflect on their interactions with babies and consider the interwoven dimensions of normalised practices when responding to babies' voices. The intention of

the VID process was to explore **Research Question Five - Do educators think the culture of the wider nursery environment influences their interactions with babies - and if so, in what way?**

The method offered opportunity to learn more about the dominant practices in the nursery and ascertain if these cultural practices work in unity with babies voicing initiations and educator responses.

Early in the field work, observational data and video footage indicated educators were visibly entangled in demands involving the babies across each day. Conversations with staff reinforced the paradoxical position educators navigate and the challenges they face when responding to babies' voice initiations. From my perspective witnessing day to day practices, I could feel their emotions and see first-hand they were stretched in various directions attempting to pacify demands of the children and organisation. It became increasingly important staff had a space to slow their practice and time away from the room.

Educators at Little Birdies demonstrated great courage and enthusiasm towards the research project. I found them courageous in the way in which they were receptive to being filmed in their workplace, participating keenly within the reflective dialogue process. They exposed themselves to uncomfortable moments, opened their minds to new possibilities and were willing to share reflections and deep emotions about their work, the children, and their own history.

Across all dialogues, the weight of educators' personal responsibility for the children was undeniable. Engaging in the process where they reflectively reviewed visual data seemed to emphasise this significantly, drawing to the surface deeply held emotions for the babies. Findings presented in this section introduce educator voices extracted from the VID recorded during the field work that took place at Little Birdies nursery and are centralised around the following dominant themes:

1. Priorities across the settings were frequently **'in conflict'**, with educators often orientated towards institutional organisation and routine. Staff oscillated between prioritising practical tasks and prioritising babies' needs; they felt the nursery culture was not conducive for both aspects to work in unison.
2. Educators identified the **configuration, stability, and consistency of the staff team** as a central aspect of baby room practice which shaped the culture of the room, directly influencing how, and if, there was time to interact with the babies.

3. Educators indicated they **desired to be close** with the babies in moments of stillness, but systemic culture of organisation dominated their time and accelerated the speed of practice, impacting **'time with the babies'**.
4. When educators engaged in close, connected interactions with babies, they experienced **profound emotions** for the children which were closely entangled with their own life experiences. However, they felt these emotions were marginalised in favour of cultural pressures.

7.2.1 Feeling 'in conflict'.

'On like my lowest days here, it's when I haven't had those interactions. There just feels like there is a pressure to upkeep the routine, the activities, a cleanliness, and tidiness in the room. It feels like there is always a worry or seems to be a pressure about what's coming next and are we going to be ready for it. As a team, it feels like, we can't just enjoy them, be with them. In a minute, we've always got to nappies, and we've got to tidy up and constantly moving from one hurdle to another...I have been in that moment (with child), and then been asked to go and do something else, so it doesn't feel like it is sacred or respected. There is always something else.'

Clare

Clare's statement implies a hidden frustration experienced by some of the staff at Little Birdies. From a personal perspective, Clare acknowledges a direct correlation between her mood and not experiencing moments of interaction with the babies in her care. She considers her time with the babies to be enjoyable, something sacred to be respected, yet presents the sense others in the setting do not share her beliefs.

Dominating practices such as cleaning, tidying and routine tasks appear to place demands on Clare which shifts her attention away from the babies and her own desire to be with them. The sense of pressure to keep moving practice forward rather than finding opportunities to 'be with' the babies weigh heavily. Interacting with the babies is a personal priority which directly conflicts with operational requirements. Clare acknowledges routine tasks including 'nappies' must be completed, yet she does not connect a nappy changing encounter as a time where educator and baby can be

alone together. Rather she cites 'the nappies' as another responsibility for completion which adds a sense of pressure to the day.

The burden of maintaining routine and cleanliness appears to align with other views from staff in the team:

'...the room leader says, 'come on guys, lets tidy up'. And we all know that we have to tidy up, but if all members of staff are tidying up, no one is really playing with the children and they are just wandering throwing things around, making it ten times worse than it was.'

Joanne

Joanne echoes Clare's view conceding a culture of tidying permeates each day, directly affecting the babies. Joanne's underlying frustration appears directed at senior leaders, an indication leaders' preoccupation to keep the setting tidy orientates her attention away from the children. Staff viewed aspects of practice as governed and prioritised by leaders, a culture dominated by rules and regulations rather than motivated by babies' needs.

Joanne moves through her dialogue sharing a defiance toward the dominating forces,

'...most of the time we try and ignore the room leader and just play with the children'.

Joanne's comments imply a lack of unity across the staff team, shared values in conflict. Lucy echoes this, her words illustrating an element of frustration *'like the room leader is just always running around, I don't know what she is doing, but I don't think she ever just sits down with them, the children and interact with them.'*

Dialogue shared paints a picture of opposing beliefs regarding the foundational components of practice with babies. Clare firmly believed that interactions with babies should be revered and respected by others, citing frustration at having her time with the babies interrupted to complete functional tasks. Pressure and irritation permeate through the words shared by all three staff. The room leader who requires order and stability is viewed as the intruder hindering time to interact with the babies. A sense of resentment toward senior leaders who command, but appear not to embody interactional moments with babies, or complete the organisational tasks expected of their staff is revealed. Clare, Joanne, and Lucy make the connection between their own responsivity towards the babies and mitigating challenging behaviours such as crying.

'The room leader gets annoyed because the children are 'mucking around with the toys' and I am trying to get her to see that they are just trying to get our attention because we are 'busy'. They are not being naughty or trying to be intentionally naughty. They are just trying to get us to see them because we are not paying them any attention or any attention to anything going on.'

Lucy

The lack of identifying a correlation between these two elements of practice by senior leaders appear to create emotions in educators that run deep and alter concordance within the staff team.

Subsequently, trust and unity within the staff team seem weakened and staff feel the culture of the baby room is impacted.

7.2.2 Configuration, stability, and consistency of staff team.

'I think staff is really important in babies...when you don't have the right staff in there, it is really hard. It is unpredictable. It is so different each day and hard. The children are confused with part time staff.'

Lucy

A salient theme arising from staff dialogue was the importance educators placed on having reliable and consistent colleagues working together as a team, fostering a culture of cohesion.

Above, Lucy acknowledges the unpredictability she feels and the confusion she believes the babies experience when the staff team is not cohesive and unified. She does not qualify how she knows the babies feel confused, but later she remarks *'It depends on what staff are in the room too, that changes how the room is run and if anyone spends any time with the children.'*

Lucy highlights 'part-time staff' as a reason for the babies' inconsistent behaviours despite herself being a part-time member of staff. Further analysis of her reflections, positions Lucy as believing she offers something 'else' to the children that others lack within the team,

'I would say I am the most loving in there because I will cuddle them and show affection whereas some other ones are just not like that. I do that because it's part of me, I think it depends on who you are as a person doesn't it?'

Lucy interprets the staff team as disjointed and views the interchangeable nature as directly impacting the babies' behaviours resulting in a stressful and 'hard' work environment. Support staff from other rooms were regarded as having a greater effect on culture of the room and the babies, as they did not readily engage with the children or support practical tasks in the room. *'Some of the other cover staff don't (sing), they get bored and then they (the babies) are going around chucking things and messing the room up and getting bored and then in trouble'*. Subsequently, remaining core staff focussed on functional tasks, meaning less time was spent interacting directly with babies which resulted in more crying and higher stress levels in the children as they were unfamiliar with those interacting with them. Furthermore, staff conceded the younger babies were sensitive to staff changes, with Joanne stating Yolanda *'knows who the solid team are in the room, 100%'*. Educators assumed a direct correlation between the staff team and a culture of efficiency. Completion of routine tasks such as nappies, organising mealtimes and planning activities, were cited in section 7.2.1 as frustrations driven by senior staff members. Configuration of the staff team was regarded as crucial in promoting a culture for interactions. Without a regular team, functional tasks were left to core staff, drawing them away from sustained moments of interaction with the babies.

During her first reflective dialogue, Joanne shared:

'It's good we have a team, otherwise it is carnage. Sometimes we have 5 screaming and only 4 staff. One child might cry when you put them down and then one staff member might be doing nappies and one still clearing up from lunch, it's really, really, hard. But you just have to get through it, and deal with it. That's just the way it is.'

Joanne's comments above convey a powerful image of how she viewed the baby unit on days when staffing and the babies are unpredictable. Whilst positively acknowledging the benefits of having a team to support one another, she conveys the evident struggle she feels when the babies' cries of distress seep into her own ability to cope. The feeling of *'just having to deal with it'* implies concealing difficult emotions she feels she cannot share with the team. Feeling isolated within a team where other colleagues are focussed on practical tasks; she absorbs the stress of juggling the crying babies. Joanne concedes that this is her reality working with young children. She has tucked away visceral emotion to *'get on with the job at hand'* and make it through each day. Her narrative reveals several aspects of practice that are *'really, really hard'*. The reality of juggling practical tasks, feeling

alone in her responsiveness to crying babies affects Joanne deeply. In moments where she felt overwhelmed, revealing, *'it's like a pressure point. I am only one person. There are so many of them. I can't do it all'*. Joanne seems overcome with the weight of responsibility, reverberating a sense of pressure shared in earlier findings although this strain seems to materialise from the babies, not functional tasks. An overwhelming sense of feeling alone within a busy environment surface, she felt positioned in a team that appears not to notice her anxiety and offers little support.

Feeling 'stretched' and unable to fulfil the obligation of care to the babies and neglecting practical tasks augmented the perception of failing at her job and failing the children. This notion was not unique:

'...you are trying to be a one-to-one and they all just want your attention. You feel like there is not enough of us to give them enough attention, and they all just pile over. It is hard'.

Lucy

The recognition that offering one baby close, attentive interactions would result in other babies moving into the space to absorb a similar experience transpired as staff engaged in further dialogue. Being available for responsive, engaging encounters acted as a catalyst for babies to pursue one adult for intense interaction. Variable staff teams appeared to intensify the issue as babies would seek familiar adults for comfort rather than cover staff. Babies sought something that was missing, a connection, whilst other adults orientated their attention toward functional tasks. Consequently, this resulted in staff feeling overwhelmed, burdened, and resentful they could not fulfil one on one interactions with babies due to the demands of other children whilst colleagues orientated attention elsewhere.

7.2.3 Desire to be close and still with the babies.

'I try to be very still with them. That's what I think she, and the others need. I try and sit, and stay for ages, well not ages because there are things to do, but I want them to come to me and to know that I am there. I am not moving around or being erratic, it makes them feel more comfortable and more relaxed.'

Lucy

Lucy's comments epitomise the paradoxical position educators experience in the baby room. Lucy acknowledges how much she enjoys the company of the babies, and the significance of offering them a consistent and calm presence. Yet, conveys a burden of 'otherness', functional tasks that need to be completed perhaps in a way to justify her job role or verify to herself that her position is not 'just' sitting with the babies. Dialogue indicates a mindfulness of how 'being with' babies should embody stillness, familiarity, and reassurance. Lucy sought to make them 'comfortable and relaxed' but so often felt drawn away or conscious of her stillness amidst the cultural demands. Underpinning her discourse are temporal conflicts. '*Things to do*' indicates these other commitments require efficiency and there are many other obligations other than 'being with' the babies. Lucy associates 'things to do' with motion and being 'erratic' contrasting temporal qualities she sees important to her connection with babies. The rhythmic change of performative tasks conflicts with 'being still' with the babies and appears closely entangled in the environment. Lucy does not explicitly state time as a factor, but her choice of vocabulary alludes to a collision of two temporal elements, one erratic and one calm. These two concepts are interrelated but different, one restricting the other.

For further insight, I turn to Clare and Joanne, who both refer to conflicting temporal aspects undulating beneath cultural practices. Clare shares a sense of being entangled within routine tasks "*routine nappies that have to be done, getting people to sleep, things like that*" which she framed as distracting from moments of interaction with the babies. The '*necessity*' of tasks is reflected in Lucy's later reflections stating '*there is a sadness that you can't be totally absorbed in*' encounters with babies. She cites the frequency of ruptures caused by external disruptions from colleagues or her own awareness of other functional errands. Similarly, Joanne revealed a more explicit acknowledgment of 'time' as a facilitating feature of interactions with babies.

'Time. Being with them, seeing them, playing with them, the touch and the smiles and not leaving them.'

Joanne

Her comments were reinforced by a narrative of 'seeing' the babies an indication that there were times where she felt she was not with 'them'. It is unclear if this is Joanne's unconscious thoughts coming to the surface of dialogue, as she identifies she is not fully attuned during moments with babies. Referring to Joanne's earlier comments citing 'a pressure point' may explain moments where

Joanne feels distracted due to her emotions. Joanne unravelled her practices with babies considerably during reflective dialogues, acknowledging moments in the day where she would overlook the children due to her preoccupation with 'tasks and organisation'. The process of visually engaging in VID empowered her to 'see' the babies for the first time, reframing her professional role and significance of her responsibility. She later reflects, '*I think about the children like Yolanda, who Mum and Dad bring her in almost straight from waking up, straight out of the door... she is here for such long hours, nearly 50 hours per week. We are a big part of her life*'. Here Joanne displays sense of personal responsibility for Yolanda, but still felt uncomfortable interacting with babies for uninterrupted time.

Taken together Joanne's account depicts commitment to the children, a responsibility she feels to '*not to leave(ing) them*' because she is a '*big part*' in their lives, particularly those children who occupy a full-time attendance. Accountability to be 'there' with babies creates a pressure, a force of responsibility which directly contrasts with the operational elements of the role. Operational moments were framed by staff as 'busy' moments where they felt rushed and pressured. Uninterrupted, interactional moments were associated with slowing down which contributed to a feeling staff felt they were not fulfilling all the responsibilities bestowed on them.



Moments of slower practice materialised when settling the babies to sleep which Clare identified a shift in practice and her own disposition and responsibility to the babies.

'I noticed his eyes were rolling, so changed speed to help him stay calm. It is contrast watching this, the stillness and slowness. It is a completely different interaction with them.

Fig.7.1 *There isn't any vocalisation but there doesn't need to be...we are interacting, but it is different'.*

Clare

Clare contemplates the significance of this and her own need to 'absorb' 'being with' Ritchie intensely. She reflects on the connectedness of intimate moments such as sleep times (Fig.7.1), citing a different sense of time for her and the baby to become deeply attuned - a space embodying eye gaze, touch, and tranquillity.

'...just taking that moment just to 'take them in' because every day is just so hectic, you don't have much time to have those slow, still moments. It is important.'

Through viewing the footage and engaging in dialogue, Clare achieved a sense of reassurance knowing that her practice affected Ritchie's experience citing she was *'glad there are moments like this' for the children during their busy day*. Acknowledgment of her relational positioning to Ritchie draws a deeper understanding of how Clare's maternal experiences motivate her connection with the babies.

7.2.4 Educator emotions associated with 'being with' babies.

'I'd like to think I am bringing more of a 'mum' role to the job. Obviously, I am never going to be that, and I don't want to be, but there is always an element of that it just adds another level, a depth to it. I just don't ever want to forget how tiny they are and how important it is to have that like, affection, love that genuine feeling for them and for them to have for us...they are so precious, I wouldn't ever want them to ever think that I am just another lady who wears a uniform and is just going to pick me up when I scrape my knee' and that's it. I know they are only tiny, but I wouldn't want them to ever have thoughts like that.'

Clare

Throughout all dialogues, staff spoke with affection about all babies in their care, not just the children participating in the study. They visibly brightened when recalling funny moments with babies or viewing moments in video footage where babies were responsive to their advances. Lucy reflected on her relationship with Yolanda and shared emotional narrative during dialogues *'Our bond is amazing'*, imparting being with Yolanda makes her *'really happy'* and she *'really miss (es) her (laughter)'* when she is not at work. Lucy approached her dialogue with a sense of embarrassment about the depth of her feelings for Yolanda and several times insinuated her awareness of colleagues' ridicule of this bond. Regardless, in the reflective space Lucy claimed she *'loved'* Yolanda and has a bond with her more than the others. Bringing to life Lucy's encounters with Yolanda affirmed the strength of their connection, Lucy exclaiming the affect seeing their special bond on screen had on her *'It's like, my heart is bursting, thank you.'*

These statements reveal the depth of emotion educators experience when working closely with very young children. A conscious pride in Clare's identity as a 'mother' transpires, as she cites how her maternal experience empowers her to add 'another level' to the babies' experience in the setting. Examining this vignette further develops consideration to Clare's frustration when organisational culture directly conflicts with her own deep-rooted feelings about early education priorities. Clare seeks to offer depth to her professional role, affirming 'affection and love' are central to encounters with babies, characteristics she associates with being a mother. Giving priority to a 'genuine feeling' within the relational, aesthetic encounters with babies should underlie a culture of practice. Acknowledgement that the connection is bidirectional, the baby developing feelings for the adult, is significant as she conceptualises the baby as an individual, with emotional competence. Despite this, Clare struggles internally with her emotional accountability which is entangled within her own identity and contrasting cultural characteristics emerging at Little Birdies. Clare is a newer staff member, joining the first month of field work, having taken time out to raise her children. Her own transition away from her own children and back into early education surfaces in her dialogue. A sense of responsibility pervades Clare's dialogue, like Joanne's accountability she attributes to herself when reflecting on Yolanda's long nursery hours '*We are a big part of her life*'. Conceding this sense of duty undoubtedly will shape individual's ability to be 'present' and give their 'all' to the babies.

The intense emotions felt for babies appeared to generate a greater sense of failure, a consciousness of missing out on time together which weighed heavily on staff. They felt moments of vitality between with a baby were overlooked and undermined by a culture of efficiency and productivity.

7.2.5 Summary of section.

This section aimed to foreground cultural characteristics within Little Birdies from the perspective of the staff. Drawing from the VID process, four core themes were emergent, yet intertwined with one another. Fundamentally, staff shared profound emotions felt for the babies in their care. Above all else, this remained central to emerging dialogue. They desired to have a culture of closeness and consistency that was difficult to establish. As such, staff perceived themselves 'failing' the babies if close, sustained interactions did not materialise. Organisational pressures and a culture of efficiency were cited as contributing to staff lack of time with babies, orientating their attention away from the

babies. Temporal dimensions emerged in dialogue which raises questions regarding how time dominates and shapes nursery culture. A culture of conflict pervaded conversation, educators feeling stretched to fulfil routine tasks while pacifying babies' calls for attention. All staff exhibited courage and resilience throughout the process of reflection, but it should be noted this section only considers dialogue from their perspective.

7.3 The Babies.

The aim of this section is to centralise how voice materialises using the four research questions as a framework for presentation. It seeks to bring to the forefront of discussion the babies voices which lingered subtly within the culture of Little Birdies⁶.

Salient aspects of voice belonging to the three babies, Ritchie, Taylor, and Yolanda, are illuminated through the purposeful selection of data samples following a comprehensive analysis process (see Chapter Five) and aim to portray the prominent features of voice framed within the research questions. Detailed extracts taken from the analysis process (Hedegaard, 2008) are intentionally included herein to represent the distinct patterns of communication elicited by each baby across the research period. For consistency, up to two detailed vignettes grids are included for each child, with others presented in the appendix to offer further elevation and clarification of the concepts discussed. Vignettes are revisited several times across all research questions to cultivate an in depth understanding as to how each baby's voice is established in the nursery space. Other relevant data is interwoven to determine deeper insight into how voicing patterns were perceived by educators and the researcher.

⁶ A contextual background of each baby is presented in Appendix 20 and can be read in conjunction with this section. The aim is to contextualise each baby across the spaces they engage whilst acknowledging that the initial impressions are taken from an adult perception.


7.3.1 Research Question one - What are the patterns of communication babies employ to express their voice in nursery provision?

On the surface, the three babies appeared to be sporadic and fleeting in voice, intermittently interacting with others, and sufficiently settled at Little Birdies. However, detailed analysis revealed a more comprehensive narrative, bringing to the foreground visible aspects of voice.

Voice materialised as a silent trajectory, simmering just beneath the surface of day-to-day activity, bound within cultural aspects as everyday activity. Predictably, during the research period the babies advanced their skills and development though observational data indicated voicing attempts were persistent and not arbitrary. The sections below seek to bring to life the patterns of communication employed by Ritchie, Taylor, and Yolanda to communicate their voice within the nursery space.

7.3.2 Ritchie.

The episode illustrated in Figure 7.2 is representative of Ritchie's typical voice pattern when he was not engaged with an adult.

Date: 11/09/2019	
Context of observational excerpt:	
Ritchie has just been moved into the garden by an adult who woke and dressed him from his morning nap. He has been placed in the centre of the garden. Ritchie is looking around the garden. It is busy and noisy. One child is crying loudly in the background. There is a lot of activity and movement around him.	
	
Observation notes:	
An adult (behind and off camera) is playing with a small group of children on the grass. She says <i>'Ready, Steady, Gooooooo!'</i>	
Ritchie orientates his gaze in the direction of the activity and watches (1). His face changes from furrowed to open. He appears to be listening in to the adult and children.	

Adult: *'What's that? Where's the ball? Shall we give the ball to Adam? Weeeee. There you go! Ready, Steady, Gooooooo!'*

Ritchie remains orientated in the direction of the activity. He lets out a sigh 'uuuuuuhh' and moves his body, pushing himself to standing and picking up a plastic car (2). He toddles forward and bends down to pick up a plastic car which he grasps close to his chest. Adult (aimed at another child): *Ready, Steady, Gooooooo! Well Done, Tabby!'*

Ritchie waves the car three times back and forth in the air and begins to move towards the activity. Adult (directed at another child): *Can you put it up here? Can you, do it? Clever boy!!'*

Ritchie waves the car once again and opens his mouth 'uh uh'. Ritchie continues to walk towards the activity (3). As he gets to the grass he trips, drops the car but pulls himself back up again. He remains orientated towards the adult and activity (4). He tries to walk again, but falls twice more, so begins to crawl across the grass. He stops and hovers, watching the activity. Adult: *weeeee! How far did it go?!'*

Ritchie remains at a 2-metre distance from the activity and lowers his eyebrows and purses his lips to watch. 'Ah' he vocalises (5). He looks between the adult, the ball, and the other children. The child nearest Ritchie begins to cry a high-pitched cry and the adult moves in to give them a cuddle. Ritchie crawls quickly back to halfway across the grass. Turns his body and looks back at the adult and activity (6). He remains interested in the activity, but another adult comes out to say snack is ready, so the children run towards the building and the activity ends. Ritchie turns and crawls quickly to the door.

VID

Clare: *'He does a lot of looking, watching people and checking in and studying people...'*

Fig.7.2. Representation of Ritchie's typical voice pattern.

Ritchie's voice presents with thoughtful caution and interest with commitment to participate in an established activity with others. His actions embody attentive listening represented in his facial expression and physical manoeuvring in the direction of the activity. Ritchie's attention is apparently drawn to the adult's voice, he quickly orients his body toward the educator and activity. As the adult engages in dialogue with other children, unaware of Ritchie's curiosity, Ritchie responds to her question with an 'uh uh', stretching the car out ahead of him as if to connect to her and gesture that he is on his way. There is a deliberateness and determination of voice to physically manoeuvre towards the event to intentionally be 'part of' the activity and shift the adult's orientation toward him. Ritchie connects himself to the adult, his dialogue emitted across the space, lingering on the peripheral despite the educator's unawareness of his pursuit for participation.

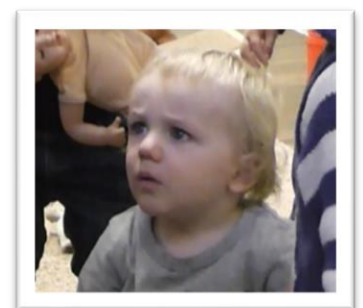


Fig.7.3

Ritchie's presence in the setting embodies a largely silent existence, inquisitive, yet apparently occupied with activity. Further observation and discussion with staff revealed greater depth into Ritchie's preoccupation with adult location and his ability to express himself through a quiet discourse used to increase his visibility in the nursery space. Notably Ritchie's facial expressions were where his voice materialised most tangibly. In moments of surveillance, Ritchie's face dropped, his eyebrows furrow and his lips often mirrored the angle of his eyebrows and his body paused as if to absorb the situation (Figure. 7.3). Following intensive concentration and surveillance of the social space, Ritchie typically advanced a physical movement toward a social event, drawing himself nearer, but not too close to the adults. This is discussed in greater detail in research question two.

Educators were conscious of Ritchie's preoccupation with their movement around the setting '*I get up to do something else or turn around and he is still staring at me*' and they had an awareness that Ritchie engaged intensive eye gaze to secure their attention '*I am sure Ritchie never blinks!*'. His furrowed face yields a fissure to his inner voice, part of the puzzle when viewed as a continuous dialogic pattern can facilitate a greater understanding of Ritchie and his tenets of voice.

7.3.3 Taylor.

Silent pursuing characterised Taylor's patterning of voice which saw her frequently shadow adults in the setting. She was rarely still, unless closely connected to an adult. Taylor displayed conviction to track the movements of adults, to linger and be patient for a moment to connect. She shadowed Joanne but lacked confidence to engage voice intentions with greater conviction. Despite this, she showed creativity in her attempts to bond with Joanne, engaging external objects as a catalyst for response. Figure 7.4 illustrates the prominence of Taylor's stepping motion engaged as part of her distinct physical voice. Moments where she stopped to assess a situation, she stepped forward and backwards several times, it was recurrent and intriguing. At times, she acquired the confidence to vocalise a single word, often 'mayee' indicating her 'mummy' or 'muzzy'. Video stills used within this chapter do not accurately capture the essence of her voice in true form. Her combined constant oscillating motion, rarely prevailed. Her ability to exhibit her voice in several modes seem advanced, despite lacking confidence. She made a connection between engaging verbalisations as part of her

typical pattern, interlaced with her physical motion. This differed to other children who seemed to prioritise physical voice and vocalisations as a final resort.

Date: 20/01/2020	
Context of observational excerpt:	
<p>Joanne is setting up and administering medicine to another child. Taylor follows her over to the table and hovers from a 2-metre distance, watching for a few seconds (1).</p>	
Observation notes:	
<p>Taylor drops her muzzy and looks at Joanne (2). She begins to step in and out, towards Joanne (2) and the table a total of 7 times (3). She then points at her muzzy on the ground and vocalises 'mayee' (4). She continues to step in and out three more times, she stops and watches Joanne's activities, Joanne briefly looks at her. Taylor picks up her muzzy, turns and walks off across the room (5). She picks up a toy and returns to a table before making her way back to Joanne.</p>	
VID (N1 P2 RD2)	
<p>Joanne: <i>'I have noticed that sometimes I am sitting down, and she will come up and just sit on me as if to say, 'I'm here'.</i></p> <p><i>I don't want to feel like she is missing out and I am not talking to her, but I have to concentrate. But here she is just waiting and watching, the hover walk is there as well.'</i></p>	

Fig.7.4 – Example of Taylor's voice patterning

Staff were irritated by Taylor's persistent 'hovering' and struggled to bond with her.

'I have noticed A LOT. She is always, like, THERE⁷.'

Joanne

Conversation alluded to an underlying exasperation, varying between *'she's not leaving me alone* and *'I don't want to ignore her, but I have to concentrate on what I am doing' to I always seem to*

⁷ Emphasis added to indicate intonation of dialogue.

have Taylor'. Evidence indicates how Taylor sought to build on her key person relationship with Joanne, whereas Joanne seems frequently disconnected or distracted. Appendix 19 portrays the need for proximity and validation sought from Joanne, which at times she receives and other times she does not.

'She will stand near me and maybe make a little noise or a bit of a fuss and then she will wait for me to go in....'

Joanne

Individually, staff shared they had noticed Taylor's actions but never had discussed them as a team. Lucy comments, *'She does this sort of step back and forwards when she is hovering, and I don't know why'*. Whilst reviewing video footage, Lucy wonders *'is she is doubting her confidence to approach me because she sort of backs off a bit, it is quite strange'*. Taylor's action intensifies when the adult is in established contact with another child, or the area is busy with many children. Taylor only breached her invisible boundaries into the adult space after prolonged period of observing and cautiously building her confidence through her stepping action. Moving through this action Taylor would often engage subtle touch to physically connect herself to adults as she shadowed their movements. This comprised a light tap to the shoulder or leg, usually as Taylor watched on or was passing through towards the book area. It was often so subtle staff often did not acknowledge nor notice it. Such a delicate motion acted as a tool to indicate her presence and offers insight into Taylor's sensitive and cautious character.

7.3.4 Yolanda.

As the youngest baby in the room, Yolanda often found herself closely engaged with an adult, as many educators seemed to relish the opportunity to hold her. As expected, Yolanda's voicing pattern altered in line with her developmental course, her increased mobility supported her movement into adult spaces and released her from some of the early frustrations captured in observations.

Figure 7.5 illustrates that without an adult nearby, her arms would be open and suspended out to the side and her fingers widely spread. Yolanda remained alert, moving her eye gaze around the environment, often focussing on the adults though her face remained concentrated and inexpressive.



Fig.7.5

Moments when Lucy, her key person, was out of eyesight, Yolanda



Fig.7.6

would move her head with greater speed as if scanning for reassurance that she was nearby. Left alone or near older children for prolonged periods, Yolanda dissolved into a whimper, wave her arms and stare at the adults. If no response was received her whimper quickly advanced into a

loud, uncontrollable cry, depicted in Figure 7.6.

In hold with an adult, Yolanda exhibited a shift in her whole-body experience. Her suspended arms would retract into her body and her hands would relax, scrunching to her chest or grasping the adult's clothes. Her eyebrows would raise, eyes widened, and her mouth would open slightly, or if sucking a dummy, sucking would increase. Joanne reflects:

'I could see in her face and hands she needed me. Her face screws up as if she is going to cry saying 'come and get me, come and get me' and if you do, then I won't cry!'

With other adults, Yolanda would continue to look around, apparently distracted or possibly searching for Lucy (Figure 7.7). Appendix 13 exemplifies the different contact established in an embrace with Lucy. Yolanda was documented frequently drawing Lucy's face in to her own, and engaging her hands to stroke or bang Lucy.



Fig. 7.7

Advancing mobility saw Yolanda's initial voicing patterns remain consistent although her crying reduced, possibly attributed to her ability to move herself towards activity or adults if she desired. Her mother reflected:

'I have a feeling that when she moves, she moves to come and see us. She doesn't move to find something. Well at least for now, a toy or let's say. 80% of the time she moves to find my husband, or me or Nora. But she doesn't want to move to play just yet. It is us.'

(Parent Interview, 18/09/19)

This correlates with observations documenting Yolanda reorientating her body to view adult activity in the setting. She would readily travel to Lucy and climb onto her as if to validate her place in Lucy's mind. Across the duration of the field work, I did not capture Yolanda physically seek out adults other than Lucy. Typically, staff members moved into her space to respond to her initiations, rather than Yolanda pursuing them.

7.3.5 Summary of section.

Episodes above are illustrative of the three babies' pattern of voice and assist a greater understanding of how voice patterns materialise within a baby room environment, which was the aim of research question one. All three babies committed to subtle surveillance of the environment, acutely tuned into the movement patterns of familiar adults. Understated actions were recurrent and deliberate over time, they did not appear to be arbitrarily exhibited. Viewed together as a whole, they represent intentionality of voice. Methodically threaded together, voice acts remain a subtle undercurrent of each child's presence in the social space. Largely, voices remain on the peripheral of the social space, subtly lingering, presenting a striking contrast to the tempo of dominating nursery practices. Drawing plural voices belonging to those close to the baby together supports greater insight into the intention behind each action.

7.4 Research Question Two - How are these patterns of communication used to initiate and sustain interactions with educators in a nursery environment?

The distinct voice patterning represented in research question one introduced the subtle patterning simmering quietly within the milieu of baby room activity. Silent initiations were often left suspended in the social space, inconsistently acknowledged by educators. Occasions where the elusive initiations were overlooked, each baby advanced their voice intentions to elicit a response from the staff. Data examples presented in this section illustrate creative engagement of external objects, deliberate movements, and vocalisations to draw greater attention to themselves and seek to present an insight into how babies can creatively increase their participation in social spaces.

Emergent discoveries of how voice elicited a reaction from adults are categorised as follows:

- **Engaging external objects as a vehicle for dialogue with others**
- **Touch as a connection**
- **Vocalisation and trajectory movements**
- **Visceral movements – feeling under threat.**

7.4.1 Engaging the use of external objects as a vehicle for dialogue with others.

The use of objects as a vehicle for dialogue and connection with adults was a marked characteristic the children's advancing voicing activity. Figure 7.4, supported by Appendix 21 offers detailed insight into Taylor's alertness to adult activity and engagement of external items to increase the adult's awareness of her. Taylor elicits purposeful action to move into Joanne's domain, receiving a response from Joanne activates further extended voice initiations by way of establishing a dialogue.

Reviewing the video narrative with Joanne, she was struck at how tuned in Taylor appeared to be:

'She is so tuned into what is going on, but she wasn't actually even looking at me'.

Joanne

In several recorded episodes (Figure 7.4, 7.8, 7.11 and Appendix 21), Taylor appears consumed with retaining contact with educators, especially Joanne. As confidence to draw attention to herself reduces,

connection to her muslin offers solace and a temporary comfort in

moments where adults are unable to respond to her. Typically, Taylor was

documented reverting to simple voice acts to pursue adult contact, retaining a lingering presence that educators only noticed during reflective dialogue. They concede Taylor makes overt bids to initiate contact using external objects and artefacts associated with her home but acknowledge the invisibility of these in usual everyday practices.

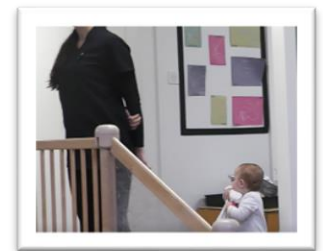


Fig.7.8



Fig.7.9

Conversely, Ritchie would transport objects to adults who were usually stationary and engaged with other babies (Figure 7.9). The correlation of these objects to Ritchie and the adult remained unclear, often unrelated to the adult or other child. Nevertheless, they were transported across the room and imparted on the adult as a catalyst for dialogue linking Ritchie and educator.

This object initiation was persistent, sometimes occurring three or four times a

day, orientated toward different adults. Staff disclosed their awareness of this strategic 'attention seeking' and found it endearing but seemed unaware of Ritchie's prolonged commitment to secure their response. Ritchie's preoccupation with drawing adults into his world seemed to dominate his activity in the setting. An undercurrent of provocation, holding out an object and then running away, before launching himself into the adult's arms. In hold with an adult, Ritchie's movements slowed as if he visibly absorbs his physical connection with the adult.

7.4.2 Using touch to sustain contact with adults.

The extent to which the babies engaged tactile connection as a stimulus to retain educators in their encounter was striking. The children worked hard to maintain a physical link with adults, particularly when encounters were disjointed or involved others. The vignettes included here represent typical episodes where babies increased their agency to stay closely linked with educators. Figure 7.10 depicts Yolanda demonstrates physical effort to preserve an emotional association with Clare.

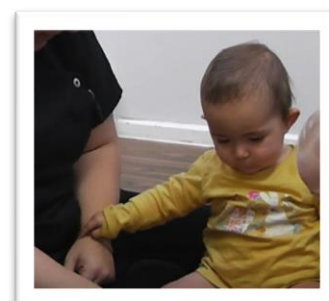


Fig.7.10

While Clare consciously attempts to share her attention with more than one baby, Yolanda appears less assured of this decision. Retaining a physical connection with Clare acts as a gesture toward the other children that Clare and Yolanda are linked. As soon as Clare moves, Yolanda regains closer physical ownership by moving back onto her lap. Clare is receptive and responds consciously, whilst maintaining her dialogue with the other children. This mindfulness, although not visibly apparent on film, surfaced during reflections and reiterates Clare's awareness of being attentive and attuned to all the babies, despite her own sense of pressure (Appendix 22).

The following observational vignette further strengthens the view babies worked hard to engage tactile strands of voice in attempt to sustain close proximity to adults,

'Taylor approaches Lucy who is looking the other way and she pulls herself up, holding Lucy's T shirt and touches her left hand on her shoulder. There it remains whilst she manoeuvres her body around to look about the room. Her mouth is slightly open, and she brings her right hand to meet her left one on Lucy's shoulder. She watches Lucy who is

looking the other way at another child and talking to a colleague. She looks up and down and then attempts to climb onto the Lucy's lap. Lucy says 'Hello Taylor, wait a minute, let me put Yolanda down' she begins to move Yolanda who begins to cry. Instead, Lucy moves Taylor off her lap and places her on the floor next to her with a book. Taylor does not protest and takes an interest in the book; her right hand remains on Lucy's leg.'

Observation 2T 16/09/19

Taylor works hard to physically link to Lucy, conceivably seeing Yolanda and Lucy's dyad as something appealing or akin to her home experiences. Taylor seems forthright, climbing onto Lucy without receiving a cue from her directly, a bid to integrate herself into the moment of closeness. Her attempt to dominate Lucy's focus misaligns and she must seek solace and connection through alternate means, preserving a touch point to Lucy whilst she remains oriented towards Yolanda.

Understated tactile threads of connection appear recurrent for all the babies, an endeavour to maintain contact with adults during busier times. Understated physical movement was an agentic action, an effort to alter the social encounter and keep themselves in the mind of the adults when interactions were compromised, or adults were orientated elsewhere. These moments of connection, led by the babies were largely perceived as insignificant by adults until they engaged in the VID process.

7.4.3 Vocalisation and trajectory movement.

"Taylor looks at Joanne one final time whilst slowing moving forward and says 'Mayee' Joanne responds and say 'huh? Mummy?' Taylor turns her head and looks towards the door".

ObservationT8 20/02/2020

Taylor's voice narrative indicates a developing competence to connect sporadic vocalisations into her voice patterning in an endeavour to increase her presence in the social space. The brief observation above, supported by an extended version as Appendix 22, indicates she waits for a dialogic connection to establish before decisively breaking into the social circle with a vocal contribution.

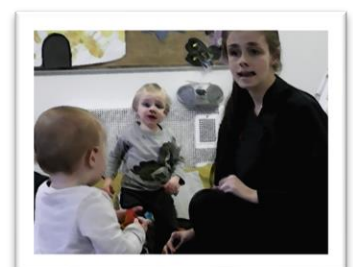


Fig.7.11




In contrast, only a small selection of observations document Ritchie verbalising as part of his voice narrative. Close analysis determined vocalisations were closely interlinked and culminated with deliberate physical movements, or in dyad with an adult. Where Ritchie vocalised outside a communication dyad, he was often in the centre of the room, at the top of the wooden bridge where he would shout once or twice (Figure 7.12).



Fig.7.12

Ritchie’s physical effort to make his presence known is depicted through a combination of assured utterance and physicality. Outbursts were predominantly centre stage and materialised after a prolonged period of weaving in and out of other momentary encounters (Appendix 23). The singularity and coherence of Ritchie’s movements appeared to have motive and intention to make himself visible to the adult. They are a link in the chain of communication, actions to reorientate adult attention toward him. He appeared anticipatory of any reaction, indicated by his frequent glances to adults and playful reaction if they did respond. Ritchie was a frequent ‘shouter’ at home, which would initiate attention from his parents. It is probable that Ritchie drew from this established strategy to make himself visible in the setting, an endeavour to create a shared and familiar meaning with the adults and acquire a response. However, educator reflections revealed a misalignment of Ritchie’s intentions characterised as ‘challenging behaviours’ that materialise and create challenges for staff.

7.4.4 Visceral movement – Feeling under threat.

Date: 27/01/2020		
Context of observational excerpt:		
Lucy and Taylor are embraced in a cuddle (1), Yolanda is playing about a metre away with some bricks.		
1.		2.
		3.
		



Observation notes:

Yolanda vocalises and holds out a brick, Lucy responds 'Hello Yolanda, what's up?' looking directly at her (2). Yolanda uses Taylor's dress to pull herself up to standing, wobbling as she goes. Lucy intercepts her loosening her arm away from Taylor and receiving Yolanda. Their eye gaze meets, and they smile at one another.

Lucy gently welcomes Yolanda to the dyad by holding her behind her head and Yolanda smiles and leans into Taylor and Lucy, resting her head on any available space Lucy has. Lucy squeezes Yolanda and says '*ahhhhhh, that's nice*' (3).

Taylor becomes unsettled and lifts her body orientating her gaze at Yolanda, who hastily moves off her back. Yolanda stares directly at Taylor, her face furrowed (4).

Lucy laughs and carefully relaxes her hold of Yolanda and pulls Taylor backwards as if to disconnect the girls. Yolanda begins to tap the wooden brick on Taylor's head. Lucy intercepts and says, 'Er, careful Yolanda, not on her head, please' and takes the brick away (5).

Yolanda begins to use her hand to tap her and pull at tufts of her hair. '*No, no, no, no (quick succession) Yolanda*'. Lucy creates some distance between the girls but still maintains a hold of them both. She snuggles her head into Taylor whilst talking to Yolanda '*Look, we go ahhhh, and a tickle, tickle*'

She tickles Yolanda under her armpit as Taylor looks on. Yolanda pushes against Lucy and she looks directly at Yolanda and Lucy says '*Yeh? shall we build a tower?*'. She places Yolanda down on the floor next to her and let's go of Taylor who disconnects from her and walks off. Yolanda immediately reorientates her body back in Lucy's direction. Yolanda reaches up to Lucy with both hands and her eyebrows raised (5). Lucy accepts Yolanda's advances, smirks, and picks her up.

VID

Lucy: '*It is still quite hard to get one-to-one with other children when she is around, but I do try really hard. I have longer times with Yolanda and then with the other children they are shorter moments I think.*'

Fig.7.13 – Example of visceral movement when under threat.

The episode above adds depth to Yolanda and Lucy's relationship and demonstrates a strategy to sustain an association between the pair, exemplifying the length babies will go to retain contact with their special adult. It does not sit in isolation to other data documented (see, Figure 7.14) and illustrates the struggle staff have each day as they attempt to share their attention with other babies. Observable across both examples is Yolanda's intention to reaffirm her place in Lucy's vision and re-establish their connection through purposeful vocalisation followed quickly by obvious physical

movement into Taylor and Lucy's established dyad. Her preoccupation to acquire Lucy dominates her orientation and the addition of knocking Taylor on the head accelerates attention on her. Lucy has no choice but to divert the behaviour, which directly alters Taylor's experience and results in their connection dissolving. In several episodes, Yolanda is forthright and appears to display a strong desire to dominate Lucy's attention. Her deliberate and intentional movement into Lucy's established spaces with other babies is unmistakable as she employs sophisticated strategies to alter the social space. Sharing attention across multiple babies brings its challenges for staff and apprehension for babies like Yolanda who have an intense bond with educators.



Fig.7.14

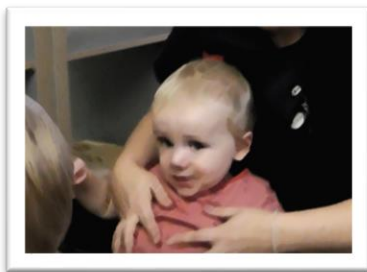


Fig.7.15

Upholding interactional moments with adults when other babies pose a threat to their experiences transpired through Ritchie's voice. Figure 7.15 typifies several encounters documented where Ritchie reacted to other children joining his established dyadic moment with Clare. In addition to engaging subtle touch during encounters, he tangibly shifted his weight backwards to be enveloped in hold by educators. Clare reorientates her attention towards other children, Ritchie is seen physically pushing himself into Clare's body, whilst retaining eye contact with another child. Clare acknowledges this attempt to maintain their connection by responding tacitly with her hands. Clare's reflects:

'He seems to be trying to keep that constant contact, so he shuffles himself back a bit more and reaches his hand out a bit more. I think at the time I felt that he was losing his interest...it's almost when I sit up, it's like he feels less of my body contact, so he shuffles back. I would guess that he is making sure that I wasn't going to go now that they are there. I think that there is an argument for the reassurance that I am there, but also the possession. To keep that 'I was here first'.

Clare and Ritchie are in the early stages of developing a relationship, the buds of humour and playfulness such as clapping, and laughter manifest themselves across several encounters

documented. Over the research period, they become firm companions, the roots of which seems to materialise through the observational footage and Clare's emerging reflections. Ritchie enjoys time with Clare, their playful games are attractive to other children. Yet Ritchie is decisive in the methods he engages to keep them at a distance and savour Clare's attention to avoid having to share these special moments with his peers.

7.4.5 Summary of section.

Vignettes shared in this section explore the complex web babies weave to creatively initiate and sustain contact with staff and assists in answering research question two. Babies are astute and intentional with their motives in a bid to dominate adult attention and reframe the social space. Emergent findings offer insight into babies' preoccupation with adult activities which appears to dominate their time in the setting. Seeking and retaining adult connection was central to the babies' activity, they worked hard to stay linked with educators and retain moments of closeness. Patterns of communication are amplified and become more complex when adult response is received or when that bond is under threat. Fundamentally, findings present a picture of babies consumed by adult activity and committed with increasing their presence in the setting via multifaceted modes of voice in a bid to obtain a connection with educators who care for them.

7.5 Research Question Three - How do the observed patterns of communication in nursery relate to parent's descriptions of patterns of interactions in the home?

The process of analysis led to emergent discoveries which connected the babies' use of voice at Little Birdies with their parent description of voice in the home. Notably aligning elements of 'home voice' materialised after consistent, sustained encounters with specific educators. Correlation between the two emerged as the baby's confidence in their relations with others increased. Below are episodes for each child where their voicing encounters aligned with home experiences.

7.5.1 Ritchie.

Date: 14/01/2020
Context of observational excerpt: Ritchie and another child have been playing with a coloured box. Joanne has been acting as mediator to encourage the boys to take it in turns. Ritchie positions himself next to Joanne and as she watches the other child, he begins to rock his body up and down and bang his hands on the floor, smiling in her direction.



Observation notes:

Ritchie looks back at Joanne and begins to rock his whole body back and forth and bang his hands consecutively on the ground (1). As he does this he laughs and smiles in Joanne's direction (2). Joanne asks, '*shall we find the other one?*'

Ritchie continues to laugh and smile at Joanne. She reaches to tickle his side and Ritchie falls down across her lap. Joanne continues to tickle Ritchie as he rolls on the floor next to her, burying his head in the carpet, laughing. '*What are you doing?*' Joanne asks twice with a smile and high-pitched tone. Ritchie looks up at Joanne and laughs (3).

Ritchie pulls Joanne with his hands down and she loses balance and begins to smile and tickle his tummy as they land. '*What are you doing?! You like it rough don't you!*' Ritchie laughs as she tickles his tummy (4). Ritchie smiles and laughs loudly.

VID

Joanne: '*He is pulling me and trying to get my attention. I think he knew that because I kept my hand there, that I am coming back... Ahhhh look, he's so funny. He is like that at home with mum and dad, they have said. Like, he likes to fight with his older brother, who is four. They have said to us that they are literally launching themselves at one another across the sofa and I was like yes, that happens a lot he likes to play rough and tumble at nursery a lot. Here, he has my undivided attention nearly... I love that, its lovely. Look at his little face.'*

Fig. 7.16 - Example of playful dialogic encounter.

This vignette illustrates Ritchie leading Joanne into a playful moment where Ritchie displays agency and confidence. Ritchie presents distinctly different facial expressions, a determined and relaxed face, creased around the edges, erratically moving between a smile and loose excitement. He is spirited and beaming, uniting physicality, vocalisation, and laughter with Joanne, who laughs along, is affectionate and responsive to Ritchie's initiations. Briefly, they fuse together in gaze, consolidating their connection and aligning to a positive interactional moment. Momentarily their two worlds collide, Ritchie devoted to entertaining Joanne, and Joanne receptive and occupied with Ritchie's actions.

Twice, Joanne must orientate her attention toward other children and Ritchie responds by reinstating

a connection to remind Joanne they are linked, physically drawing her back down to him on the floor where she instigates a tickling game once again.

The characterisation of voice corresponds with descriptions of Ritchie's manifestation of voice at home. His parents shared his playful and humorous presentation of voice at home often materialised during times with his father and brother. He frequently engaged in '*play and tumbles and wrestles and tickles to make him giggle...*' with his father (Parent interview 09/09/2019). Furthermore, Ritchie and his brother pursue each other through provocation and chasing games where physicality and vocalisations are common. Such playfulness transfers into the nursery space noticeably.

'He will chase him and get him to chase him. They've been doing that since when he first started crawling and now Richie has started to do it in nursery and has been trying to get his little buddies to do it here at nursery. He apparently runs up to them and then runs away himself like he doesn't quite know what to do!'

Ritchie used this tactic regularly to tease others and make his presence known seemingly relishing any response if it orientated the educator nearer to him. Staff were aware of his 'teasing', but their reactions to him were erratic, with some staff laughing and others reprimanding. In all observations, Ritchie visibly worked hard to engage adults into playful encounters, pursuing his distinct voicing pattern which, when adults were available, resulted in prolonged moments of physical contact and play resonating with his experiences at home.

Ritchie's ability to draw on his reserves from voicing encounters he has experienced in the home materialise significantly when he is engaged dialogically, in unity with one adult. It is significant that despite his apparent cautiousness to approach social encounters, when he does penetrate an adult space, positive adult responses are transformational to Ritchie's power of voice.

7.5.2 Taylor.

Taylor's voice in her home environment was portrayed by her mother as confident, independent, and loving. Tenets of her home voice were tentatively demonstrated across the field work, although not as visibly as other babies in the study. Familiar items from home including books and her muzzy were actively sought and embedded in Taylor's narrative. These recognisable artefacts reinforced

Taylor's identity and facilitated confidence to pursue adult contact and social encounters with others.

Lucy had noticed Taylor's movements and reflects:

'She is hovering around me with that book. She does that a lot. She just hovers around.'

As previously discussed, Taylor seems to lack confidence to penetrate adult spaces. During reflections, staff began to recognise Taylor's contact and attempts to engage them were concentrated around comfort and reassurance, Lucy goes on,

'...she really seems to need that comfort, doesn't she? One of us, actually sitting down and interacting with her. I guess that because we are all always walking around, maybe she doesn't quite know where to go...'

Dialogic encounters surfaced after prolonged commitment from Taylor to survey, join in from afar and watch how other babies occupied the adult's time. Taylor 'chattered' and made vocal advances into adult spaces, these were often mistimed or very subtle. Figure 7.16 captures a sudden advance of a physical movement combined with vocalisation 'bird' which followed on from observing of Lucy's engagement with others. As Lucy reacts, Taylor's confidence strengthens, and a short verbal exchange follows, assimilating gestural communication and touch. An accompanying vignette can be viewed in Appendix 24.

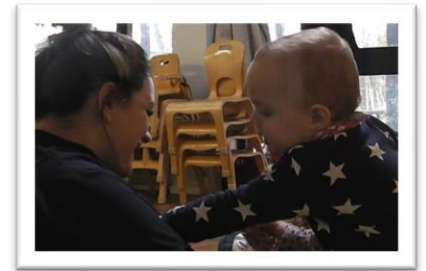


Fig.7.17

Little in the way of playfulness materialised without the support of an adult close by. Taylor's focus remained on exploration of artefacts independently (Figure 7.18), sometimes associating herself with established play episodes but rarely instigating lively moments of contact. Her mother communicated



Fig.7.18

solitary and stopped if anyone approached.

that at home with her cousin, she will *'actually sit down and play for longer, like a farm with the animals, she will bang them on the floor and makes them roar and things, so she does really play.'* (Parent interview, 03/12/2019). Evidence of her attempting to interact with small world toys was documented during the field work, however this remained

Joanne reflects that without an adult guiding her, Taylor lacks confidence to be playful; *'when I leave her, she doesn't know what to do with herself'*. Instances where play becomes overcrowded or noisy, Taylor regulated her experience by moving herself out of the play frame. This action indicates emotional maturity on one level, whilst her confidence and participation in social groups remained emergent. A quieter home life may attribute to this characteristic of voice although confidence to engage in spirited moments of physical play seem absent, even with adult support in the nursery.

7.5.3 Yolanda.

It is notable Yolanda's experiences in the home centralised around close consistent time within her family unit, her mother citing she 'rarely' needed to call 'as they were always together'. Moments of isolation in the setting found Yolanda struggling to engage modes of voice loud enough to be heard against environmental noise. It is revealing her mother admitted Yolanda always had company in the family home, stating she only 'calls' for her sister and rarely cries. Experiencing solitude, even momentarily, Yolanda searched the room, engaging brief patterning of communication before advancing to call and cry out, orienting in adult direction. Rapid increase of crying advances her voice patterning as a last resort to intentionally elicit attention from the adults. With other adults, Yolanda would break contact more readily, disengaging to search the room for Lucy. In contrast, connected with Lucy, Yolanda exhibited interconnected, playful, and intense characteristics of voice, to which Lucy would respond.



*'Yolanda begins to hum into Lucy's shoulder, increasing in volume.
Lucy repeats the noise, and Yolanda responds again.'*

Observation 15L 18/11/2019

Fig. 7.19

Several episodes of rich dialogic encounter were documented between Yolanda and Lucy. Dialogue between the pair embodying Yolanda, enlivening her presence, evident in the way she uses interconnected movements and vocalisations. Simultaneously they mimic one another and build upon previous playful and tender encounters. Further analysis revealed these playful tenets of voice materialise in close connection with Clare, as Yolanda increased in confidence over time.

Figure 7.20 characterise moments of tender, rhythmic, synchronous movement interspersed with laughter and imitation, appeared responsive and mutually enjoyable. Through these moments, a vision of Yolanda enveloped within the family unit emerges. Confident and cheerful leading the adult through discourse, with agency.


<p>Date: 25/11/2019</p>
<p>Context of observational excerpt:</p> <p>Clare and Yolanda have been interacting for over 2 minutes. They are alone on the carpet. Another staff member from preschool has popped into the room and is sat just behind the dyad, she is intermittently talking to Clare and calling Yolanda's name.</p>

<p>Observation notes:</p> <p>Yolanda is occupied with the watch Clare has attached to her tabard. She fiddles with it and hums. Clare helps her to access the watch and hums back. Yolanda flits her eye gaze between Clare and watch, smiling as she joins Clare's gaze. Clare responds by smiling and laughing, Yolanda mimics this. The dialogue and movement of hands and manipulation of the watch continues for over 4 minutes and 50 seconds. When the other staff member calls Yolanda's name she briefly orients her gaze behind her before returning to Clare's gaze.</p>
<p>VID</p> <p>Clare: <i>It's a nice feeling. It just felt like something very simple and really silly. Like, there was no equipment, well apart from my watch. No toys, no nothing and she seemed like she wanted to just talk, and I talked back, and that was it!</i></p>

Fig. 7.20 Representative example of dialogic encounter – at ease

Clare's narrative characterises the episode as 'simple and silly' underplaying the significance of this event for Yolanda, although she acknowledged it as a 'breakthrough moment' signifying the encounter as mutual and reciprocal. Straightforward, uncomplicated interaction is embodied here, together they are playful and receptive to one another, familiar territory for Yolanda who builds on her voicing encounters with Lucy and family.

7.5.4 Summary of section.

The purpose of this section was to examine the narratives shared by the parents in a bid to gather a richer portrayal of each baby's voicing intentions in the home. Framed via the adult's voice, it cannot be entirely reliable, but it does offer insight into the child's character and offers opportunity to construct greater meaning behind the babies' voicing encounters. Distinctly, Ritchie and Yolanda's voices manifest confidently in response to close, consistent, and responsive interactions with the same adults. Strikingly, Taylor's voice remains emergent; sudden buds of confidence are interlaced with uncertainty and caution, which contrasts with her mother's description. That said, the vignettes presented across this section indicate that strands of children's experiences in the home do materialise in the voices they cultivate in nursery. Home experiences support babies participate and seek a new identity in new surroundings. In summary, faced with a new environment babies will seek familiar encounters, moments of closeness and playfulness, which allude to their home life. In time, and with the right adults, they do find confidence in voice and strategies to establish a presence in social encounters.

7.6 Research Question Four - In what ways do educators respond to infant voices in the setting?

Across the research period, educators at Little Birdies were consistent in the strategies engaged to respond to individual baby's initiation but unpredictable as to the frequency of these responses. Section 7.2 portrays aspects which may have contributed to these infrequencies, from the perspective of the staff. This section further explores and examines these elements by elucidating educator responses documented during the field work. Specific responses captured through observational data are illuminated across this section, presented as vignettes to 'bring to life' moments between educator and baby.

Encouragingly educators endeavoured to differentiate interactions between individual babies, during sustained one-to-one interaction. It is testament to the staff involved that they worked hard to differentiate their encounters with each baby while maintaining supervisory and organisational responsibilities. However, moments where babies were suspended within hurried practices, educator engagement levels were notably indiscriminate, comprising calling names across the room, or redirection tactics. A handful of distinct approaches were consistently observed over six months but varied between educators, with the staff team configuration altering the variance across these

reactions. Consequently, the babies' experiences of adult responsiveness were inconsistent. As a result, the babies were observed orienting themselves toward educators throughout each day and appeared receptive to any initiation from the adults and subsequently worked hard to sustain these moments when they materialised.

As with previous sections in this chapter, I endeavour to draw out the most salient aspects of educator engagement, to represent the practices witnessed. It is near impossible to generalise the responses documented, however, there were emerging commonalities which can contribute awareness of the 'typical' responses which may transpire in a baby room like Little Birdies.

7.6.1 Playful responsiveness.

Moments of close encounter between baby and staff documented playful responses from staff, embodying affectionate touch and laughter which are exemplified in Figures 7.16, 7.19 and 7.20.



Figure 7.21 provides an illustrative example of rich moments of shared attention playfully characterised between educators and babies. This image is taken from 22 minutes of footage where Ritchie and Clare engage a continual whole-body experience, shifting between touch,

Fig. 7.21 and interconnected dialogue. Emergence of an animated face and relaxed expression combines a flowing stream of hand gestures and a subtle rise of connected utterance, which is also replicated in Figure 7.16 between Ritchie and Joanne. As other children attempt to join them and Clare orients her attention away from Ritchie, his movements intensify to retain possession and control of the situation. Figure 7.21 shows how Ritchie creatively dominates Clare's attention and subsequently, Clare has no choice but to orient her gaze to Ritchie and remain in the dialogic space with him a little longer before focussing on other children.

Ritchie's agentic disposition thrived in connected moments of intersubjective exchange with adults. For all children, these moments 'drew them out' into the nursery space revealing their playful humour and relational perception. Moreover, playful adult responses seemed to instil confidence and validate their presence resulting in increased interconnectedness in voice patterning.

7.6.2. Affectionate touch.

Figure 7.22 draws attention to how closeness and responsiveness can be achieved in a busy setting during moments of slowed practice. Lucy orients her whole self to Yolanda, engaged and immersed in a moment of contact.

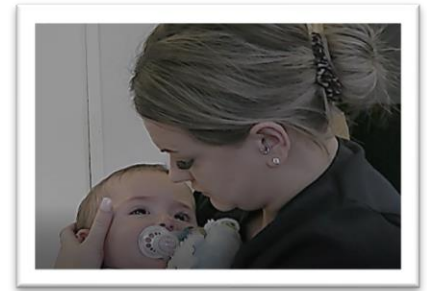


Fig.7.22

Her response to Yolanda's initiations attunes and affirms Yolanda's existence.

Yolanda and Lucy have formed an exclusive dialogic space through body contact and emotional connection. Like Joanne and Ritchie's encounter detailed in Figure. 7.16, the recurrent animated, tactile response from the adult acts as a cue for the babies to extend their dialogue. Clare reflects on her rationale for engaging tactile modes of connection through her voiced response:

'I think there is just something special about the extra contact with them being able to feel that you are actually 'there' with them.'

Fig.7.23



These communication facets materialise when educators are not distracted, remained static, and absorbed 'in the moment'. Adult motive is orientated and focussed on the baby, these short segments capturing the baby's whole bodies energised and brightened in response to adult attentiveness. Tactile communication results in animated reaction and is closely attributed to interconnected babbling and prolonged attention.

Sustained adult attention appeared to validate the babies' presence in the setting. In unity, the dialogue that unfolds is bounded together by simultaneous body movements and vocalisation. Each partner dominating the other's attention, attuning to and being receptive to the other. Moments of slowed, shared attention, in contrast to activity encircling them.

7.6.3. Redirection of attention.

Occasions where voice initiations misaligned with those of the adults, observations documented staff attempting to redirect the babies' initiations with directive speech or use of comfort objects. Younger babies like Yolanda had their voice initiations diverted with comforters and dummies. Examples from Taylor's case powerfully illustrate how she was partially redirected away from adults with her muslin. The muslin offered security, she drew strength from it, frequently sniffing and rubbing it over her face.



Fig.7.24

The muslin is her companion, a connection to something or someone familiar and reassuring.

'We just seem to hand her the muzzy and maybe on reflection she wanted a cuddle with me and the muzzy with a book for a couple of minutes.'

Joanne

The muslin acts as a tool to draw attention of adults into her space, as represented in Figure 7.4 and Appendix 21. Staff reflect that Taylor drops her muslin regularly around the setting, something staff reflect happens when she is *'feels secure'* or *'busy'*, which further reaffirms its significance.

Figure 7.25 shows Yolanda unsettled, sucking a dummy, and holding a toy truck given to her by Joanne when she was called away. The act of deflecting Yolanda's attention toward a toy does little to pacify her needs. She quickly flails her hands up and down, throwing the truck, increasing the volume of her cry, looking directly at the adults across the room. Joanne reacts and moves into comfort Yolanda. With this, sucking on the dummy intensifies and Joanne attempts to focus Yolanda's attention on a book.



Fig.7.25

Comparably, the observational excerpt below exemplifies the use of re-directional language in response to Ritchie's physical stream of propelling objects or running around the room.

'Beth is looking at one of the room displays and two other staff members are in the room (one is changing nappies) and the other is over by the sink area with her back to the room. Ritchie begins to rummage in the role play cupboard. He throws things forcefully onto the floor and then moves his body back to pick up a plastic spatula and holds it up in his right

hand, moves his body to upright and waves it in the air in the direction of the centre of the room. He then throws it from his hand and walks back across the room to the tuff spot which has dinosaurs in it. He picks one up and moves it carefully across to another space on the unit. He picks up another one and looks at it and then throws it on the floor. Beth turns around 'No Ritchie, we don't throw'. She walks over and takes his hand and leads him away from the dinosaurs and walks him back towards the role play area, letting go of his hand as she leads him in that direction.'

Observation 15R 20/01/2019

Conflicting with the demands of the adults in the setting was a regular occurrence for Ritchie and other children each day. Distraction techniques did not seem to pacify Ritchie's keenness to connect, he would immediately return to his voice patterning increasing its speed and infused provocation to provoke a reaction again. Ritchie's commitment remained undeterred, a bid to entangle himself with the adult world. His voice initiations, appear directed at the adult space, an effort to reorientate their attention toward him. It is possible Ritchie made a connection between past relational experiences where positive attention was experienced, although the attention received in this example does not appear to be affirmative.

There were occurrences when educators appeared distracted with other tasks as demonstrated across the dialogue shared in section 7.3. Emblematic of this was the following episode captured between Lucy and Ritchie depicted in Figure 7.26 and extended in Appendix 28.

On this occasion, Lucy consciously sought to direct Ritchie to eat his lunch, meeting his basic care needs. His occupation with eating was viewed as opportunity for Lucy to fulfil her responsibility of completing paperwork. Taking time to reflect on this incident, Lucy alludes once again to the paradoxical path her and colleagues carefully navigate each day.

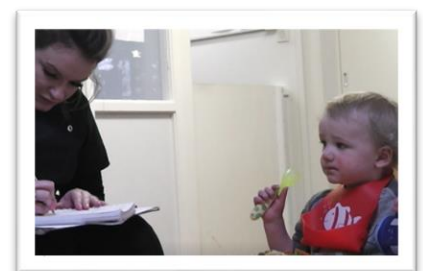


Fig.7.26

'I feel sad, because I am just sat there doing paperwork and he is just there eating. I remember that all the other girls were busy so I just thought I should do them'.

Lucy

Redirection tactics are employed as reasonable responses to babies' voice initiations. These strategies are viewed as customary practice which enabled staff to endure the daily grapple between organisational responsibilities and satisfying the children's needs. It stretches 'time', even momentarily, offering the babies a fleeting response to their cues whilst facilitating opportunity to accomplish routine tasks. It is in these moments where dominant motives of baby and adult collide most acutely. Babies' motives are dominated by their desire to initiate or retain connection from an adult, whereas adults remain obligated to respond to other babies crying nearby or keen to continue the ongoing tasks delegated by leaders. The babies were rarely fulfilled by the object or verbal response, essentially the redirection resulted in increased intensity of voicing intentions which directly affected pressure in the environment.

7.6.4 Summary of section.

In response to research question four, the findings presented above illuminate the reality for educators working in a baby room, like Little Birdies. The vignettes presented showcase moments of intimacy, warmth and playfulness which strongly contrast with bids to redirect babies' attention to increase time on other tasks. No, single response was the same but there were consistent features which materialised and were familiar to educator and baby alike. Together, passing shared relational moments, synergy and familiarity were constructed. A relationship emerged based upon previous moments together, although there were evident times where intentions misaligned, and educators grappled with a sense of duty and accountability to the child and business.

7.7 Concluding thoughts.

This chapter provides clear evidence of the voice patterns babies engage in nursery spaces and the responses educators employ during interactions with babies. Findings have been systematically drawn together to portray the interconnection between voice, cultural characteristics of space and educator responsivity. Vignettes presented give insight into how babies make their presence known in baby rooms and how these voicing intentions are closely intertwined with home relationships. Babies are represented as astute, highly competent individuals who work hard to shape their own environment and associate themselves with educators in a bid to increase their identity in nursery. Voice patterning is closely affiliated with dominant practices in the setting, which educators feel

directly affects their ability to respond or sustain interactions with the children. Emergent discoveries discussed across this chapter will be discussed in greater detail alongside literature in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Eight: Institution Two - Little Pandas

8.1 Introduction.

This chapter mirrors Chapter Seven in the way the reader is provided with a context of the nursery culture arising from data associated with research question five prior to examining research questions one to four. As discussed at the start of Chapter Seven, this decision was ethically motivated to offer the reader context to findings presented to minimise premature evaluation of educator response patterns depicted in research question four. Each section below contains a summary which draws together salient findings in relation to the individual research questions. Findings associated with the children's voices can be read in conjunction with the child profiles presented in Appendix 29.

8.2 An Early Years Educator perspective of the culture at Little Pandas.

This section of the chapter examines **Research Question Five - Do educators think the culture of the wider nursery environment influences their interactions with babies - and if so, in what way?** from the perspective of staff based at Little Pandas.

Engaging with the process of Video Interaction Dialogue at Little Pandas was challenging from the outset due to staff configuration and frequent staff absence. Several diarised meetings were cancelled at short notice by Zainab or Stacey citing it was 'just not possible' for them to take place. One issue that arose was how staff were just unable to be released from the room for the dialogues to take place, and in the end, several had to take place in the sleep room, adjacent to the main activity room to maintain ratio levels.

Partway through the field work, two of the four educator participants resigned from Little Pandas meaning the VID process for these educators was incomplete. Despite this, they agreed for their narratives to remain in the study, and their voices have still been captured in the subsequent dialogue shared herein.

Combining Video Interaction Dialogues and other data denoted early on that the Little Pandas baby room was high pressured and staff found the fulfilling the babies' demands exhausting. Configuration of the baby room environment appeared to create a constant movement between the four small rooms, driven by the babies' own movements or the staff moving babies in and out of activities

across the unit. This continuous transference of bodies and activity resulted in few sustained moments of one-to-one interaction materialising. The room leader identified the only time the babies were experienced one-to-one interaction with educators was during nappy changing periods.

One issue that arose early in the Video Interaction Dialogue process was that staff viewed the video footage via a deficit lens, despite the clips being framed within the core values of the VID framework. This was not limited to one educator, but all four involved. The dialogic experience required greater sensitivity and reassurance from the researcher to reframe video footage and support educators to acknowledge the babies' voice and recognise moments of positive practice. It was made clear from the outset that the purpose of the dialogic encounter was to focus on the baby first and educator second, nevertheless, staff immediately drew out their own oversights in practice rather than the babies' reactions. On reflection, I felt this insinuated a lot about the type of culture they were working within. Casual comments such as 'well I know the standard expected here' or 'that's how Zainab likes it to be', were interspersed in dialogue. Additionally, several comments captured during observations and field notes echoed a normalised culture of very high standard of operation. There was an undulating consciousness that there were high standards driven by the senior management team which should not be challenged. Nevertheless, the courage of the staff team to engage in the research process should be noted and across the dialogues, they showed a growing sense of empowerment which offered opportunity to evolve practice, their professional contributions and reframe the voices of the babies.

Themes arising from reflective dialogue with staff were categorised as the following:

- **Maintaining excellence**
- **Ratios and overwhelming demands of the children**
- **Temporal dimensions of practice**

8.2.1 Maintaining Excellence.

'I do that for my children, and I want parents to know I do it for theirs. It drives my practice. I know the standards expected here. I got cross last night...I saw the chairs and tables stacked and I was appalled. I spent a week cleaning them off, so they were spotless, and

they were dirty again. They were covered in Weetabix and food. I'd go mad if my child had to sit on a chair like that'.

Alma

Underpinning all findings was a pressure to be outstanding and to uphold company standards of excellence. Not only did this materialise through staff reflective dialogue but across all observations and conversations with management.

Alma had worked at Little Pandas for several years and viewed herself as 'old school' and attained the role of modelling practice to younger staff members. In her dialogue a sense of intergenerational practice emerged, coupled with the expectations of high standards necessitated by senior management. A conflict is insinuated within her dialogue, with Alma's frustration at other staff members who appeared lackadaisical with their efforts to maintain cleanliness of nursery equipment. Framing her practice are her own experiences as a mother and grandmother which 'drives her practice'.

'Well, they are like my grandchildren, so I want them to have a security, comfort and they know they get that with me'.

Alma

Alma positions herself as a parent, acknowledging the quality of care she would expect to see and the responsibility to offer practice underpinned by her own principles. Several times across her dialogue, Alma comments how she likes to set an example to the 'younger members of the team'. She is driven by her own personal experiences which directly shapes her attention to detail and quality of practice for the babies she cares for.

Little Pandas baby room saw increased occupancy during the field work process. Several show rounds took place and in my first week, four new babies started their settling in process. As a result of this several early observations documented a lot of crying and unsettled behaviours. Sally reflected the pressure of settling the babies quickly as she knew more babies would be starting the following week.

'...it can be quite difficult, but they all get there in the end with just cuddles, and singing, get toys which are a good distraction'.

Sally

Implied here is the necessity to 'distract' or redirect attention to reduce episodes of crying and support the babies settling in swiftly. Identification of cuddles and singing as support strategies are a positive insight into the principles underpinning Sally's practice. Noteworthy was Sally's reflection that all babies in the room were first born which she felt directly impacted how the babies reacted to their experiences in the room.

'They are used to having quite a lot of attention. All the children in my room are first born so they are all used to just being one on one just with mum and dad...they must find it a bit strange not having that full on one on one, they are having to adapt and learn how to take turns'.

Sally

It is reasonable to consider Sally's awareness of the babies' limited social experiences influenced her emotional reaction during times where she felt overstretched or ineffective in her ability to support all the children's needs. Mindful of the babies' own perspectives surfaced in several conversations with Sally. She endeavoured to offer the babies a high quality, calm environment but when other practices dominated, she experienced emotions which she struggled to articulate. Her dialogues implied a sense of affirmation regarding the effectiveness of providing closeness and cuddles to each child as she grappled with the number of new children enrolling each week.

At the helm of practice was Zainab whose drive for excellence on the surface acted as a motivator for staff to offer high standards of care and education for all children. This high standard pervaded staff dialogue as Alma reflects on her rationale for setting up the sleep room:

'I set the beds out, they have to be set up in lines of four, that is how Zainab likes them'.

Alma

This remark connects with Alma's earlier consciousness of knowing 'the standards expected here' which influences how she performs in the setting. Additionally, Alma's words imply a conscientiousness in relation to her performance and a respect towards regulation from management in parallel with an endeavour to provide excellent care experiences for the children.

Impetus to increase occupancy and regain trust of parents permeated Zainab's presence, so much so that undulating pressure materialised, shaping how staff engage with one another and the children. As a centre of excellence, there were routine training sessions for other nursery staff from across Jolly Jungle to see outstanding practice in action. One of my research days coincided with such an event and although I chose not to film on that day, I carried out written observations and documented the following:

'Zainab pops her head around the door and the staff stop talking. She says, 'we will be down in 7 minutes' she smiles and closes the door. All the staff look between one another, Sally jumps up and says, 'let's clear this up and get the children out of the way so we can set up for the other activity'. Anna is picked up by Sally and carried through the door and placed on the carpet and handed a ball. Another staff member puts the CD player on, and Disney music starts to play...'

Observation 23LP 05/02/2020

A sense of anticipation filled the room, and staff movement embodied apprehension as they prepared the environment. As Zainab entered the room, she brought with her 8-10 adults who observed practice as Zainab talked through the environment and outstanding features underpinning the room. A new staff member was in the centre of the room blowing bubbles for the babies and latterly the same staff member disclosed there were extra staff in from other sites to support the success of the event. Significant during this period was the position of all staff members who were situated on the floor, with the babies. Animated dialogue and several activities were implemented, and the babies were oriented towards activities in small groups. I reflected how as soon as the tour had left staff members got back up and instigated nappy changes. Opening the door to the nappy changing area resulted in six children crawling into the space and I pondered in my field diaries if the babies had found the moment of intense engagement with staff overwhelming and unusual.

Dialogue with all staff established a common theme relating to 'teaching' the babies which was entangled with an implication of providing an 'education'. This shaped situations in the room, and reflections from staff and management regarding the effectiveness of planned for activities which were purposeful and educational. Observations documented episodes where educators were trying to 'teach' the babies independence and physical skills in addition to the planned tasks.

'One child (Alex⁸) was wandering around and raising hands to the adult with an added grizzle. The staff member looks at her and says, 'No, I'm not picking you up, you need to walk, your mummy obviously picks you up too much.' The adult walks away and Alex drops her hands but follows the adult.'

Observation 18A 29/01/2020

Staff pondered the effectiveness of activities and their preoccupation with taught skills,

'We are to cut and dry and move on too quickly to the next thing. We should try gradually to finish and end activities.'

Alma

Through the VID process and observing the babies' reaction and disengagement to activities, staff began to contemplate the intention of activities and how these were implemented. A striking contrast was Zainab's view staff in the baby unit 'rarely had anything planned for the children to do', rather they focussed on play and were disorganised with their time'. One conversation struck me as contradictory when she commented that she had some 'strong staff who supported the children's learning, but organisation was the key stating 'If they got that right, then everything else would fall into place.'

8.2.2 Ratios.

'I think we do try to spend time, but it can get quite hard, it gets busy, and the ratio is 1:3 so we can't spend it one-to-one. You do get a chance to, but not often I would say.'

Sally

A recurrent theme emerging from the VID process and other data was staff preoccupation with adult: child ratios. Practice adhered to ratios mandated within EYFS (DfE, 2021a) but participants cited they lacked opportunity to interact with the babies in their care. They felt over stretched and unable to sufficiently care for or interact for prolonged periods of time with individual children because there were so many children competing for their attention.

⁸ Not a participant

Sally's comments draw in several aspects which appear to be closely intertwined and epitomise the typical comments from staff across the field work. Here, Sally is reflective and honest, openly stating that time one on one with each baby is momentary and compromised by 'being busy'. Further dialogue with Sally did not draw out any further details regarding the frequency of these encounters. However, an early field site visit, documented Sally juggling two crying children, share with me *'see, I think the ratio in this room should be much less, how are we meant to cope with this?'* I asked her how this made her feel, her eyes welled up and she said *'stressed, but you know, what can you do?'* (Field Diary 02/09/2019).

Anecdotal comments relating to ratios, and the sheer numbers of children seeking closeness with adults captured during observations were a common occurrence. Several observations depict situations where staff were sharing their attention with up to eight babies at one time, despite other educators working in the same room. Typically, often these staff were preoccupied with organisational tasks such as preparing another room for meal or sleep times. As such, babies who had been occupying themselves independently would move into spaces where educators were leading activities such as singing or art activities with small groups of children which resulted in staff struggling to apportion attention across the group.

Reflective dialogue accentuated concerns regarding ratios and was further amplified by observational data and field diaries which captured my own reflections and emotion following days of heightened pressure in the setting.

'...you are trying to be a one-to-one and they all just want your attention. You feel like there is not enough of us to give them enough attention, and they all just pile over.'

Staff deployment occupied many conversations across the children and distracted educators from the babies' voice initiations. A frequent occurrence was sourcing lunch cover which remained a priority for the team. This was perhaps indicative of how the staff felt about being in the room for prolonged periods of time. The following vignette from a written observation taken during a busy sleep time gives insight into the nursery culture and underlying issues of organisation which shaped practice:

'Zainab walks down the stairs (you can hear her heels on the staircase) the staff look at one another and say 'oh, she's coming down'. She pokes her head through the door and again, speaks at a usual volume and smiles at the staff. Two staff look up and the other on the far side of the room keeps looking down. The cover staff member says, 'I need to go on lunch now, is there anyone who can take over?' the staff member in the far corner says, 'I should have gone on lunch 10 mins ago'. Zainab responds 'I've got 5 people in my office too, and the phone has not stopped all morning. It's busy today, I need to sort them out. It's frantic, let me sort this out and then I will sort something out for you, ok?' and she smiles at me and walks away.'

Observation 11A 16/10/2019

An emergent culture of culpability materialised in data, amidst a sense of resentment towards management and other colleagues who got to take a break first. Educator dialogue insinuated the number of babies to care for restricted their ability to 'be with' the children for sustained periods but the vignette above reveals deeper rifts within the organisational culture. Staff were keen to leave the room frequently, even when children were eating, they would briefly 'nip' next door to tidy or set up for the next activity. Consequently, the remaining staff would be left supervising too many babies and managing routine moments, which were often overlooked as potential opportunities for sustained interaction. Zainab's reaction and apparent unawareness of the unfolding situation documented above signifies a culture of avoidance and evasion. Avoiding the acknowledgment of crying babies and staff members desperate for a lunch break contributes to a culture where staff feel undervalued and invisible. In turn, these behaviours ripple down into the care practices adopted with the babies.

The sheer sense of not coping with the number of babies and individual needs was at times overwhelming to observe. Several visits I noted staff were stressed or fatigued, with at times, limited animation or enjoyment directed towards the babies. It directly conflicted the culture of productivity and proficiency portrayed in communal areas of the nursery.

Despite this, staff endeavoured to source moments of interaction with individual babies yet maintained the sheer number of babies bidding for their attention and jobs to do as overwhelming and stressful. Momentary interactions documented were at times, rich, but fleeting. Educators were adamant that ratios were contributing to difficult practice and increased day to day strain. A sense of

not being enough for the babies or having to abandon sustained encounters to regulate aspects of operational practice permeated through staff narratives and insinuated a culture of pressure which contributed towards weakened staff cohesion.

8.2.3 Temporal dimensions of practice.

'I just think that when it gets busy it is hard, someone might be trying to climb on something...so you have to get up and deal with it. There are a few of us, but if someone is busy doing nappies or busy in the other room then you must be the one to sort it out.'

Josie

Emerging from educator dialogue at Little Pandas was an overwhelming sense of rushing and 'being busy'. This was closely linked with discourse associated with the quantity of babies in the room and their diversity of needs, which is discussed in greater detail in section 8.4.2.

The vignette above highlights how Josie acknowledges a correlation between 'busyness' and practice becoming 'harder', the constant juggle of responding the children's active initiations whilst maintaining safety and interactions. Josie illuminates a sense of opposing priorities and interruptions that fragment practice. Colleagues attending to organisational tasks necessitates others to interrupt interactions with babies to swiftly respond to health and safety issues such as children falling over. Josie's dialogue indicates that feeling over stretched creates a culture of pressure that influences her own sense of satisfaction in her job.

Consciously accepting being 'busy' and having lots to do was commonplace and '*just the way it is*' dominated reflective dialogues. Educators remained particularly hesitant when asked in reflective dialogue how they felt about this 'busyness' and they seemed resolved infrequent moments of sustained interaction with one or two babies was normalised, unavoidable practice. Notable was the acceptance that to complete organisational tasks, babies had to be left and they would cry. Educator dialogue alluded to how crying was archetypal of working in the baby room, and other staff members working around the nursery would try to avoid covering in the room.

Adult movement in the room was frenetic, moving babies in and out of the smaller rooms which made up the unit or blocking the children's movements to prevent them accessing areas which were not ready. This distracted staff and resulted in practice which was fast paced and intensely mobile. A

field diary entry captures my own feeling about the rapidity and frequency of movement in the nursery space.

'There is a lot of transition and movement across the four rooms, I ponder on the impact this has on the children settling having to familiarise themselves with a new space every few minutes when they are lifted into a new room for snack, nappy, play, arts and crafts and sleep. Although it is a self-contained unit, a little like a house, there does not seem to be any 'settled' time in the rooms...'

Field diary 09/10/2019

Alma reflected on the speed of mealtimes and in turn, unravelled practices against her own values and beliefs:

'I think mealtimes are quite an important social time. It's quite an important time where you can sit, well, where you 'should be able' to sit and chat, like you do at home. So why is it not done here too...I suppose it is a busy time'.

Efficiency appeared to permeate every aspect of daily practice, so much so that during the VID process, Alma began to question its effectiveness for the babies and the purpose of mealtimes. The social element of eating together is overpowered by a need to move the children on to the next stage of the routine and get the babies settled to sleep. Nap times were also a space where speed materialised, which contradicted the atmosphere staff were aiming to create. Noise and adult conversation dominated sleep time, despite calming music being played and lights faded. Alma viewed two clips of sleep times, one where she was rubbing Nina's back hastily and another where she slowly stroked her head.

'There is a lot of noise going on, too much noise, we shouldn't be talking that loud, really...

I have changed my tempo, or maybe she's ready to settle. I am much slower now. She's settling. I am quite rocky at first.

I stroked her head slower than back. I am much calmer and smoother. Yeh, I never looked at this before. This kind of closeness doesn't happen, not even in nappy changes. It's nice to see'. Alma

Alma's comments illustrate how 'being busy' embodies physical movement and can override the purpose of routine moments for children. Through reflection, Alma recognises the connection between her own slowing bodily movements and offering an intimate dialogic moment for Nina which resulted in her falling asleep. In contrast, adult apprehension, and eagerness to settle the babies overshadowed the children's need to experience a calm, quiet and soothing environment. The physical apparatus to facilitate sleep time were implemented form of music, closed curtains, and soft bedding, yet cultural proficiency and adult centric conversation often dominated the atmosphere.

8.2.4 Summary of section.

This section considered emergent facets of culture and its influential role on nursery life. Drawing purposefully on findings from the VID process and field diaries, it aimed to examine the emergent principles which shaped how babies' voices are situated at Little Pandas.

What is significant in the findings above are the entangled nature of emergent cultural aspects of nursery life. Maintaining excellence appears to require efficiency and productivity which directly opposes the needs and desires of babies. Rapidly increasing occupancy in a baby room seems to hamper staff efforts to offer a calming and consistent environment for babies who are settling. Staff shared they endeavoured to deliver good quality practice, yet what characterises quality in baby room provision remains ambiguous and paradoxical. During the VID process, educators largely adopted a professional and guarded tone in dialogue, perhaps cautiously navigating the researcher's intentions or seeking to avert attention away from practices that were uncomfortable to view. A culture of pressure permeated dialogue, the inability to slow down and 'take stock' conflicted management desire for regulation and proficiency. Entangled within the expectations were educators' own personal beliefs of early childhood education which were rediscovered during reflections and began to challenge authoritative regulations.

8.3 The Babies.

This section intentionally draws attention to the voicing patterns of the three babies, Frank, Nina, and Anna who attend Little Pandas. The four remaining research questions act as a framework as vignettes present data with the aim to bring to life salient aspects of voice within the culture of Little Pandas. Aligning to the comprehensive data analysis process detailed in Chapter Five and the

structure of Chapter Seven, up to two vignette grids per child are purposefully included. Vignettes are purposefully interwoven alongside other data sets to depict a rich description of voice as it materialises. Additional vignettes are presented as appendices to elevate the images presented as part of this chapter.

8.3.1 Research Question one - What are the patterns of communication babies employ to express their voice in nursery provision?

In examining findings associated with research question one, the systematic and recurrent patterns of voice for each baby are presented. Each of the three babies presented voice and character uniquely, which was anticipated. Creative modes of voice, often accelerated in volume and presentation when adults were elsewhere. Voice initiations were directed toward adult spaces, finely interwoven between adult movement around the nursery spaces. Across the field work period, the babies successfully penetrated adult attention with vocal outbursts and mischievous actions which necessitated swift adult responses. It is important to note that each child had recently joined the setting, within 4 weeks of the research commencing, and all children had no siblings. As such, the findings presented acknowledge this and do not attempt to draw definitive conclusions surrounding the children's experiences but to illuminate their patterns of voice as they transpired during the field work.

8.3.2 Frank.

Frank was a vibrant presence in the setting from the outset. Described by the staff as 'funny and cheeky', Frank was an established personality, who educators felt 'wanders everywhere' and is into 'everything'. On the surface his pattern of voice materialised in humorous and playful tenets, cited by all educators as they reflected on interactions with him.

Date: 20/11/2019
Context of observational excerpt:
Chloe and Frank are playing a game of peekaboo through the window of the tepee. Julian is watching close by. An adult in behind the camera is comforting a child who is crying.

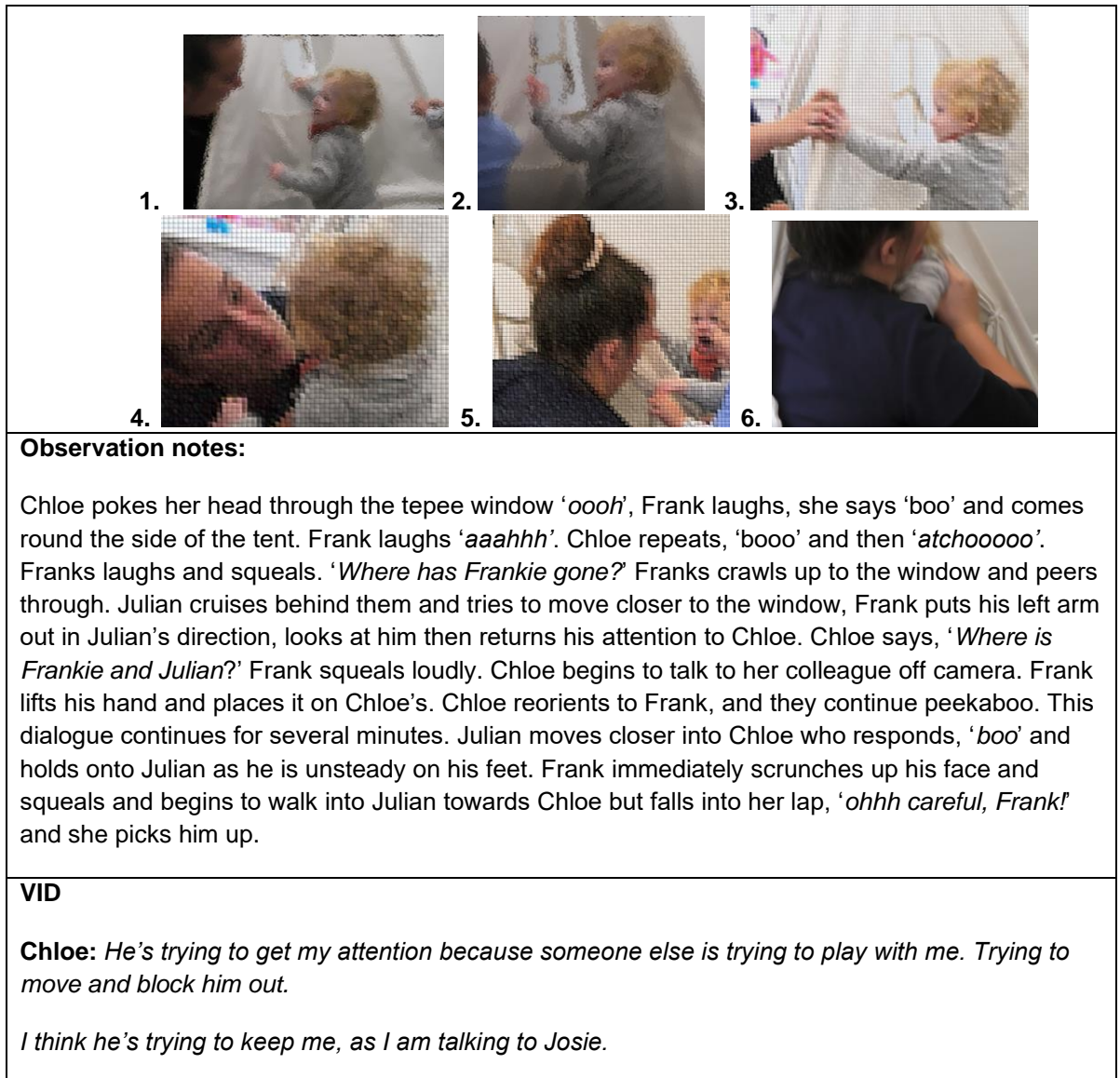


Fig.8.1 Representative example of Frank's typical voice patterning

Figure 8.1 typifies Frank's presence and engagement of voice across the setting space and presents a moment of playful interaction initiated by Frank and acknowledged and extended by Chloe. He often moved himself around the room hastily, weaving between the internal rooms where he frequently 'checked in' with adults looping their space and activity. His 'checking in' comprised of scrunching up his face into a smile and educators would often acknowledge Frank and he would either continue his journey or remain nearby, observing the adults until they responded to his initiations once again.

Staff reflected Frank's patterning included an independence to explore his surroundings and approached adults if he was ever in need.

'He is quite an independent child; he will come to you if he needs anything rather than waiting for the adult to come to him.'

Sally

His crawling was at times frenetic, although moments of calmer movement alighted at the books or puppet area. Typically, Frank was documented locating an entry point into educator's space, by waiting patiently and then responding quickly and vibrantly if they acknowledged him.



Fig.8.2

Figure 8.2 presents Frank instigating playful initiations to join in, shifting the adult attention from the baby to him. Closer attention during reflective dialogues and further analysis unravelled a complex undercurrent of voice. Behind his initial conviction of voice, Frank was an attuned observer, sensitive to the variations in the room, and specifically tuned into any child who appeared to be unsettled. His astute awareness of others materialised during moments where younger babies were engaging joint attention episodes with adults which saw Frank attempting to join.

Frank's sensitivity and attunedness to others is depicted in Figure 8.3 where he offers Anna a



comforting role in Josie's absence. Having been a close observer of Josie and Anna's interaction, Frank immediately responds to Anna's cries by placing a hand on her chair. Josie reflects his role,

Fig.8.3 *'As soon as I am there, he takes his hand off, like a protector'.* It is reasonable to

assume Frank was attempting to emulate a response like adult reactions he has witnessed before in a bid to pacify her emotions (Figure 8.3 and Appendix 31).

8.3.3 Anna.

Anna was the youngest baby involved in the study; therefore, it is reasonable to conclude any emergence of her voicing patterning was in response to all new situations, both at home and at Little Pandas. She was the youngest baby involved in the study and across this period saw her attendance pattern increase from one to five days per week. Anna was always less than a metre from an educator, her time revolved around being held, or contained within the bouncer chair. As she became more developmentally able, she was encouraged to experience 'tummy time' and explored toys in the nursery space, often with adult support.

Initial interpretation of footage indicated Anna reverted to crying rapidly and rarely engaged alternate modes of voice patterning. Further extensive analysis denoted subtle use of gaze following, physical movements such as gestural arm movements which materialised prior to crying. Figure 8.4 represents Anna's presence in the setting during a mealtime. Here she observes patiently and sucks rapidly on her dummy which was given to her as she was placed in the chair. Josie's intermittent attention toward her results in her patterning of voice materialising. Anna's banging and tapping gestures emerged across the setting, in different spaces and usually when an adult was close by, but not oriented toward her.

Anna was a highly attuned child, always staring and examining the movements of adults, including the researcher. The episode below does not sit in isolation to other observations documented, Anna's anticipation of adult interaction was always evident. Her eyebrows raised and sucking of a dummy increased or halted in anticipation of adult response. The interconnected elements of her voice were fast paced, often materialising in unison, or closely linked.

Date: 17/12/19

Context of observational excerpt:

Snack time, and all older children are located at the tables. Anna is in her bouncer chair on the floor, she had been crying but has been given her dummy and covered with a blanket by Josie, her key person. Josie is helping to settle the older children whilst putting on her plastic apron. The adults are moving around the room organising food and talking to each other.

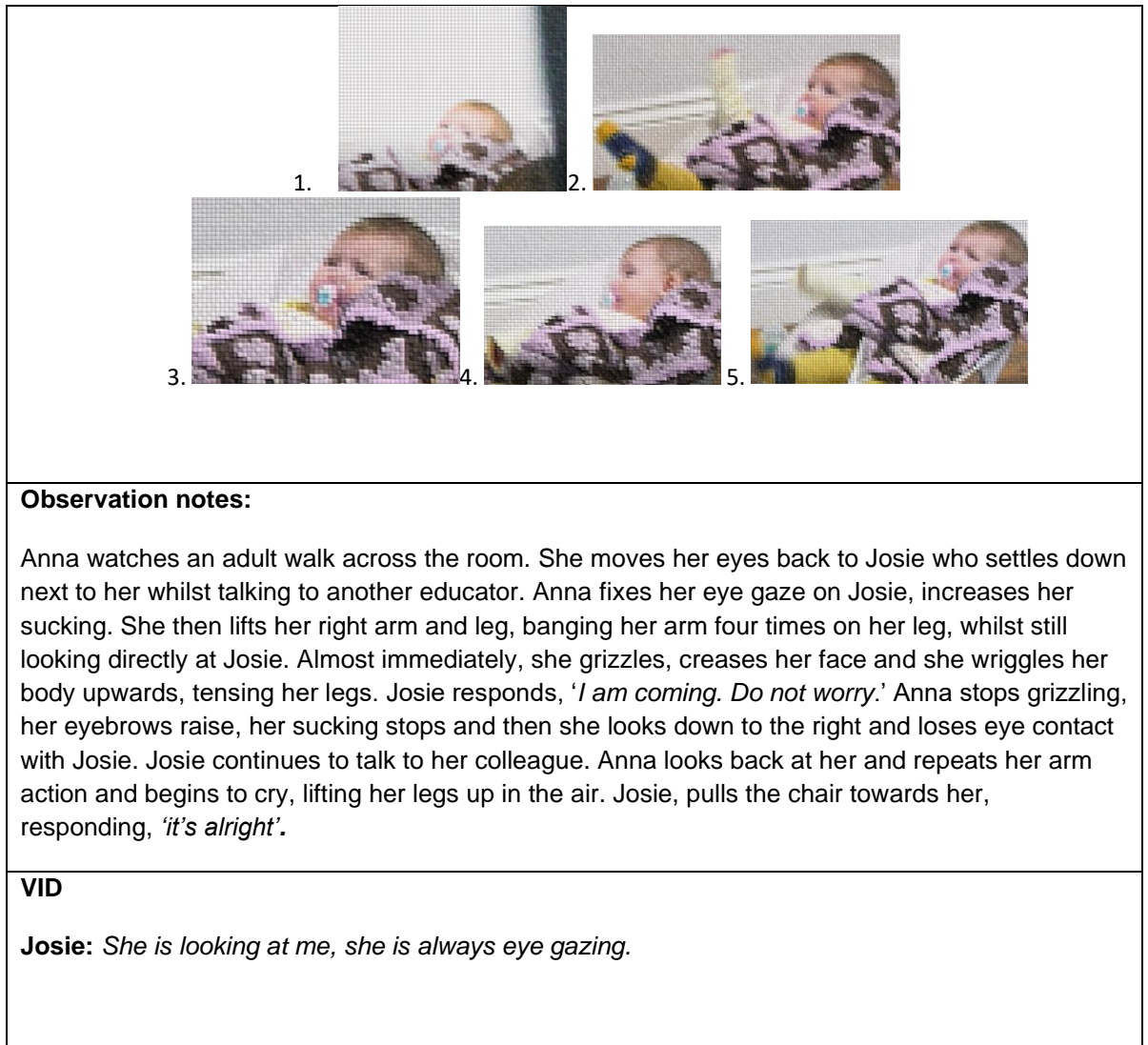
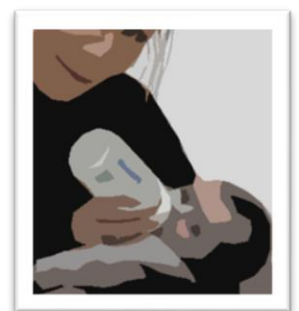


Fig.8.4 Representative sample of Anna's typical voice pattern

Obtaining eye gaze rarely resulted in a smile or animated response from Anna, rather she continued to stare for some time, until the adult moved into her space or spoke to her directly. Figure 8.5 shows her attentiveness to the researcher in the room, even after several months of research. Anna was intrigued and highly alert to my movements, so much so, several observations were postponed to respect ethical principles regarding her assent. Her caution and heightened sensitivity regarding adult activity dominated her time at the setting. Incidences where she went too long without her eye gaze being mutually received, forceful gestural cues of arm or leg 'stamps' were documented, including during nappy changes when educators looked away. Swift crying ensued if the latter voice initiations misaligned with adult activity. As such, the crying would always result in a rapid adult response which would usually pacify

Fig.8.5



Anna's needs. With Josie, she often combined subtle utterances and gestural initiations which developed in confidence over the field work.


'She's cooing and blowing raspberries, but she might be thinking, if you can't see me Jo, then you will see me flapping my arm around.'

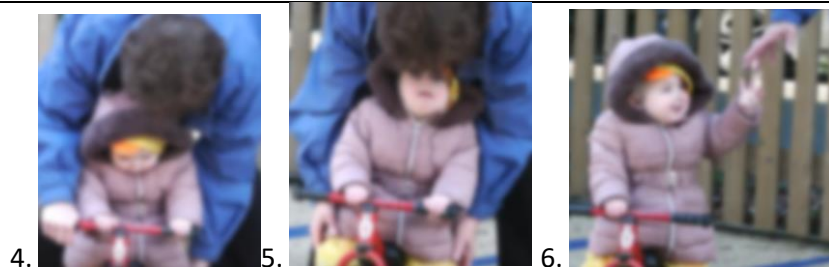
Josie

The examples selected illuminate Anna's developing intention of voice. Anna's voice characterises acceleration of patterning which transpires swiftly if children are in unfamiliar surroundings. The intentional physical engagement draws adults into responsive encounter are apparent in Anna's narrative. Agency and purposeful action underpinned Anna's voice patterning which established her place in the setting and a role within dialogic encounters with others.

8.3.4 Nina

Following a difficult settling in period comprising uncontrollable crying and struggling to adjust comfort from educators, Nina's pattern of voice became more subtle in the setting. Nina seemed to physically move into a space near to adults, but she resisted close contact, or prolonged physical contact with any of the staff members. Few facial expressions were documented, and she fostered a self-reliant presence, ostensibly occupied, but cautiously watching social activity nearby.

Date: 29/01/2020
Context of observational excerpt: Nina and some of her peers are in the garden. Staff members off camera are playing 'peepo' off camera. Nina watches the adult and two children from a bike she was lifted on to by an adult earlier in the session.




Observation notes:

A child off camera calls 'bub bal, bub, bal' Alma responds 'Last lot, Coen, because that's all I've got this week, I haven't got anymore. I haven't been to the shops to get some' With this dialogue, Nina orients her gaze to look at Alma. Alma blows the bubbles, and the child says 'yeh'. Nina watches the bubbles float past her and utters 'bub, bub' Alma continues to talk to Coen 'Go on then, go and chase them. Oh, look they are moving around that way now, they are moving all over this morning.'

Nina follows the bubble movement and utters 'ua, ua, bub, bub, ba'. Anna calls over to her 'You alright Ninny?' Nina responds 'bub, bub', quietly. Anna walks over to her and Nina points 'bub bub ba' Alma begins to move Nina's arms and legs to adjust her on the bike and situates herself behind the bike. She begins to push Nina along on the bike.

As Alma does this, Nina is repeating, 'bub, bub, ba, bub, bub, ba, bub, bub, ba'. Nina momentarily looks up at Alma, but repeats, this time with a point, 'bub, bub, ba'. Alma is talking to Nina, 'Come on, you can move like Frank, you hold on and I'll move your feet. That's it, come on.'

Alma bends down to move Nina's feet. Nina repeats 'bub, bub, ba' a little louder and Alma repeats, 'bubble, bubble.' Nina looks up directly at Alma and they momentarily meet in eye gaze. Alma responds, 'there you've got it now. Are you going to be alright on your own, now? I need to go and get a tissue for your nose.' Nina looks, and rapidly moves her left hand off the handles, reaching in Alma's direction, briefly grabbing her fingers and utters, 'Da, Da'.

Alma looks back, 'Yeh, I need a tissue, for your nose...for your nose (singing voice), for your nose'. Nina watches Alma as she moves across the garden to fetch a tissue. She returns, wipes her nose gently and then calls, 'anyone else need a tissue?' and Alma walks off to the other side of the garden.

VID

Alma: *She is looking at me, isn't she? Oh, and she's following me around.*

She is pushing for that interaction, isn't she? Her volume and sound changes as I get near.

Really watching this, she is just sitting on the bike to watch me, and bubbles and she doesn't really have any interest in going on the bike, but I don't see that. I think she wants to go on the bike, but she wants the bubbles.

Fig.8.6 Representative example of Nina's typical voice pattern

Figure 8.6 epitomises her attuned listening and engagement with established encounters involving other children and adults. Her voice initiations suspended into the dialogic space awaiting a response

from someone, although she lacked agency to breach the physical boundaries and enter adult or peer spaces. Depicting Nina's patience and surveillance of nursery activity simmering around her, she intermittently looked for the adult and observed her peers' activity. Recurrently, Nina would survey social dyads, looking on from afar, and would engage babbling or utterances to associate herself with the situation. As she shifted position, she would intermittently orient herself towards the adult, although this did not seem to occupy all her attention. Concurrently, she would explore the nursery space, travelling towards books and art materials, though frequently looked around and manoeuvring closer to adult spaces. Interconnected babbling would regularly materialise as part of her voicing mode, but it was not determined if this was intentionally aimed at the adults as it would often occur when she was holding toys or her comforter.

During reflections, educators realised Nina's resistance to confidently join established social encounters. Alma commented, '*I never realised how much she hangs back and waits*' and Chloe also noted '*Nina is more of a watcher*'. Alma goes onto correlate her response with a change in Nina's bodily reaction; '*I drew her in and her eyes light up.*'

Nina's physical repositioning towards adults in the room was often elusive and under the radar. Large, whole-body gestures occurred several times and alluded to agentic voice, a purposeful shift in location to remain in the adult's mind and retain the physical connection disturbed.

8.3.5. Summary of section.

Evidence portrayed in this section illustrates a picture of the three babies' emerging intention of voice at Little Birdies. Patterns of communication manifest independently and offer an insight into each child's emerging character and 'ways of being' at nursery. The subtleties of voice are strategic and purposefully act as a facilitator for developing an identity in the nursery space. Examined in the context of the nursery space and drawing from voices of those close to the children, a richer depiction of meaning emerges. A true sense of each baby intentionally casting voice cues transcends the environment and surfaces through the data.

8.4 Research Question Two - How are these patterns of communication used to initiate and sustain interactions with educators in a nursery environment?

Research question one presents the distinct voice patterning emerging for each baby at Little Pandas. The prominent use of vocalisations all three children engaged, albeit differentiated, as voice

mode are well defined. Analysis of observational footage indicated that moments of one-on-one attention were infrequent and fleeting, the adults often breaking the connection to move on elsewhere. As such, increased voice patterning as detailed in research question one was rapidly reinstated and combined with cries in a bid to redirect the adult attention. Significantly in moments where educators were unable to respond quickly to verbal initiations, crying ensued, intensifying quickly in parallel with a whole-body reaction of rapid movement. That said, over time, Frank and Nina developed creative and mischievous tenets of voice which frequently prompted adult reaction. In this section, examples of strategic voicing strategies are considered, and connections made across all data sets to make sense of how each baby initiated and sustained interactions with educators.

Extensive analysis revealed the following emergent themes which were consistent and recurrent in presentation over the research period:

- Vocalisations and Crying
- Humour and provocation
- The use of physical movement to provoke a response.

8.4.1 Vocalisations and Crying.

Loud vocalisations and crying were a trending characteristic of voice patterning across the research period at Little Pandas. Significantly, there were few observations where crying did not dominate the nursery space. It is important to note, however several new babies settled in each week, and consequently behaviours such as crying were viewed as the staff as normative in the process of settling into the baby room.

Figure 8.4 shows crying featured as core aspect of Anna's voice patterning, often accelerated as contact with adults was fractured. Significantly, Anna's parents shared she only cried in the home if she was tired which raises a question over her manifestation of voicing strategies in the nursery. Given that Anna is an only child, her experiences of being left alone are likely to be few and characteristics of the nursery space will contrast home. New noises, unfamiliar adults, older children as well as a larger physical space would create uncertainty for Anna. Josie reflected how Anna's crying materialised after a pattern of behaviour, which she often overlooked if she was elsewhere.

'Anna always has a way to get me to do something, either in touch, or gaze or sound if I am not there. It's like she's giving me a warning before she starts to cry.'

Josie

As Anna's key person, Josie tendered great insight into her intentional cues and associated a lack of adult response with crying and distress. Josie's consciousness of these behaviours resulted in her trying her best to react to Anna's repertoire but ultimately, she resolved that she also had to fulfil her other responsibilities. Consequently, Josie was mindful that Anna's needs were not always fully met, and crying was a usual occurrence for Anna and for many of the younger babies settling in.

Aside from crying, Frank and Nina developed a varying repertoire of vocalisations across the research period, which was developmentally anticipated. Despite a difficult settling in process, Nina presented interconnected babbling independently and in response to activity in the setting.

Subtle and nearly silent utterances are characterised in Figure 8.6. She is alone, activity orbits her, and she attentively responds to dialogue taking place between others nearby. As Alma moves towards her, Nina is responsive, yet these subtle utterances seem to be overlooked by Alma who is preoccupied with teaching Nina how to use the bicycle. Here we see adult priorities misaligning with Nina's intentional utterance. Nina's keenness to bridge the space between her and Alma, to join the bubbles activity and foster a moment of connection is overshadowed by well-meaning adult intentions.

Alma's reflection represents the reframing which materialised during the VID process for staff. Alma was unable to articulate why she had a preoccupation to move Nina on the bike. Despite this, she was able to reframe Nina's use of voice and identify the differentiation of voice that occurred when she joins Nina's dialogic space.

8.4.2 Humour.

Frank's skilful strategies to retain educators during playful and humorous interactional moments reveal themselves across all vignettes included in this chapter and the accompanying

appendices 30 and 32. Frank expertly combines physical initiations with



Fig.8.7

interconnected vocalisations and humour indicating that increased adult attention corresponds with increased complexity of voice patterning.

'Chloe pokes her head through the tepee window 'oooh', Frank laughs, she says 'boo' and comes round the side of the tent. Frank laughs 'aaahhh'. Chloe repeats, 'booo' and then 'atchooooo'. Franks laughs and squeals. 'Where has Frankie gone?' Franks crawls up to the window and peers through.'

Observation 12F 20/11/2020

Humorous moments show how Frank can build upon previously established moments with staff and initiate a two-way encounter comprising anticipation and humour. Other babies would often watch these moments unfold or even attempt to integrate themselves into shared attentional moments, sometimes with success. Towards the end of the research period and after moving up to the next room, Frank was documented emulating episodes of social play but with his peers, teasing and enticing them into playful moments.

In Figure 8.7, Chloe, dominates Frank's attention and Frank dominates her orientation. Attempts to retain Chloe's connection materialise when the dialogic moment is fractured (see Appendix 32). Frank combines purposeful looking and gestural declarations to preserve their interaction which accelerate to a forceful movement and cry



Fig.8.8

out to Chloe. This episode is one of a handful of playful and two-way interactions captured between Frank and staff and exemplifies a richness of voice, for both adult and baby when opportunities for these encounters arose. Conversely, Anna's humour and confidence materialised during moments of playfulness with Josie and continued to manifest as a tool to directed at getting Josie's attention when they were apart. A familiar shared game between Josie and Anna was blowing raspberries which started as a game of imitation but assembled a familiar dialogic encounter which increased in complexity (Figure 8.8). Josie contemplates their connection and Anna's skill at drawing her into her social space.

'She's blowing raspberries for me to turn my head to look at her again. She knows I will respond to her doing that. I say 'lovely' and turn back so she does it harder to get me again. She knows that's what we do!'

Closer scrutiny of video footage reveals Anna holds her entire body still in anticipation of Josie's reaction to her cue, and as she receives the anticipated response, her whole body reacts with excitement and laughter. Josie reflected in admiration how her own response to Anna resulted in an intensely physical and visceral reaction from Anna. This indicates the value of establishing synchronous interactions and the significance of these moments to both baby and educator.

8.4.3 The use of physical movement to provoke a response.

Figure 8.9 and Appendix 33 presents Frank during a snack time, recorded in the second week following Frank's transition into a new room. Frank is acutely tuned into Alma and her colleagues dialogue and seem preoccupied with their movements, despite having his snack from early in the observation. Recurrent climbing gradually intensifies following intermittent responses from the staff, culminating with Frank falling onto the floor before an adult relocates to support him. Throughout the episode staff call to him from afar, attempting to redirect his initiations. Each time, Frank is compliant, returning to sitting, yet instigating a movement as soon as adults reorient attention elsewhere.

Sharing this footage with Alma, she reflects an intention underlying Frank's initiation, citing his eagerness to be seen, heard and prominent in her activity. She acknowledges that each time she speaks, he responds even when her dialogue is generically aimed.



Fig.8.9

'Oh, he is responding to a general conversation. My comments are not directed at anyone in particular but he is tuned in and responding and talking.'

Frank works hard to join dialogic encounters with adults, combining vocal utterance with enthusiastic physicality. Alma, however, orients herself across several children and focusses on making the mealtime successful which dominated her attention. On reflection, she contends the efficiency of the situation may not have been as successful for the babies as she intended.

'Snack time should be social, but it's not a very social time. The only interaction they have got is themselves, not the adults.'

Alma

Later in the video clip another child at the table (Nina) begins to stand and replicate Frank's behaviours. Alma ponders how Nina has recognised that Frank is receiving a response from the adults, and by mimicking Frank indicates she is seeking a similar response. Further reflection uncovers a greater insight into all the children, *'Actually, all the children are looking at where we are'*. Alma contemplates the snack time process and begins to question how positive the experience is for Frank and all the other babies. She moves towards a realisation that there was limited interaction between any adult and baby, she and the staff fostering a directive tone, talking 'at the children' rather than 'with them'.

This episode points towards greater issue for babies and the staff in baby rooms where the alignment of educator tasks directly conflicts children's desire and need to be feel connected. Frank's physical initiation of voice are recognisable facets of all baby and toddler rooms. Moments of seemingly 'challenging behaviours' directly contradicting the adult's priorities. Babies seek adults as an anchor to support mealtime engagement whereas adults oscillate between organisation and momentary dialogue with the children. Crucially, what this episode represents is the connection between close, dialogic encounters, and babies feeling a sense of visibility in nursery spaces.

8.4.4 Summary of section.

Research question two was designed to generate findings associated with the agency babies have in social spaces. The narrative that unfolds across this section shows the creative, intentional patterning babies employ to initiate contact with adults in the nursery. Crucially if the connection they secured is broken or disjointed, babies appeared to manifest an intensification of voice. There were very few incidences where voice amplification did not transpire, all babies appeared to be dominated by securing connections with the adults and were forthright in the ways they achieved this.

8.5 Research Question Three - How do the observed patterns of communication in nursery relate to parent's descriptions of patterns of interactions in the home?

Analysis of data from Little Pandas identified parental descriptions of babies' voice did not consistently correlate with voice patterns documented in the nursery. While Frank occupied a playful character, aligning parental accounts, this did not always materialise in close connection with educators. Neither Nina or Anna's voice characterised in accordance with their parent's narratives, appearing restricted and interchangeably exhibited. It is important to note that all three children were first born with no siblings. All lived with two parents and had some social contact with extended family and friends with young children. Below, findings drawing from parent descriptions and observations in the field are considered.

8.5.1 Frank.

Frank's parents described his character 'very happy, he has always been smiley'. They characterise his patterns of communication to be highly physical, stating that prior to 6 months old, he was excitable, kicking his legs frantically during interactions which they felt was rewarding and promoted lots of energised interactions together. Both parents comment Frank seemed to always 'want to get moving' and was interested in social situations from a very early age. While Frank's verbal communication patterns were continually developing, they noted that recently, Frank seeks them out by taking their hand to lead them towards his interests and shouts out for 'Mumma'. His parents' comment,



Fig.8.10

'He definitely isn't fazed by busy environments. The whole nursery experience has been very happy and easy for us...He is definitely very confident and not fazed by being around lots of other children...I think he loves being centre of attention...'

Parent interview 10/10/2019

Frank was noticeably energetic in nursery, recorded several times pursuing group activities and adult attention with vigour and interest. Notable however, was his observant and interested disposition, always taking time to watch before approaching an activity. Frank's parents offered descriptions of

his humour transpiring in inopportune and inappropriate social moments such as laughing and screaming in a quiet library. In the setting, Frank shows interest in nursery activity, busying himself with watching and noticing interactions taking place between adults and other children. Frank is perceptive and tuned into noisy activities, including singing sessions and play comprising chasing and peek-a-boo. He appears less confident in the garden area and watches adult movement intently.

Figure 8.10 illustrates Frank moving to join an established singing activity. Strategic physical orientation combined with gestures towards the adult indicates his motivation to associate himself with the group. Physical animation unfolds in response to Sally greeting him and he extends to a clear verbal utterance in return. Sally reflects how Frank shows greater interest and engagement than the other children, which unconsciously shapes her responsivity towards him. This display of interconnected utterance and physicality, along with Fig. 8.1 presents Frank's voice in accordance with the parental descriptions of his voice.

While he displayed animated physicality, for much of his nursery time, his voice did manifest with caution and sensitivity, something his parents had not indicated in dialogue. This materialised tangibly during mealtimes (Figure 8.9) where his habits misaligned with educator expectations.

'Recently we have got rid of the highchair and have been feeding him at a little chair and table or just about and about wherever he is. He eats so much more if he is not confined to the highchair. We found when he is in the highchair, he is angry and rebelling. Now, he will wander around and come back for more when he wants...'

Parent interview 10/10/2019

Connecting the video footage and insight into Frank's mealtime experiences in the home gives greater understanding of his voice. The staff were unaware of these changes at home, therefore assimilating Frank's mealtime expectations will always result in a conflict of intentions. That said, it is still reasonable to acknowledge Frank's deliberate and coherent patterning of voice to coax Alma into a dialogic encounter.

8.5.2 Anna.

Anna was described by her mother as very energetic and excitable, characteristics she felt were matched by Anna's key person, Josie. Although she was described as rarely crying, in recent weeks, Anna's mother notes how she has become quite frustrated, moving into crying fits more frequently than before, resisting being put into her buggy, car seat or any place where she is restricted, attributing this to her independent character and 'knowing what she likes'.

Anna settled at Little Pandas 'unexpectedly beautifully', reportedly not crying although was unanimated and 'not fussed' when collected. Anna's parents ascribed this to her not really understanding what was going on as she was so young.

Typically, at Little Pandas, Anna exhibited a restrained yet highly alert characterisation of voice, watching Josie's movements closely, and exhibiting distinct arm and leg 'bangs' to orient attention towards her. This aligns with parent reflections,

'Matt (Dad) mentioned the other she was raising one hand with fingers splayed and I didn't think anything of it. He interpreted it as her calling for attention. She doesn't cry an awful lot, only when she is tired or having her nappy change.'

Parent Interview 12/02/2020



Contrary to her mother's account, in nursery Anna displayed arbitrary cries and frantic body movements regularly, apparent when left unattended in the bouncer chair for too long, or when Josie went out of the view. Moments of animation did emerge, and unfolded at inopportune moments or following a bottle feed and were often led by Josie, initiating a raspberry or tickling game, to

Fig.8.11 which Anna responded. There were several moments where Anna appeared distracted with activity in the room, breaking eye contact (Figure 8.11), only to return a few seconds later. Josie felt Anna played games with her and fostered a sense of control in their emerging relationship. Anna received more one-to-one interaction than other babies at Little Pandas, enjoying time with Josie, but struggling to adjust without her nearby. While moments of exploration of toys

were documented, these were typically recorded when Josie was within reaching distance and could react quickly if Anna became unsettled.

Midway through the study, Josie resigned from Little Pandas which meant Anna was allocated a new key person. This coincided with Anna's increase in mobility and as such, her voicing endeavours altered substantially. While she resorted to frequent crying in the initial weeks following Josie's departure, she began to assert confidence in movement around the setting which meant she



Fig.8.12

targeted certain adults. Once near to them she would activate her arm banging, often with a toy in hand and look directly at the adult (usually, Sally) and call 'uh'. If she received no response, she quickly reinstated loud cries, that oriented Sally to respond and pick her up (Figure 8.12). Much of the final few weeks of footage documents Anna being held by adults as they moved around the nursery completing task-based activities. Despite this, her parents were told she remained 'smiley' in the setting and was 'fine' without Josie.

8.5.3 Nina.

Nina's characterisation of voice was described by her parents as '*cheeky*', and '*very loving*'. While she was described in her early months as a calm soul, in recent weeks her confidence and vocalisation increased, notably frequently babbling to herself at home. Outside of Little Pandas, Nina enjoys closeness with others, stating how much she '*loves a cuddle*' as well as physically '*bucking up*' to sit near to her parents



Fig.8.13

to share stories and songs. Nina's parents say she finds humour in a lot of things and will run off smiling if they tell her off. Figure 8.15 depicts a humorous provocation led by Nina, but this was not consistently documented during the field work period. Only a handful of observations captured Nina smiling, opting to remain cautiously inquisitive rather than fostering humorous or physically active interactions with educators. At Little Pandas, Nina displaying interconnected babbling regularly as part of her voice patterning. Her fluency of voice was documented physically and verbally, documented several times threading her presence into established dialogue from afar. Nina frequently projected vocal utterances across the nursery space,

albeit these were seldom noticed by the adults. Several observations captured an obvious disconnect between her motives and adult orientation.

Nina's parents shared she is vocal and is inquisitive and likes to be around others, though she will stand back and watch as something new is introduced (Figure 8.13).



Fig.8.14

It could be interpreted through her 'bub bub' utterance represented in Figure 8.6 that Nina seeks to join the bubbles activity, responding to Alma's earlier dialogue though lacking in confidence to move into the space. This episode also highlights adult and child intentions collide in everyday practices. Nina was lifted on the tricycle by a passing adult, and there she remained, unable to get herself off or move forward. Instead, she watched activity unfold from afar, communicating interest via her subtle voice acts. Her immobility is seen by Alma, who overlooks the delicate voicing, as interest in the bike. To the outside observer, Nina's interest in the bike was not apparent, her voice acts communicating her interest in the bubbles and Alma's interaction with another child.

Tenets of Nina seeking a loving closeness through voice acts were documented during routine moments including sleep times. Typically, during daily activities, Nina appeared to avoid prolonged moments of closeness with the staff. However, to settle during sleep times, Nina would babble and gurgle to settle herself, though often asked to quieten down by educators. Figure 8.14 illustrates how Nina remains closely attuned to Alma's movements, actively repositioning her whole body to remain close to Alma. It is only through reflection that Alma recognises the undulating voice act communicated by Nina.

'She's lost that contact with me; she's come right up to me to turn round to see me... It's that moment I take my hand off her, she's moving towards me'. (Appendix 34)

Notably, Nina was not recorded cuddling any staff member during the field work, opting to travel around the nursery room, occupying herself with books and watching others. Nina's parents shared they felt she had developed a bond with Alma, which is demonstrated as she seeks closeness to Alma at sleep times (Figure. 8.14 and Appendix 34), While Alma and Nina were recorded regularly in dialogue, this remained in some way restricted and limited in physical closeness, as if there was an

invisible barrier between them. Alma remained attentive to Nina's needs, such as wiping noses and taking her to activities, but a level of synchronicity and natural unfolding of affection seemed absent. It is difficult to determine definitive reasons for this, but it is likely to be a combination of Nina's adjustment to the social surroundings and Alma's preoccupation with other responsibilities driving an element of detachment from the children.

8.5.4 Summary of section.

Research question three intentionally sought to gain an understanding of how babies voice acts materialise within the home environment and may support the emergence of voice in nursery settings. The three babies at Little Pandas were all first born, and their tenets of voice described as self-assured and confident by parents. While aspects of home voice were noted, typically these were fleeting moments of confidence, lacking assurance, and arbitrarily authored. Descriptions shared by parents did not always closely correspond with evidence documented during the field work. Frank was the only child who displayed confidence in voice and worked hard to ensure her remained a focus of the educator's attention. Nina and Anna's voice patterns were notably disjointed and although oriented towards adults, these rarely corresponded with parental descriptions. Both children appeared uncertain of their surroundings, displaying a combination of subtle and arbitrary voice acts to establish themselves in nursery. Moments of close encounter with educators were limited for all children, documenting larger group times characteristically over one-to-one interaction. Therefore, it could be argued that opportunities to develop confidence of voice were insufficient and subsequently the children were working hard to develop coherence and confidence in voice patterns in unfamiliar surroundings, without the familiarity of home to reassure and strengthen their efforts.

8.6 Research Question Four - In what ways do educators respond to babies' voices in the setting?

Voice initiations were directed coherently into adult spaces and often instigated responses from the educators. Over the research period, emergent commonalities materialised, though many responses documented were sporadic and fleeting. Significant was the variance between the reactions each child received, very few received a consistent response to their initiations, even during intimate moments. Documenting moments of one-on-one social encounters was limited, but that is not to say these moments did not materialise on days outside of the field work.

Extensive analysis of all data sets found emerging themes associated with educator responses to the babies' voice initiations. These are determined as:

1. **Singing**
2. **Directive Language**
3. **Reassurance and Redirection of attention**

8.6.1 **Singing.**

'I think it is important bit of practice, it should be in every baby room, I think that it really helps them...Singing always settles them down. It is just something I have just tried, and it has always worked. I did it at my last nursery, they stop, look, listen, or might join in.'

Sally

Singing featured as a group activity, often led by Sally, who shared in her previous employment singing was central to practice. As a new room leader, she worked hard to role model to her team how singing could assist at Little Pandas, and she was documented engaging this as a natural strategy to respond to all babies. Planned group singing episodes provided rich engagement for some of the babies, with Sally, engaging babies' attention with the use of puppets and varied intonation.

Observations recorded Sally eliciting singing during times of heightened pressure, often when several babies were crying or noise levels in the room were high. Notably it was a 'go to' strategy when new babies were settling, and the room became unsettled.

'If you're happy and you're know it and wind the bobbin up and Tiny turtle' always cheers them up. I think I am modelling with the new staff. The singing has improved, and we've introduced bubbles and things too which helps as it can be an emotional time for them before lunchtime'.

Sally

Singing was adopted as a central pedagogical feature of nappy changing routines (Appendix 34). It was regularly documented, with an increase of its presence towards the end of the field work. Justifiably this aligned with Sally's increased influence on staff practice as she established herself as

a room leader. Over time other staff members engaged this strategy, often singing 'If you're happy and you know it' over the top of cries until the children calmed, although this intensified the situation before acting as a pacifying measure.

Systematic exploration of video footage with the staff, revealed they felt singing was an effective tool to use, although reflected very little on the babies' reactions to this in day-to-day conversation. Singing appeared to be a universal strategy which was not differentiated for individual children. Reflection drew out the subtle responses from the babies during nappy changes when singing was employed that the staff had not considered (Appendix 34).

'I think she is responding to what I am doing. She's looking at me, and she's babbling at me. She's giving me eye contact, obviously she is grabbing onto my glove too... I think I have always noticed that if you sing stuff, it just distracts them and it helps them.'

Sally

Sally views singing as a distraction technique to avoid the children's becoming unsettled, whereas it is reasonable to assume in this episode, Anna was attempting to draw Sally into a conversational moment. The indiscriminate engagement of singing often resulted in staff overlooking cues from the babies to engage conversation or prolonged interaction. Although the babies displayed some level of engagement during these encounters, they remained focussed on achieving eye gaze and retaining touch above responding to the melody of the songs during these routine encounters.

8.6.2 Directive Language.

A striking feature of practice at Little Pandas was the directive language employed by all the staff in response to the babies and their voice initiations. The tone of language and vocabulary appeared to focus on the babies, and practices encircling them maintaining organisation and control. Initially I noted this materialised during mealtimes but with closer analysis, it infiltrated all aspects of practice.



'Chloe puts Anna down and begins to move towards Nina, which in response, Nina partially smiles and sits down in the seat and then begins to bounce up and down staring and smiling directly at Chloe. 'Get down, you'll go bump', get down please Nina.'

(Observation extended in Appendix 36)

Fig.8.15

The above vignette depicts how creative voice initiations often resulted in adults responding with directive commands to manage the situation. Here (Figure 8.15), Nina playfully explores the bouncer chair, intermittently glancing to Chloe who is nearby with Anna. Chloe's immediate response attends to Nina's safety, which appears to be a catalyst for Nina to advance her actions and smile as Chloe approaches. Nina appears conscious of how her actions influence Chloe's response, changing her body language and facial expression as Chloe physically moved into her space to intervene. This episode highlights the multiple challenges educators face in baby rooms to maintain alert, responsive and accountable for children's safety whilst balancing the needs of more than one child.

Alma reflected on the interactions that materialised with babies at mealtimes, specifically Frank and Nina (See Figure 8.9) and observes,

'I haven't really said anything to them but telling them what to do and directing them. I don't think I have even spoken to Nina...pause...there is nothing natural about it'.

Mindfulness of how her dialogue affects the babies during this time shifts Alma's conceptualisation of snack time and the babies' contributions. Alma acknowledged the limited social engagement the children experienced, which directly conflicted her own beliefs which place socialisation at the core.

'...We are only telling them what to do, we are not having any conversations at all with them...'

It is reasonable to consider directive talk is adopted in spaces where regulation and control are crucial. If the babies respond and obey the directions, then situations such as mealtimes can assumed to be managed more effectively and efficiently.

8.6.3 Reassurance and Redirection of behaviour.

Several episodes of misalignment between adult and babies were documented during moments of hurried practice. Figure 8.16 (extended in Appendix 37) shows Josie using toys to redirect several children's attention away from Anna's feeding time. Anna's



Fig.8.16

interest in the children is interpreted by Josie as an opportunity to end the feed and relocate her to the bouncer chair. Anna's immediate crying receives reassurance that she is 'alright' despite displaying actions which indicate the opposite. Josie elicits a combination of reassurance strategies to calm Anna's distress including praise as her cries subside and affectionately touching and stroking her. Additionally, she amplifies the volume of the chair's music and bounces the chair with increased rigour. Her attempts to redirect Anna's crying with her cuddly 'Tigs' and her dummy are unsuccessful, and her reflections uncover her consciousness of using the comforter to support Anna.

'...It's like I give her Tigs and the dummy and I'm like 'You've just got to hold on a minute', you know?'

Josie

Repeating 'you're alright' several times (Appendix 37) could be indicative of Josie's own unconscious feelings, a sense of herself not feeling she is coping in this stressful moment, something to which her later reflective dialogue alludes. A disconnect between Josie and Anna becomes more apparent, with them both looking opposite ways and vocally



Fig.8.17

shutting down. Both resort to a quiet place of drawing from emotional reserves in a bid to move through the emotional encounter. Intermittent looks back at Josie seem to drive Anna to remain calm, akin to a game to bid for her eye gaze and connection once again. Josie, however, appears detached from Anna as she surveys the room although there remains a consciousness of the correlation between bodily contact and Anna's quietening.

Later the video footage captures reparation, and a healing of their dialogic moment (Figure. 8.17). An initiation of eye gaze is received from Josie who re-establishes their dialogic encounter. Their bond restoring through the engagement of toys, and a moment of joint attention and trust reemerging.

8.6.4 Summary of section.

Findings included in this section characterise the common educator responses documented across the field work at Little Pandas. Although the findings do not seek to generalise or represent all baby room interactions, episodes examined provide clear evidence to guide understanding of typical baby-educator responses. Examined in close connection with research question five, presented in section 8.2, highlight how cultural tenets of practice can assist interpretation of why these types of responses may manifest in baby room settings. Notable is the way educators at Little Pandas were conscientious and dedicated to every aspect of practice, from organisation to engaging playfully with babies.

8.7 Concluding thoughts.

Evidence examined in this chapter elucidates emergent voices of three babies enrolled at Little Pandas. Not dissimilar to Chapter Seven, findings have been intentionally drawn together across the research questions to portray in what ways babies engage patterns of voice to establish themselves within nursery life. Visceral moments of purposeful initiations were propelled into the environment and educators worked hard to acknowledge and respond. The examples included go some way towards illustrating the distinct practices which shaped the culture of the nursery and that, in turn altered how and if babies' initiations were received. Babies worked hard to establish their character against the backdrop of nursery life and educators work hard to balance responsibilities and expectations of both baby and nursery regulation.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

9.1 Introduction

This study sought to make visible the voices of babies through the examination of interactions that take place between babies and early childhood educators in nursery. Broadening awareness of how the voices of babies' manifest in nursery and the context in which they arise is crucial to understand more about how we might facilitate a responsive and sustained relational pedagogy for very young children. Whilst a growing body of literature has considered interactions between babies and educators in early childhood settings, few have considered how babies' voices are generated within dialogically bound social encounters (Degotardi and Han, 2022; Lawrence, 2022) or act as a source of participation-seeking during interactions. This study foregrounds babies' voices arguing the culture of nursery environments places demands on educators influencing how babies' voices can be responded to. As such the visibility of voice for the under twos is inadvertently marginalised and overlooked (Johansson and White, 2011).

My intention in this chapter is to centralise the experiences of six babies and share how their voices materialise within the time and space of nursery life. While the arguments presented seek to foreground the voices of a small sample of babies enrolled in early childhood settings in England, it is important to highlight my intention is not to make generalisations nor claim the stories of these babies represent those of all babies or all settings. This chapter orientates the reader's attention systematically through the five research questions which act as a framework for discussion. It brings together evidence to provide an extended discussion of findings, positioning the study in relation to relevant literature and theoretical concepts. Each question commences with an overview of findings, drawing from and extending the analysis presented across Chapters Seven and Eight, identifying how this study can contribute to wider knowledge and discourse surrounding the voices of babies accessing early childhood settings.

9.2 Research Question one - What are the patterns of communication babies employ to express their voice in nursery provision?

Babies are positioned in this thesis as innately sociable and driven to connect with others relationally in nursery (Stern, 2010; Trevarthen and Delafield Butt, 2017). Babies involved in this study exhibited distinct patterns of communication. My data suggests that these act as a bridge - a voice- to draw

them out into the social world of nursery as they seek connection with others. As ‘co-authors’ (Quiñones and Cooper, 2021) of their social world, babies engaged meaningful communication cues to reshape the outer environment. In line with previous studies, findings reveal voice manifests as a unique, multimodal coordinated pattern encompassing eye gaze, motor movements, facial expressions, and vocalisations (Stern, 2010; Trevarthen, 2015; 2017). Notably different in this study is the way coordinated acts of voice patterning are presented as a silent meandering of corporeal movements directed into adult spaces, coherently interlaced across the nursery environment. Voice acts were motivated towards generating a sense of identity and existence through adult reactions as they become accustomed to institutional practices (Hedegaard, 2008a, 2008b).

Babies adopted five distinct modes of voice which were consistently documented to be delicately threaded together across the nursery space. These were sequentially organised and acted as a ‘communication chain’ (White, 2016, p.24) linking invisibly to adults who unknowingly pass by the babies whilst diligently fulfilling daily responsibilities. Emerging delicately from the inner body, with distinct interplay of movement, voice acts materialised externally in a rapid and coordinated fashion.

1. Committed surveillance,
2. Facial expressions,
3. Physical movement in direction of eye gaze,
4. Engagement of external objects as a catalyst for response,
5. Sporadic vocalisations or crying*⁹.

It is not the intention here to examine all these modes individually. Rather, modes will be considered in wholeness across this chapter, respecting the origins of a cultural historical approach which offers scope to consider how babies’ interests and desires manifest in form of motivated action (Hedegaard and Fler 2013).

Although a growing body of research has examined the embodied narratives babies construct in response to early experiences (Trevarthen, *et al.* 2019, McGowan and Delafield-Butt 2022), few have extended studies to consider the intentionality behind narratives displayed in ‘out of home’ contexts. Examples presented in preceding Chapters Seven and Eight bring to life the coherent, intentional

⁹ Crying materialised in Little Pandas more frequently than at Little Birdies. Possible reasons for this will be considered within the discussion chapter.

'movement bundle' (Reddy 2012) babies elicit, revealing interconnected, controlled, sophisticated narratives which were consistently and strategically employed and intensified overtime. On the surface, these remain consistent with earlier research (Stern 2010; Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen 2015), but deeper analysis indicates they manifest with a subtle orientation into adult spaces and are concerned with redirecting adult attention towards the baby's activity. At all times, voice acts remained an undulating presence in the social space contrasting sharply with the dominant nursery practices and were often overlooked by busy adults. This is interesting because, even with little knowledge of the educators caring for them, babies remained preoccupied with obtaining and retaining the attention of adults. Not only does this reaffirm the importance of a sensitive and responsive workforce (Elfer *et al.* 2018, Cadima *et al.* 2020; Quiñones and Cooper, 2022), but emphasises babies are deliberate and determined to draw themselves into social activity with others to establish relationships in 'out of home' contexts.

While each baby authored distinguishable voice patterns, these systematically materialised with differing temporal qualities, sometimes slowly, at other times, momentarily. Analysis did not determine the cause of this differentiation but indicates there may be an association between surveillance of educator movement and momentary desire to propel themselves into view with greater self-assurance. Nonetheless, as self-generated narratives developed, increased complexity and 'spatiotemporal reach' subtly interlaced between the natural rhythm of everyday activity (Lefebvre, 2004; McGowan and Delafield-Butt's, 2022, p.2). Significantly, my data reveals babies authored their own rhythm of communication which conflicts the rhythm of nursery activity, presenting external challenges and mistimed interactions between baby and educator (see research question four and five). Notably, there was a distinct variance in the way older and younger babies progressed through their individual pattern of voice. Evidence revealed that, the younger the baby, the more rapid the patterning of voice sequence. For example, Yolanda and Anna moved through voice modes concurrently, amplifying crying as the main voice mode simultaneously with physical movement. In contrast, older, more mobile babies employed creative strategies physically moving into adult spaces to draw attention towards themselves. Additionally, findings note how babies with infrequent or irregular attendance patterns of less than two days per week (Taylor and Anna), seemed to present voice patterning with more subtlety but with haste, advancing to crying when preceding voice initiations were overlooked. Furthermore, Anna and Taylor were first born children,

with no siblings which may have contributed to the formation and intention of voice initiations, though this warrants further consideration in future studies. Common to all babies, however, were how subtle initiations expressed by the children appeared to get lost within daily rapidity of nursery life and, consequently, babies accelerate these communication patterns to include zealous behaviours and vocalisations which create a challenge for staff to manage (see research question 2 and 5).

The babies' external actions, seemed to indicate an acute sensitivity to the impact actions may have on the intended adults (Trevarthen and Reddy, 2007; Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt, 2017).

Anticipation of adult response resembled characteristics documented between parents and babies' intentional communication, including raised eyebrows, pauses in between voice acts and patient gazing (Trevarthen, 2015). Anticipation of educator response implies that babies' previous relational experiences bear influence on their expectation of new adults as they begin to form relationships outside of the family. Such vivid descriptions of babies' social anticipation of adults other than parents has scarcely been documented in literature. Therefore, this study presents original insight into babies' experiences in nursery and indicates their 'striking drive' towards socially connecting with adults who do show them affection and respond to their needs (Murray, 2014, p. 10-11).

To establish a relationship, through connectedness, one must seek an identity and forge links with those in the environment (Murray, 2014). Based on the evidence thus far, I would argue that babies are striving to affirm they exist as recognised members of the baby room. Their voice patterning is deeply rooted in the desire to connect or associate with others. It is engaged intentionally as a strategy to illuminate their presence and form a sense of participation and belonging in nursery through motive driven acts. In line with a cultural historical lens, pursuing adults presented as a meaningful activity to babies, strongly associated with their interests and desires and connected with motive orientation and emotions (Hedegaard and Fleeer 2008; Hedegaard, 2012). Bakhtin (1990, p.51) strengthens this, asserting the value of one's body can only be 'actualised' through the giving of 'his mother's love and the love of others around him'. My data further extends Bakhtin's position, illustrating how babies engage their bodies, drawing to the surface their inner desires to be seen as a distinct individual as they adjust to nursery life. Accordingly, variations in the orientation of babies' attention away from adults were rare, with momentary occupation with toys, before attempts to re-establish adult interest resurfaced, often engaging objects as a catalyst for intervention (see research question 2). The data strongly indicates babies were motivated to overcome externally driven

demands on the nursery staff and remained ambitious to connect and stay connected to adults, correlating with an emergent sense of belonging.

For a child to achieve a sense of belonging, they must feel connected to the people who care for them and the environment which they are positioned (Froebel, cited in Lilley 1967; Tronick, 2005). Achieving this comes to life through the examples presented in Chapters Seven and Eight that show the babies' aspiration to be seen by and connected to specific educators - little seemed to deter their determination to seek contact. Woodhouse and Brooker (2008, p.3) corroborate this view determining that a sense of belonging is relationally situated and is the 'glue that locates every individual...at a particular position in space, time and human society'. The babies in this study were driven to connect with educators and did so through strategic employment of communication patterns to make themselves known in the nursery environment. Consequently, the patterns of communication enacted are foundational for babies in establishing connectedness with others, acting as a voice to draw them out into the social space.

These findings offer compelling evidence to advocate how babies' voice acts play a significant role in establishing a sense of belonging in new social surroundings. Significantly, voice is intentionally and strategically employed to connect with others, drawing the child into the social world. Patterns of voice have been documented to be subtle and often silently enacted narrative but should be considered in wholeness, connecting each corporeal action as an intentional and meaningful act of communication. While voice presentation indicates babies' social proficiency and competency, it also highlights the vulnerability of that voice when formed against a busy landscape. Evidence points to a potential misalignment between enacted voice acts and the environment in which they materialise, revealing a disconnect between the rhythms of everyday nursery acts and rhythms of babies' communication. Very few studies have documented detailed descriptions of babies' patterns of communications, their voices in nursery. In this respect, this study offers an original contribution to initiate sector wide dialogue considering the optimal conditions required to position babies as co-authors (Quiñones and Cooper, 2021) contributing to baby room experiences.

9.3 Research Question Two - How are these patterns of communication used to initiate and sustain interactions with educators in a nursery environment?

Within this thesis I make the claim that the babies are engaging patterns of communication intentionally as a voice to connect with adults and forge an identity in the nursery. To date, very few scholarly contributions have documented babies' intentional efforts to initiate and sustain interactions with educators in early childhood settings (Vallotton, 2009; Jacobson and Degotardi, 2022). Intentional communication is seen to be goal directed, representative of one's desires, and closely connected to the subjectivity of the individual (Reddy, 1991; Vallotton, 2009). All babies were documented fostering closeness with educators through the engagement of strategic voice initiations to achieve this motive. Reddy (2012) proposes the concept of seeking attention should be positioned as an activity, which aligns with a cultural historical perspective with babies' movement activity as motivated to gain a response from another (Hedegaard, 2012). Episodes examined in Chapters Seven and Eight present vignettes of babies who are preoccupied with adult activity and appear to engage with their peers or play superficially and momentarily.

Much has been written about the significant role adults play in supporting young children's transition to nursery and the importance of fostering interactional moments as a natural tenet of pedagogical practice (Belsky *et al.* 2007; Degotardi and Pearson, 2014). Findings from this study endorse that rhetoric as babies' drive to maintain proximity to educators was striking, reflecting characteristic attachment behaviours associated with physical closeness and 'checking in' (Bowlby, 1968, 1973, Barnet, Hansen, Bailes, and Humphreys, 2022). A complex communication web remained interwoven within nursery activity; subtle tactile movements saw the babies reach out to connect with adults who sometimes seemed to remain unaware of the narrative beneath the surface of activity. One possibility lends itself to educators not wanting to see babies' expressions of voice as they had no capacity to respond to it (Menzies Lyth, 1988; Brace, 2020).

Organised patterns of voice advanced babies' existence into the nursery space seemingly motivated by the allure of a 'deep seated desire for connectedness' (Sumsion and Wong, 2011, p.37). Evidence of babies' commitment to be seen was consistent and unwavering across the data. Each baby worked hard to create an existence in the nursery space but consistently sought validation through pursuing eye contact and physical proximity with educators.

Modes of voice that materialised typically followed a systematic pattern as detailed in research question one. Distinctly different was the modification and complexity of such initiations, manifesting creatively and deliberately directed towards the adults in the room, if preceding voice efforts were responded to or overlooked. A correlation emerged between moments of infrequent or fragment closeness with an adult and the intensification of rapid voice patterning. Borelli (2007) speculates that babies desire intimacy and safety in social situations and, to achieve this, they are motivated to establish moments of intersubjectivity with another. A view consistently verified across research domains (Trevarthen, 2016; Sumsion and Wong 2011; McGowan and Delafield-Butt, 2021). Such notion increases our understanding of the children in this study as the babies were documented floating adrift within the milieu of nursery life, lingering closely near adults, anticipating opportunities to establish encounters that could manifest intersubjectively. I argue that if they were not concerned with adult attention, then voice patterning would dissipate or orientate towards peers or objects in the setting, and this was seldom recorded at either site.

Conversely, babies remained committed and resolute to attain connections with adults and drew from the following strategies to elicit greater impact on social surroundings.

- Babies engaged external objects as a catalyst for response from others.
- Touch acts as a connection for, and to sustain, contact with adults.
- Babies interspersed vocalisations, crying and self-propelling actions into adult spaces to draw attention to themselves.
- Babies engaged visceral movement into adult spaces when connection with adults was under threat.

There is not scope in this section to examine each mode in detail, but it will discuss how initiations played out strategically to initiate and sustain interactions with educators and seeks to act as a platform for continued sector wide discourse.

Our intentional actions need to be perceived by another who will elicit a response to give the action meaning. Without this, the action becomes meaningless (Reddy, 2012), invisible to the outer world, as the silent voice endeavours documented in research question one attest. This study has found that as active agents, babies' motives influence the actions they author (Hedegaard, 2012). Voice acts are composed in a serially organised way, underpinned with a concrete intention which has

roots in previous relational experiences (Trevvarthen, 2001; Murray, 2014; Delafield-Butt, 2018). Adults represented protection, closeness, and a sense of belonging within the dialogic space (Ahnert, et al. 2006) and babies endeavoured to make voice initiations a visible feature in the social space to be acknowledged by those around them. I suggest that over time, and with the support of other's reactions, they begin to learn to deconstruct and reconstruct voice acts, recognising they have potential to alter and be altered by external influences (Vygotsky, 1998; Vallotton, 2009). Without this, identity formation is inconsistently formed and moves into a space and time where voice acts are likely to become more unpredictable and intermittent. In essence, the formation of 'becoming' (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984) is interconnected with the babies' motive of voice being acknowledged and responded to by another, to be socialised with 'other'.

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou) ...The very being of man (both external and internal) is the deepest communion. To be means to communicate...To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself.

(Bakhtin 1984, p. 287)

Bakhtin alludes to the intent underpinning the babies' voice acts, to draw their inner desires outward into the nursery space, to be seen and acknowledged by the educators. Babies demonstrated a clear sense of self in the way they intentionally threaded their presence in the nursery space and consciously evolved voice initiations over time. Voice acts initiated and redirected adult attention towards themselves, though, these acts were context driven, reacting to, and advancing in complexity, driving towards moments of joint interaction with another (Reddy, 2003).

Emotions are conjoined within the act of realigning the adult's attention to communicate power and physical closeness with adults to other children (White, 2012; Hannikanen, 2015). In line with other studies (Murray, 2014; Trevvarthen, 2010; Hedegaard, 2012), my findings reveal babies were motivated to intentionally evolve their identity despite obvious external influences of other children and adults who appear to dominate adult's attention. Intentionally manoeuvring onto an adult's lap appeared to be entangled in seeking 'sensory proof of a self-existence' through sourcing an affective

social space that offers intimacy and responsivity (Froebel, cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 77; Hannikainen, 2015). It is reasonable to consider that when disconnected from educators, babies worked to author a new narrative to orient adult attention to secure a sense of togetherness and recognition for her self-other consciousness (Reddy, 2003). Voice utterance in this context is externally driven and located in previous experiences of closeness but concerned with impacting her own relational future (Bakhtin, 1981; Hedegaard, 2012).

Through the acts of touch babies preserved a connective link with adults, indicating their intentions and physical presence to sustain or initiate a social encounter, particularly if established interactions were ruptured externally. While there has been an increased interest in the role affectionate touch holds from adult driven communications (Barnett, 2005; Cekaite and Bergnehr 2018), to date, very little evidence of how and why babies instigate the use of touch as a stimulus for interaction has emerged. This study contributes to the discourse, postulating that touch forms an integral part of baby's voicing pattern; it appears to act as an externally visible voice act portraying the invisible sense of self-assurance which is deep rooted in their desire to connect with others, particularly adults who are special to them. All children in this study, no matter their age or stage of development augmented touch as a connective source of voice, reaching out into adult spaces and retaining a connection physically, particularly if their interaction was threatened. In this sense, educators were implicated to act and respond to the babies' advances (Bakhtin, 1993; De Vocht, 2015) as the exhibited voice act served to disrupt the flow of typical practice.

Babies sought creative strategies including the use of 'little tricks and funny movements' (Reddy, 2012, p.104) to attract and retain the attention of others before moving towards complex communicative modes. Varying between subtle touch, employment of external objects or physical movement onto or into adult spaces, voice acts were played outward to drive a response from adults which could lead to a moment of interaction. Visceral movements were not accidental but shaped in a coherent and deliberate manner to alter the adult's orientation to create a private dialogic space (Reddy, 2008; Cao, 2020). This finding resonates with Woodward *et al.* (2014) who affirm physical movements are not arbitrarily exhibited but structured intentionally to increase visibility in the adult's consciousness and activate response. For example, the act of self-propelling objects such as toys was typically recorded to be vigorously directed towards adult spaces, with babies seen to be pausing awaiting a response. It is thought communicative actions in infancy are goal directed yet

research has implied that babies under 12-month-olds only show rudimentary skills in the first year, with these increasing steadily up to the age of two years old (Woodward, 1998; Tomasello, 2008). Findings in this study appear to confirm that in naturalistic environments, babies' voice patterns calm once they have received the attention (goal) from adults, indicating they exhibit intentionality and distinct identification of 'objective self-consciousness' (Reddy, 2008, p. 125).

Short, fragmented vocalisations and crying episodes were documented to be strategically engaged as a pattern of communication. This was particularly acute for younger babies (under six months) and children with infrequent attendance patterns (less than two days per week). Typically, this initiation resulted in swift responses from educators, but similarly to life in the home, there were incidences where crying was prolonged when adults were occupied with other external demands. Crying is accepted to be a normal part of a baby's communication system, playing an important role in relationship forming and is frequently viewed to be normalised in early childhood settings (Möller *et al.* 2019; Quiñones and Cooper, 2022). However, crying for prolonged periods triggers a stress response that can lead to increased cortisol levels if the baby remains in a heightened state of stress (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). It is difficult to determine with certainty the reason for each baby's crying in this study as it was context dependant. Crying episodes were noted more frequently for babies who were first born with no siblings, under six months of age or attending the nursery for less than two days per week. Furthermore, it is possible that uncertainty relating to environmental factors including noise, unfamiliar people, conflicting demands, and staff response are plausible explanations for the regularity of crying as a strategic voice mode (Soltis, 2004), although this warrants further investigation. Regardless, crying appeared to be consistently exhibited following a trajectory of clear voice initiations such as prolonged looking and gestural movements in the adult's direction. It was also activated when educators were close by but moved away. In most cases, crying was a last resort for attention recurrently exhibited by younger babies intermixed with frantic body movements possibly to hasten adults' response when previous subtle facets of voice patterning were overlooked. Based on such evidence, this study emphasises the crucial role early childhood educators must adopt to be available, responsive, and attuned to babies outside of typical routine care moments, as these moments appear essential features of babies' positive day care experiences (Elfer, 2007, 2012; Page and Elfer, 2013; Bussey *et al.* 2021).

Bakhtin (1981) recognises how utterance of self are bound in a body of emotion and evidence emerging from this study endorses this belief. In general, the provocations documented point to babies demonstrating anticipatory behaviours, a way to dominate and remain present in adult vision. Babies appeared to be conscious of each voicing act would make an impact and afford retention of adult interaction. No matter how the adult responded to the child's advances, visible emotionally charged reactions ensued. This included, but not limited to, animated smiling and laughter if the adult responded enthusiastically or subdued facial expressions and a cry out if the educators orientated their attention elsewhere. At times, externally demanding situations including other children, practical responsibilities, and paperwork conflict the needs of educators and the babies (Hedegaard, 2020). I suggest babies experienced a sudden vulnerability when established connection with adults were interrupted or fragmented because of externally imposed demands. Therefore, engaging amplification of voice patterning through visceral movement not only increases possession of, and demand for adults to respond, but conversely sends a direct message to others in the space that they were in control and directing the social encounter (Hannikainen, 2015).

9.4 Research Question Three - How do the observed patterns of communication in nursery relate to parent's descriptions of patterns of interactions in the home?

This research question did not seek to compare the characterisation of voice between home and nursery care, but it did intentionally involve parents in the data generation to learn more about how babies engage their voice at home. To me, this was an integral aspect of the methodology resonating Winnicott's (1957) view of the seeing the baby in parallel with patterns of maternal care experienced and honouring Froebelian philosophy that parents are the first of foremost educators of the child and 'must be involved in children's learning' (Tovey, 2019, p.10). Including parental voices supports a greater understanding of how babies' voice is exhibited as they enter a nursery environment and aligns the principles of cultural historical theory examining the multiple perspectives of children's development (Hedegaard, 2008a). I do not seek to generalise, nor compare the baby's own narratives. However, there are incidences where discussion draws out certain aspects which may have wider implications for emergent practices and policy guiding baby room provision more generally.

While no family home will guarantee the quality nor quantity of adults available for care, the parents involved in this study indicated that contact levels with their babies was high and notably, four of the six babies were first born children with no siblings, which will be significant when considering how their voice would materialise in a home environment (Downey *et al.* 2015). Vivid descriptions of charismatic, energetic souls, confident of their place in the family home were shared in parental dialogue. Of note were parent comments sharing examples of interconnected vocalisations, laughter, and playfulness of their babies (Stern, 2009; Trevarthen, 2011). Insight into each baby's spirited character was shared tenderly by parents, reinforcing the necessity for responsive and loving home environments where babies can advance confidence and value in themselves (Trevarthen, 2016).

It became clear across this study, that babies entered nursery familiar with, and seeking dialogic interactions with adults and they struggled when they did not encounter this. Evidence denotes that misplaced and mis-attuned voice initiations do have a bearing on babies' confidence and emerging character in nursery. Data points to a connection between variables such as infrequent attendance patterns and the manifestation of accelerated patterns of voice with an absence of close dialogic interactions with familiar adults (Pinto *et al.* 2019).

Literature examined in Chapter Two highlights the prominence of intersubjective experiences between a parent and baby in the home environment and the correlation of such encounters to babies' long term social, emotional, and cognitive development (Shonkoff *et al.* 2015). Great emphasis has rightly been placed on this first relationship, as parents do 'command his whole field of vision - the sun which draws him out' into the social world (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p.78). Froebel's concept comes to life in the narrative shared by parents during the interview stage of this study revealing these babies joined nursery accustomed to an intensely loving, stable social environment in the home, persons with whom they are familiar and have confidence in will respond to their needs. From this, babies acclimatise to 'culturally valued social scripts' (White, 2013, p. 65) affording opportunity to shape their consciousness, to 'be granted legitimacy of being' who they are (Junefelt, 2009; Marjanovic-Shane, 2011, p.222). It is hoped that all babies experience positive, predictable patterns of adult response, so they can foster their own identity within the family 'chorus' before transitioning into the broader social world (Gratier and Trevarthen, 2007, p.169). These earliest experiences assert value and authenticity on the baby's emerging character materialises in response to the 'emotional-volitional tones of love' from another (Bakhtin, 1990, p.49-50).

The words of a loving human being are the first and most authoritative words about him; they are the words that for the first time determine his personality from outside, the word he comes to meet his indistinct inner sensation of himself, giving it form and a name in which, for the first time, he finds himself and becomes aware of himself as something.

(Bakhtin, 1990, p.49-50)

Sharing insight into early relationships, Bakhtin (1990) affords the view that babies enter the nursery with an already established sense of self, which will continue to evolve dialectically because of the demands in the nursery environment (Hedegaard, 2014). A cultural historical approach claims the individual and environment are connected in unity and responsive to one another (Vygotsky, 1998; Hedegaard, 2014). Therefore, adjusting to new social spaces will require babies to draw on relational experiences in the home. Joining out of home care leads to expansion of the babies' social relationships (McNally and Slutsky, 2017), a broadening of the social sky 'under which he grows up' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p.78). As such, babies will likely enter the nursery with an assumption that adults will respond in similar ways to their experiences at home and they will encounter familiar one-to-one interactions. Significantly, evidence in this study points to the nursery environment offering a quite different, interchangeable experience. Regular close, intimate, and responsive one-to-one interactions do not appear to be the reality for all babies enrolled in nursery care. This is something they struggled to adjust to, manifesting in accelerated, arbitrary movements and cries - an indication that they were not coping in the nursery environment. Such rapid and dysregulated voice expressions in response to the demands of nursery contrasted sharply with parental descriptions.

Without family, babies are suspended in an unfamiliar context where there are many adults, children, and unknown events. Confidence and identity established in the familial home is challenged by the unfamiliar, unpredictable environmental changes as babies adjust to nursery life. To navigate the external demands encountered, my observational data supports the claim the new modes of voice are constructed to adjust to the new demands placed on them in nursery and move through a process of 'neoformation' (Vygotsky, 1998; Hedegaard, 2009). Findings reveal that distressed crying exhibited as a last resort for babies who were, a) under 6 months of age, b) first born c) shorter attendance patterns, to draw an adult response, seeking closeness and intimacy accustomed to in the home. This raises questions over how babies transition into the new relationships as they join

nursery and, if current practices, including continuity of staff, (Pinto *et al.* 2019) inhibit opportunities for confidence in voice to materialise.

For some babies, crying assumed a regular mode of voice, differing from the parental descriptions shared. For example, Anna's mother disclosed she '*doesn't cry an awful lot, only when she is tired or having her nappy change*' which conflicted with findings that revealed Anna cried frequently in the setting, although this rarely occurred when she had her nappy changed at nursery. It is possible to conclude that experiencing a close and sustained interaction with her key person during changing times, in a quiet room, away from the main nursery environment was a familiar and comforting encounter. Nappy changes were one of the only occurrences where prolonged one-to-one interaction were recorded. While the nature of these events was variable between educators, notably, these one-to-one encounters rarely resulted in crying for any child, indicating the value and significance of affording quiet, calm one on one interactions to occur. Although crying was often pacified swiftly by staff responses (who worked hard to be responsive), the connection between responsive relational care and babies' cortisol levels, particularly of those babies attending nursery settings, is widely accepted (Sumner *et al.* 2010; Berry *et al.* 2016; Albers *et al.* 2016).

Evidence in this study reiterates previous findings published in the Baby Room Project (Goouch and Powell, 2015) that opportunities for one-on-one, dialogic encounters were irregularly established and a rare occurrence for some children. Educators openly acknowledged that babies received very little one-on-one time and struggled transitioning into nursery care and viewed this as normalised and accepted practice. This is an uncomfortable, problematic finding to report. Nonetheless, it reflects the data gathered across six months in two large early childhood settings which were compliant with current government directives (DfE, 2021a), maintaining mandated adult: child ratios. I discuss the issue of ratios in research question four, but it is pertinent to acknowledge the disparity between contact with adults in the home and nursery early on in discussion, to highlight that babies who do not receive regular one-to-one interaction will likely struggle to locate the voice confidence they use at home as described by parents.

Evidence indicates some babies lacked self-assurance to engage their voice and acclimatise to social surroundings. Observations documented babies displaying quiet, withdrawn behaviours, superficially bordering the edges of social activity, which directly contrasted parent's descriptions and

echoed descriptions of emptiness and 'being lost' recorded by Datler et al. (2010). Remarkably, though, such behaviours were interspersed with sudden surges of movement into adult spaces as if the babies reverted to tried and tested strategies used at home to 'come out of' themselves (Bertau, 2007; Bakhtin, 1986) and as if to 'test' whether educators would respond to them. In direct contrast, other babies appeared to pre-empt educator responses, consistently displaying creative, goal directed voice initiations. Rarely deterred, their body language anticipating joining joint attentional moments (Carpendale and Lewis, 2006). As such, this challenges the notion of fragility depicted by Datler *et al.* (2010) and McMullen (2010) and leads us to reposition some babies as more resilient in demanding or stressful situations than previously thought. Characters like Ritchie and Frank typified tenets of resilience by drawing on characteristics of home voicing encounters to challenge the social demands experienced as they adapt to life at nursery.

Further emphasising the conflicting social demands babies experience, a disconnect between home and nursery was illustrated through characterful voice modes which challenged staff during certain routine tasks. Frank's example of standing at mealtimes could easily be explained through parent dialogue revealing he did not sit down for snacks in the family home. Without this information, Frank was positioned in a conflicting situation where differing institutional demands transformed a familiar routine to the unfamiliar (Hedegaard, 2020) and staff were challenged and exasperated, framing his voice mode as defiant. It is here that I want to recommend early childhood settings need to reflect on the dialogue established with parents as they settle babies into a new setting. The types of questions and dialogue fostered between educators and families should focus on growing knowledge about how babies' voice acts might differ between home and nursery. In addition, early childhood educators should seek to learn more about how voice manifests in the home and must capture this as an integral aspect of the transition process. Current policy guidance emphasises trusting relationships between home and nursery as integral components for a positive transition into nursery for child and family (DfE, 2021a, DfE, 2021b, Early Education, 2021) and increasing educator understanding of voice narratives will strengthen the ways in which support can be offered as babies settle into nursery.

While opportunities for one-to-one interactions were rare, they were documented, and it was in these moments where babies' voice patterning resembled parental descriptions. This remained a consistent occurrence across both field sites, although it is important to note that fewer dialogic

interactions were documented at Little Pandas for reasons considered in research questions four and five. For some, positive characteristics of voice, akin to home descriptions, did not materialise at all, which is a more pressing and alarming finding for urgent sector wide reflection. Several observations unveiled an unpredictable narrative of voice comprising distressed and subdued initiations which sharply contrasted the contented descriptions imparted by parents. Only when babies were dialogically engaged with an educator, usually their key person, over a sustained period (see research question two and four), did humour, playfulness, and moment of intersubjectivity emerge (Trevarthen and Hubble, 1978; Trevarthen, 2004; Trevarthen 2011). Such encounters embodied unplanned, intersubjective episodes characterised by physical connection, emotional tenderness, responsiveness, and mutual respect, akin to parental descriptions that resonated tenets of Professional Love (Trevarthen, 1993, 1998; Page, 2011; Page and Elfer, 2013). Voices and bodies were mutually shared, positioned in relaxed and slower dialogue, entangled within the landscape of nursery life. These moments were uniquely individualised shared moments which built upon previous interactions, deepening threads of the educator: baby relationship.

Mitchelmore *et al.* (2017) consider the potentiality of such everyday moments unfolding amid practice, stating every interaction brings '*individual ways of being, thinking, and responding-to the interactional space, while drawing upon understandings of past experiences*' (94). In these passing moments, the babies construct a new understanding of themselves, building upon past encounters with educators, rooted in prior home experiences. A reframing of voice transcends with confidence, presenting intensity and interconnectedness resembling interactions they are familiar with in the home (Elfer, *et al.* 2012), yet different and redefined. Such interactions offer tenets of familiarity, intimacy, and the potentiality for transformation of voice and the formation of an identity in the setting. In essence, as relationships flourish, educators play an essential role as Froebel's sun (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p.78) drawing the baby's voice out in responsiveness to, and relationships with individual educators.

9.5 Research Question Four - In what ways do educators respond to babies' voices in the setting?

Determining the normative response patterns educators elicit in response to babies' voice initiations can strengthen findings emerging from this study and assist the sector in acquiring a greater

understanding of the complexity of adult: baby interactions. Rhetoric across early childhood research emphasises the connection between institutional practices (Menzie Lyth, 1988; Hopkins, 1988; Elfer *et al.* 2018; Brace, 2020), opportunity for interactions and how an individual reacts and responds to demands placed upon them (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014; Hedegaard, 2012). The level of importance placed on the role of adult and child relationships is situated in institutional principles which are thought to inform emerging practices (Vygotsky, 1998; Fler and Veresov, 2018). As a company, Jolly Jungle align with statutory guidance (DfE, 2021a) by promoting the centrality of relationships at the heart of their ethos. Dialogue with management reiterated this position. However, data gathered in both field sites pointed to a conflicting narrative where responses and interactions, the starting point for relational care, were compressed into momentary exchanges and educators' responses to babies' initiations irregular.

An abundance of cross-cultural research agrees that the way in which adults respond to and interact with babies and young children assume great importance to future social and cognitive outcomes have long been positioned as a pivotal feature of high-quality early education (Dalli *et al.* 2011) (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005; 2017; Moullin, Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2014). Adult responses have the potential to shape how a baby feels about themselves (Wittmer, 2008) and act as a motivator for communication (Trevarthen, 2005). Findings from this study reinforce this narrative, presenting distinct examples showing the influence adult responses have on babies' presentation of voice in nursery. Most profound is the way in which reactions encompassing smiles, playfulness and physical body connection act as a spark igniting (White, 2009) a whole-body reaction in babies and act as a stimulus to extend interaction. At all times babies were documented to be anticipatory of adults' responses and quick to act when any response was elicited. Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) report that by paying intuitive attention to baby's communicative advances, adults are guided by a baby's reactions how to respond, thus meaningful dialogue can be established. This raises questions regarding the time available in nursery environments for educators to orient attention to babies' voice acts and, more fundamentally, if educators carry a natural intuition to respond to babies in their care, or, if response patterns are entangled in cultural practices established in nursery provision.

Goodfellow, (2014, p. 209) affirms it is the responsibility of early educators to be present and establish 'relational and respectful' environments where babies can flourish. Bakhtin (1990; 1993)

supposes in dialogue, we are morally bound to respond to another's acts of answerability, positioning educators with significant accountability to be present and responsive to babies' voicing acts. Bakhtin (1990) frames this as a pedagogical process, a responsibility to attend to and foster dialogue with babies habitually. This study points to a manifestation of interchangeable responsivity to babies' voice patterning and an unpredictable adult presence in adult: baby interactions. Babies engaged voice acts to negotiate their way around externally placed demands as they adjust to new environments, which in turn, placed additional demands on educators who were caring for them. Strikingly, patterns of adult responses appeared deeply entangled with personal aspirations and external demands in the nursery environment which inhibited the relational characteristics of the nursery space. Deciphering what might be the cultural norms regarding expected patterns of educator: baby interactions and what drives responses was a priority during data analysis.

While this study does not set out to generalise findings or claim representation of all baby room provision, some emergent commonalities of how educators responded to babies did materialise. Typified responses were characterised as, playful responsiveness, affectionate touch, singing, reassurance and redirection, and use of directive language.

9.5.1 Playful responsiveness

Research advocating for babies to experience attentive and playful partners during dialogic encounters is extensive (Hakkarainen, 2010; Singer, 2013; Fleer, 2014). Most afford attention to playful moments within the family, although attention to such interactions in out of home care has increased attention in recent years (Shin, 2010; Trevarthen, 2011; Singer 2013). Findings from this study support the growing consensus that engaging in playful, responsive, and humorous interactions should underpin early childhood practices and, without this, babies struggle to adjust to their surroundings and source confidence of voice.

Playful responsivity offered the babies a window into dialogic encounters where together, adult and baby co-constructed a shared, private space. Once aligned, educator and baby co-construct a humorous narrative that gradually adopts a shared rhythm and a set of rules both appear to respect (Trevarthen, 2011). Acting playfully together offers a pleasurable, rewarding endeavour where adult and baby can obtain a mutual sense of freedom, overcoming the externally placed demands typically encountered within the ordinary world of the baby room (Singer, 2013). Essentially, responding in a

playful way validated each baby's existence, acknowledging their efforts to communicate, revealing to the child that they are appreciated and valued by another. Moreover, when intentions aligned together, they create a history as their relationship strengthens (Fleer, 2015). Communicating in synchronously creates a sense of togetherness, a shared cultural practice which can be returned to and consolidated over time.

The way educators position their own bodies coupled with animated facial expressions communicating their availability to babies is an important feature of 'seeing' voice (Payler, 2007; Singer et al. 2014). Babies typically elicited a whole-body reaction comprising interconnected voice narrative, complex vocalisations, movement, and laughter when adults oriented to them. Joined in a slower dialogue, a dynamic interplay between adult eye gaze, tactile gesture, playfulness, and vocalisations indicated to the baby they were central, and their voice privileged in that moment. As such, this accelerated bodily movements and verbalisations from the baby, their voice becoming more established and intentionally dialogic.

Bakhtin's (1990, p.49) explains,

...there is an equally profound difference between my inner experience of my own body and the recognition of its outer value by other people-my right to the loving acceptance or recognition of my exterior by others: this recognition or acceptance descends on me from others like a gift...

Adult responsivity did appear to offer babies a 'gift', a spark to ignite and extend interactions. Babies became excitable, animated, and displayed interconnected voice initiations. Bakhtin (1990, p. 90) described reactions from another as an act of validation through 'aesthetic love' that 'transposes the recipient of the gift to a new plane of existence'. Together adult and child founded ritualised interactions and a special kind of playfulness which was dialogically unique was portrayed in several documented episodes. In essence, babies, with the support of the adult progressed toward a new formation of multifaceted and interconnected voice patterning in response to educator advances.

9.5.2 Affectionate touch

Findings from this study highlight the significance of establishing physical connection through touch as a stimulus for interactional moments. Touch is critical for communication in infancy and embodies

tactile inter-corporeality leading to language rich moments and unfolding social relationships (Goodwin, 2017, p. 95). Research questions one and two detailed how touch formed an essential part of babies' voice repertoire and acts as a strategy to establish intimacy cues to adults when babies were seeking contact (Fleck and Chavajay, 2009).

While touch was not always documented to be adult initiated, typically engaged by babies first, it did naturally transcend educator response patterns and was frequently documented to be a primary feature of unfolding dialogic interactions. Several studies confirm that receiving touch from a caregiver activates positive emotions in most children and forms an essential component when establishing attachments with others (Bowlby, 1969; Pelaez-Nogueras *et al.* 1996). Evidence herein reinforces those conclusions, visibly bringing to life an intensity to babies' reactions when adults reciprocate corporeal communication cues. Moreover, distinguished in my findings is the way in which moments of sustained affectionate touch were documented in response to babies' voice initiatives and but were not a consistently natural aspect of practice activated by adults. Physical 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2002) were stimulated largely by the babies, seeking physical contact, without words. As adults responded, bodies were engaged in coordination and moved towards an intersubjective experience. An intimate dialogic space between adult and child was formed, boundaries established exclusively through interwoven movements. Embodied moments where bodies moved in harmony (Delafield-Butt, 2018) had a profound effect on babies' complexity of voice patterning and the unfolding dialogic engagement.

Educator physical response patterns were cultivated in various forms, taking on different contextual and temporal configurations. Affectionate touch (Cekaite and Bergnehr, 2018) was engaged as a strategy to retain regulation of the setting and symbolise a physical connection even if they were disconnected emotionally. Head rubs, light touches on the back and stroking were all recorded as a form of emotional connection to babies' cues, but were often passing acknowledgments of presence, as educators' orient attention toward external demands. Primarily, in this study, touch acted as a connective thread, interwoven between diverging lines of organisational practice and personal desire to sustain connection with one another. Babies' own response patterns were noticeably affected when adults connected with them tactility, activating vivid and animated dialogic movements. Russon (2014) speaks of sensorial experiences enlivening a sense of self in individuals, and I would agree

as babies' sense of self was awakened by adult touch which appeared deeply entangled in establishing a physical social connection with another.

Distinctly educators made connections between the timbre and speed of comforting touch, acknowledging how slowing movements to a calm tempo settled the children and influenced their behaviours. Comforting touch associates itself with caring embodied initiatives and offering babies a 'compresence' (Cekaite and Bergnehe, 2018, p.945) which are culturally and temporally dependent. Offering a responsive, tactile presence was central to constructing dialogic moments with babies and extended moments of interaction which were at risk of ending. Significantly, educators were conscious of the significance of touch but limited in moments where this was enacted or sustained. Reasons for this were not established in dialogue but it could be explained by tensions and anxiety concerning the appropriateness of touch in professional settings, which has influenced practices in recent years (Piper and Smith, 2013). Additionally, some alluded to sourcing time to be still and slow enough to foster moments of touch as a barrier to engaging these corporeal interactions. Nevertheless, staff did make a conscious effort to be tangibly close to the babies during routine moments such as sleep times, to indicate to babies that they were attentive to their needs. Principally, engaging touch recurrently as a characteristic of dialogic encounters has the potential to promote temporally enduring relationships which is essential to babies' wellbeing and development (Berghner and Cekaite, 2018). Establishing a physical and emotional presence enhanced connection with the babies and corresponds with findings from Page and Elfer (2013) who state physical and personal closeness is a necessary feature of emotionally attuned caregiving but raises inconsistencies as to the frequency of such incidences arising in practice. Establishing a physical connection with adults matters to babies and forms an essential feature of establishing sustained dialogic interactions. This study offers a measured insight into the influential role of touch as a dialogic construct. Findings emphasise its necessity as a vital component of pedagogy with babies.

9.5.3 Reassurance and redirection of attention

Across both field sites, redirection strategies and reassurance were interchangeably employed as typical educator responses to babies' voice initiations. Both techniques were seen as customary practices affording educators time to manage organisational responsibilities and pacifying the babies' demands for attention. Misalignment between baby and educator priorities was regularly

documented with educators citing they were overstretched and felt unable to support the needs and demands of all the babies. Verbal reassurances, including name calling, were enacted daily, particularly to younger babies isolated in bouncer chairs waiting for feeds or attention. In these moments, the rhythm of interactions was intermittent and reassurance talk acted as a mediator between adult and baby to extend their time apart. Redirection strategies were situationally sensitive, moving between an interplay of directive vocalisations along with physical movements akin to affectionate-controlling touch (Cekaite and Bergnehr, 2018) to regulate and guide babies away from situations should they be in danger. Artefacts including dummies and nearby toys were also employed to distract and extend time between interactions with babies but were seldom successful in pacifying babies' communications. This resulted in increased external demands on educators. Dummies have a contentious position in early childhood education, easily misused to inhibit and 'cut off' elicited communication in babies (Goldschmied and Selleck, 2004). Parents disclosed dummies were only used as part of a sleep routine in the home, while documented evidence in this study points to their regular usage as a strategy to calm and distract babies voice initiations until individual educators were available for a more genuine response. Largely, dummies and other toys, such as comforters were employed to extend time for educators to fulfil other responsibilities.

During moments where adults were unable to respond physically and emotionally to babies' advances, educators called the baby's name, offering words of reassurance across the room. These acts of consolation were a functional, accepted pedagogical feature alerting babies that they remained held in mind despite the restriction on a close, contingent response in that moment (Winnicott, 1957; Pellegrino and Scopesi, 1990). From the babies' perspective, this perhaps offered some gratification that their pattern of communication had been acknowledged but elicited a cue in response to the adult to advance their voice initiation.

Educator responses appeared to acknowledge babies' unique ways of participation (Bakhtin, 1993) but stimulated further voice elicitation to extend dialogue. In this sense, pacifying babies' communication is partially rooted in the moral and ethical responsibility to 'answer', yet this brief reaction offers little gratification to the child. Not only because the educator's answerable act lacks depth of meaning but it paves the way for fragmented unfinished dialogic encounters. It leaves babies seeking more than the initial answer, resulting in frustration and confusion regarding the confidence in their relations with educators. The educator remains implicated by this action and the

baby awaits a more meaningful response, which if it does not materialise, places external demands on baby and educator for very different reasons. Nevertheless, the act of reassurance from afar was integral to promoting opportunity for educators to attend to other children and complete operational tasks.

9.5.4 Singing

Recent research has examined how singing acts as a tool to enliven baby room practices to manage, rather than meet the needs of babies (Powell, Gooch and Werth, 2014). Findings from this study align with those discoveries but strikingly, singing practices documented appear to be indiscriminately aimed at babies (Bain and Barnett, 1986), rather than differentiated or used as a response to each individual baby's voice acts. Singing was employed by educators as a generic response to babies' voice initiations and was particularly acute when voice acts were accelerated to include crying or distress signals during group times. Enacting singing as a functional tool (Spratt, 2012) to pacify voice initiations was particularly evident at Little Pandas, motivated by the room leader as an effective feature of pedagogy to calm the babies. Singing was advocated to be an essential aspect of baby room practice, echoing a long pedagogical tradition that singing can foster intimate care practices and companionship between adult and baby (Powell and Gooch, 2019).

Traditional nursery rhymes were performed over the top of babies crying during large group times where babies' behaviours communicated a sense of being overwhelmed and over stimulated. In effect, as voice initiations were accelerated and became unmanageable in a group context, singing was performed to all babies in a bid to calm and distract rather than promote closeness and learning. Possibly singing was an embedded strategy enacted to distract from and avoid overwhelming moments in practice, where intense emotions in baby and educators were at risk of becoming unmanageable, signifying a culture of avoidance in moments of heightened stress (Menzie Lyth, 1989; Hopkins, 1988).

There were incidences where singing was enacted as a planned learning event using external objects such as puppets and objects to stimulate babies' attention. Educators viewed this to be an important aspect of baby room pedagogy, aligning to Froebel's principles related to mother songs (Bruce, 2021). Occurrences of singing during care practices were frequently recorded, although close analysis of these encounters revealed missed opportunities to respond to subtle voice

initiations. Where babies sought to engage in 'serve and return' moments during nappy changes in response to adult initiations, singing continued and remained the intent of the adult rather than adopting close attunement to babies' communications. Educators' prioritisation of singing as a strategy to divert away from intense emotional reactions, directly conflicted babies' attempts to sustain and redirect interactions via their own distinct responses, as they continued to seek out sustained eye contact and slowed moments of care.

9.5.5 Directive Language

Directive language was a dominant characteristic of educator responses and underpinned talk between baby and educator during interactions documented. I refer to the term directive language as I conceptualise the dialogue recorded to direct and regulate the behaviours and movements of children, aligning the conceptualisation of mother's use of language with their children (Hasan, 2009). Evidence in this study points to educators leading talk with babies through adoption of direct and non-suggestive commands (Hasan, 2009), to cease demanding voice initiations that redirected adult own attentions away from other priorities.

Hu *et al.* (2019) found that a third of educator talk with babies was directive and this study is no different, with substantial findings pointing toward direct commands being employed by some educators as a cessation strategy when voice initiations such as self-propelling objects transpired. Directive language largely inhibited any further representation of voice, even momentarily. Babies seemed despondent, presented visibly on their facial reactions and subdued bodily movements. Voice patterning regressed to silent endeavours, before resuming typical patterning which were swiftly accelerated, as examined across research questions one and two. Research suggests commanding language serves an important role in guiding children's behaviours to follow setting routine and activities and can act as a stimulus for language rich interactions (Girolametto *et al.* 2000; Hu *et al.* 2019). In this study, very few, language rich events materialised following educator directive comments. Rather, directive comments led to a cessation of voice initiations and suppressed behaviours where babies wandered aimlessly until they established connection with others once again.

Commanding behaviours through talk were overtly prevalent during mealtimes or times where educators were occupied with organisational tasks such as paperwork or preparing for activities

which required less emotional exertion (Lóvgren, 2016). Examples of talk including 'Have you finished?', 'No, thank you,' 'Use your spoon, please' and recurrent calling of the children's names were documented. It was during these group activities where educators appeared to be most overstretched and concerned that the babies should demonstrate listening and compliant behaviours. Orientation of the adults seemed motivated to move quickly through mealtimes into the sleep times with as little disruption as possible, exerting authority and power over the babies (Hu, *et al.* 2019). Incidentally, it was group situations where babies received momentary attention from adults which acted as a stimulus to increase their voicing initiations. This created encounters where educators struggled to manage the demands of babies which consequently led to increased commanding language (Girolametto and Weizmann, 2002).

Hu, *et al.* (2019) propose there is a strong correlation between educator qualifications and the amount and type of commands employed. While findings from this study do not directly challenge this proposal and do not set out to refute claims that higher educator qualifications are essential in professionalising early education (Nutbrown, 2012; Oberhuemer, 2011; Nutbrown, 2021), there is a suggestion that the manifestation of directive language seems rooted in length of service and inter-generational discourse (Monk, 2014) passed down within the staff teams. Directive talk largely transpired from established staff members employed for at least two years in the setting. This raises questions about transmission of typical vocabulary adopted as a response by educators within each setting's culture. Trommsdorff (2012) suggests culture acts as a transmission belt that shapes emergent values and beliefs in specific contexts, aligning with Monk's (2014) conceptualisation of intergenerational family dialogue where dialogue between child and adults is anchored, over time, in established family culture. My study argues educators quickly become accustomed to the culturally specific responses modelled by colleagues, rooted in the specific culture of the setting. Even if they enter the nursery with a personal belief of how one should interact with babies, this is quickly challenged by established cultural demands, so they fall into similar dialogue to conform with the setting ethos. This finding has implications for the way educators are inducted into customary practices of provision and the value placed upon talk with babies. Momentary interactions shaped by direction and command lacks any purpose for babies other than to pacify unwanted behaviours observed by adults. Recurrent occurrences lead to inhibited voice patterning and ineffectual social encounters which reap little benefit for babies' development.

9.6 Research Question Five - Do educators think the culture of the wider nursery environment influences their interactions with infants - and if so, in what way?

The culture of nursery provision has had an increased focus in international literature in recent years, centralising the role of relationships (Dalli, 2006; Elfer, 2012; Davis and Degotardi, 2015; Elfer et al., 2018). Nursery culture is diversely anchored in institutional traditions and influenced by the role of societal laws and legislation as well as the individuals within it (Hedegaard, 2020). Culture is conceptualised from multiple perspectives (Kapur, 2018; Hedegaard, 2012) and will always influence how practices are enacted and the way in which children develop (Hedegaard, 2002; 2020). Whilst I remain conscious that babies' voices are the central premise to this study, it would be careless to neglect the evident connection between organisational culture and educator ability to attend to the children's needs. Therefore, conceptualisation from a cultural historical theory perspective remains dominant, I contend Social Defence Systems Theory (Menzies Lyth, 1988; Armstrong and Rustin, 2014) offers a helpful addition to attribute meaning to emergent findings in this section. Therefore, in addition to consideration of the societal and political lens, social defences systems theory and aligning literature is considered.

Educators shared many reflections over the course of this study that reveal significant obstacles in the culture and power dynamics of provision, which were cited to influence staff ability to respond to, and spend prolonged relational moments, with individual babies. Markedly the two field sites unearthed similarities but also differences in the way in which staff felt cultural aspects attributed opportunity to interact with babies. This section will consider what might explain these differences and engage discussion around how the culture of nursery environment can shape opportunities for sustained, responsive interactions with babies and young children.

The following findings arose from analysis and will be discussed in this section:

9.6.1 Educators said they wanted to share moments of intimacy with babies but thought the culture of the nursery prevented this.

Educator's strong desire to form close connections with babies, and the emotions entangled with doing so (Elfer, 2014) was distinct in emergent findings across this study. Predominantly educators shared they wanted to establish moments of intimacy but imparted they felt the culture of the setting prevented this. Data presented in Chapters Seven and Eight told a story of educators grappling with

strong feelings for the children in their care which were deeply entrenched in operational nursery practices. The juxtapose between navigating personal feelings, maintaining a sense of keeping these emotions tucked away and emerging cultural practices was evident across both field sites. Much has been written about the emotional dimensions of working with babies and young children and most agree that to care for very young children, one will experience deep emotional demands (Elfer, 2012; Andrew, 2015). Educators involved in this study were no different, citing a complex journey of emotions (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Page, 2015) associated with caring for babies. These appeared heightened in response to the cultural characteristics of each setting, particularly when they were unable to establish and sustain interactions with babies. A fine line between deeply personal feelings for babies and a sense of feeling the culture of the workplace 'got in the way' of maintaining enduring relationships emerged from data sets. Significantly, findings revealed educators felt they needed permission to 'be with' babies for sustained periods of time and consequently experienced a burden of guilt that they were not always able to offer babies time and space to connect emotionally. Organisational culture of the setting was cited by educators to obscure their relational time with babies and findings reveal the following rhetoric beneath dialogue:

- Educators felt that there were too many operational and organisational tasks to complete which took them away from being with babies socially.
- Educators attributed not enough staff to hindering opportunity to slow down practice enough to be still with babies.
- A sense of feeling guilty for not spending enough time with babies or establishing interactions with babies which were subsequently interrupted emerged from dialogue.
- Educators were conscious of the notion of *not working hard enough* if they stopped for too long to interact with babies and felt they needed 'permission' from the team or management to establish these encounters.

Although there is not scope in this thesis to examine each aspect identified above in detail, organisational barriers were clearly deeply entwined with a sense of wanting to be with the babies for longer periods of interaction than educators felt the nursery culture permitted. Consequentially, this provoked multi-dimensional emotions which had been 'held in check' (Elfer and Page, 2015, p.562), to endure day-to-day demands placed upon them, transpiring complicated emotions.

While staff at Little Birdies appeared to challenge the convention of performative demands by examining their own positionality as professionals, evidence from Little Pandas contrasted sharply, with individuals detaching from babies and at times, the VID process. Emotions were notably absent from narratives, giving way to a personal accountability to maintain professionalism and neutrality (Osgood, 2012, p.125; Bradbury, 2012). Educators were cautious not to become too attached or distracted by the babies as this drew attention away from regulatory elements of practice which was inherent to Little Pandas culture. Staff employed individual defence strategies (Menzies Lyth, 1988; Brace, 2020) in form of 'keeping busy' (Hopkins, 1988) through tidying and transient movement in the room. As in other studies (Page and Elfer, 2013; Brace, 2020) educators often adopt a protective position, shielding the babies from their own anxiety and stress as they navigate the demands associated with working in a baby room. Openness and reflexivity in educator discourse indicate an emotional intelligence connecting feelings and a fear of transferring these onto the babies. 'Not having time' to consider their own feelings transcends dialogue, across data emphasising the emotional demands associated with caring for babies in nursery, and anxiety relating to being 'too close for too long' and the ramifications of doing so (Elfer and Wilson, 2021). In part this can be explained as a mechanism to protect themselves from the enduring operational demands of nursery life as well as managing the increasing demands for efficiency and productivity. More likely is the prospect that establishing intimate interactions with babies would result in painful detachment and accountability when these moments were severed by external demands (Elfer *et al.* 2018; Brace, 2020) Either way, their ability to tune in to and respond to babies' voice initiations was affected causing consequences for the babies' social experiences. As such, I would argue that personal aspirations to respond to babies and established cultural practices are deeply entwined and influence each other, resulting in convoluted system where the emotionally demanding aspects of working with babies is suppressed in favour of maintaining a sense of diligence and organisation.

Bakhtin (1993) places considerable importance of the moral obligation held within relationship formation with others, and I would argue that morality implicates educator activity and emotions considerably. In this sense, every act elicited by the baby is answerable and demands a response from another (White, 2016). Such framing places significant pressures on educators and the emotions entangled in this accountability seemed to surface in the dialogic VID process, bringing to

light concealed emotions which, at times, were the driving force behind practice, yet beneath the surface of nursery culture.

To emphasise, I draw from Clare's narrative (see section 7.2.4), who positioned her role as an early childhood educator to be deeply entangled in her role as a mother (Osgood, 2011). A sensitive enactment of professional responsibilities was rooted in Clare's own moral and ethical position, motivated by a drive to ensure she offers positive memories for the babies she cares for. Noddings (1984) considers answerability to be embedded in the constructs of moral aspects of 'natural caring'. Educators face a paradoxical position when personal values, emotion and professionalism collide during ordinary acts of care and conflict with working practices (Warren, 2021). In essence, interactions were shaped through ethical and moral motives engrained with how Clare hoped her own children would be cared for, challenging the rhetoric of the private and professional self (Noddings, 2002; Osgood, 2011). Talk of love, and the depth of feeling experienced, align the complex tenets of Professional Love (Page, 2011; 2017), combining love, intimacy and care which transcended the observed response patterns. A foundation of morality reflects in the conflict articulated as staff sought to slow down to just 'take them (*babies*) in' contrary to the demands of externally imposed practice. I note here the correlation between behaviours of longing to slow and presence with babies and the essence of 'lovingly lingering' (Sullivan and McCarthy, 2003) and demonstrating 'acts of recognition and love' (Bakhtin, 1990, p.49) where a purposeful space for emotional connection is grounded in one's own dialogic engagement with another. Findings reveal that for some educators, personal intuition and emotional investment shapes response to babies but directly conflicts broader institutional demands already noted in previous studies (Page and Elfer, 2013; Recchia and Shin, 2012).

With support from the researcher, educators noticed their emotional availability during close, sustained interactions comprising affective touch, responsivity, and playfulness (Degotardi and Pearson, 2014). This drew to the surface suppressed emotion and reflection of their own positionality, igniting a spark for adult and child alike. It was in these reflexive moments where it was essential for the researcher to be sensitive and attentive to the unfolding dialogue that often-revealed affecting, painful or overwhelming dimensions for educators to consider. This was particularly acute when they observed moments of conflicting professional priorities. Essentially VID was a process of human connection, extending the roots of dialogue between educator and baby to the space between

researcher and educator. It was through these moments of dialogic reflection with the researcher that facilitation of sensitive and gentle dialogue assisted educators to shift their thinking away from 'missed opportunity or letting the children down' to a valued discovery. The VID experience afforded educators time to re-examine the value in their role, endorsing Bakhtin's (1990, p. 49) view that establishing relational encounters with other leads to active 'emotional volitional tones' of love, which in this case may have been previously dismissed. That is, awakening an affective connection seemed to dominate baby and educator attention, momentarily prevailing against peripheral cultural demands, yet creating deeply interwoven bonds between two. It is these moments that can intensify the relationship between the adult and baby in nursery, challenging an established nursery culture of depersonalisation. Engaging reflectively activates a depth of knowledge about the baby, their agency and capabilities that can empower early childhood educators and improve the relational qualities of pedagogy.

Institutional practice grounded in policy directives disseminated from central government invariably emphasises the role of interactions within a school readying agenda (DfE, 2021). As such, there remains a distinct disconnect between guidance calling for emotionally responsive practices and the reality of day-to-day provision. Educator rhetoric and observational evidence from this study echo Hopkins (1988, p.99) commentary that 'the gap between ideals and practice in childcare is often inexplicably wide'. Educators do connect with babies emotionally but feel they are forced to dismiss the complexity of feeling to maintain regulatory priorities, often feeling they need permission to be with babies for prolonged social encounters. These were the moments which enacted painful and deeply uncomfortable emotions during reflection and required great care and trust between educator and the researcher. Without such connection, the process would have become destructive and devaluing experience for educators rather than empowering. Froebel (cited in Lilley, 1964, p.10) comments that creative growth can be uncomfortable and is never 'an effortless unfolding', moving through 'conflict' and 'tension', therefore the researcher was an essential element to mediate such a deeply reflexive process. Similarly, Elfer *et al.* (2018) contends there is an urgent need for baby room educators to be afforded time to step back from their frontline work with babies to receive support from trusted facilitators to manage the emotions experienced as they grow their relationships with young children and this study strengthens this call. In doing so, educators can establish mechanisms to help navigate the divergence between personal responsiveness and professional accountability

and ultimately learn that experiencing emotions is a natural, necessary requirement to fulfil the relational aspects of being an early childhood professional.

9.6.2 Nursery cultures are heavily shaped by a dominant performative and marketized approach to nursery provision.

Inherent in a cultural historical theory approach (Hedegaard, 2012), are the influential role societal laws, policies and regulations enacted on institutional practice. A gradual cultural shift towards effectiveness and performativity in early education has occurred over the past twenty-five years (Osgood, 2011; MacFarlene and Likhani, 2015). Assumptions rooted in nationwide legislative guidance will shape the cultural conditions of individual institutions and fundamentally the experiences of individuals within it (Hedegaard, 2012). Positioned within a larger nursery chain, Little Pandas and Little Birdies work within guidance disseminated company wide, grounded in Department for Education directives (DfE, 2021a, DfE, 2021b). In the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum Guidance (DfE 2021a, p.5), 'high quality early learning' is framed as foundational for future educational success. Teaching and learning are adopted as standard vocabulary, with connotations of care and love notably absent.

Early childhood education has become increasingly entrenched in a marketisation culture, with private for-profit providers, like Jolly Jungle competing for business and perpetrating efficiency and productivity (Lloyd, 2020; Moss and Cameron, 2020). Major policy decisions were made at Head Office, and filtered down to individual managers, who were accountable for the enactment of companywide policy directives. This generated an 'audit culture' (Albin-Clark and Archer, 2023) where control was centralised, and educators felt powerless, feeling management were detached from the day-to-day challenges faced in the baby room. This was typified in practice as negative body language when management entered the room, or undulating tension anticipating parent tours or quality assurance checks. Notably, there was less than five miles between Little Pandas and Little Birdies, with another three Jolly Jungle nurseries within a circular three-mile radius. The pressure to increase occupancy and meet the internal quality standards pervaded talk with management and educators and created a culture of competition between sites.

An accountability to maintain standards during internal quality assurance monitoring visits emerged across data. Staff at Little Birdies insinuated a pressure associated with maintaining excellence, but it

was at Little Pandas, where achieving excellence in all aspects of practice was most acute and seemed influenced by the status of the nursery in the company. A beacon of excellence within the company, Little Pandas housed regular tours for sister nursery sites to learn from their Ofsted graded outstanding practices. Management shared how 'education' was prioritised for all children, particularly the babies and saw the concept of teaching and educational experiences as a crucial component of attracting new clients. Parents as consumers acts as a central feature of neoliberal childcare market (Gallagher, 2017) and appeared in this case to play an influential role shaping the working culture. One informal conversation with management revealed frustrations that staff were silent in staff meetings, rarely challenging authority. Legislating practice through a performative lens resulted in a silencing of educators, who essence allows the authoritative voice to become theirs (Bakhtin, 1990). Facilitating management to 'speak on their behalf' (Wegerif, 2020) leads to disempowered workforce characterised by detachment and depersonalisation (Colley, 2006) which have consequences for babies and staff alike.

A culture of acceleration critiqued by Alison Clark in her advocacy for 'Slow Pedagogy' (Clark, 2021, 2022) personified how educators responded to babies and this construct remains entangled with other findings merging across this research question. Productivity and efficiency embodied the way in which staff moved around the setting and was personified during routine moments, including sleep times. Adults were largely transient, settling only momentarily at meal tables creating a fragmented and inconsistent environment, often mirrored by babies' behaviours. Preoccupation with external accountability created an intensely pressured environment for staff. In effect, the babies at Little Pandas were regulated and controlled by high levels of routinisation which obscured opportunity to be 'in the moment' and embrace potential moments of interactions. Evidence points to marked limitations surrounding the opportunity for, and enactment of, babies' voice in nursery provision. Voices of both baby and adult were marginalised within the milieu of regulatory tasks. As such a disconnect between adult and child occurred in parallel with the emergence of resentment towards management directives. Fundamentally, preoccupation with maintaining organisational excellence obscured the opportunity for excellence for babies (Osgood, 2011).

9.6.3 Adult: child ratios and the consistency and stability of staff teams bare an influence on the opportunity for and type of interactions that materialise in the nursery culture.

For this section, I have intentionally drawn together two emergent themes: Ratios and staff configuration and stability as I view these to be intrinsically linked to the emergent culture dynamics in both field sites. An inconsistent finding relating to the way educators at both field sites viewed workforce continuity surfaced during analysis. Educators at Little Pandas recurrently cited ratios as a problematic feature of nursery culture, regularly attributing this to inhibiting time with the children. Little Birdies staff determined lesser correlation between adult: child ratios but emphasised continuity and consistency of staff team as crucial to founding a responsive nursery culture. Nevertheless, findings point to an organisational and individuals' preoccupation with formulaic components of maintaining consistent staffing which overshadowed the essence of practices in place to positively enhance babies' experiences. Putting it simply, staff seemed overly concerned with staff configuration which distracted from establishing uninterrupted one-to-one interactions and group time with small groups of babies. Maintaining consistent staffing occupied most of the conversation between staff and was a contentious issue for management, resulting in a sense of resentment and frustration for staff and senior leaders. Whilst the educators were preoccupied in maintaining the correct number of adults in the room, tolerating various configurations of staff from across the nursery chain, the babies were sensitive to *who* was in the room, displaying a breadth of animated responses when their special adult acknowledged them.

A relatively modest amount of literature has examined the role of staff continuity in early childhood settings (Recchia and Shin, 2012), with few tackling the contentious issue of adult: child ratios (Pessanha *et al.* 2017). Data in this study drew parallels in educator dialogues, citing concern for maintaining stability of staff teams, viewing this as an influential aspect of baby room culture. This is no surprise given the continuity of staff teams is closely aligned with developing attachment based institutional practices and decreasing stress levels for all stakeholders (McMullen *et al.* 2016; Pinto *et al.* 2019). It should be noted how the changing tide of sector wide directives associated with recruitment, training and funding will influence the consistency of staff teams in nursery provision (Bonetti *et al.* 2021). At the time of completing this study, early childhood regulation has confirmed an *optional* increase to the number of children adults can care for to promote more affordable childcare for parents (DfE, 2023a), a point I return to later.

Adult: child ratios are known to have significant impact on the quality-of-care children receive and increase the opportunity for positive adult: child interactions (Munton *et al.* 2002; Bonetti and Brown,

2018; Melhuish and Gardiner, 2019). Comparisons to international peers sees England faring favourably, maintaining significantly more adults per baby than other countries (OECD, 2017), with regulatory guidance in England stipulating a one adult to three children ratio should be maintained in baby rooms (DfE, 2021a). Despite this, data presented in this study raises questions over its effectiveness, portraying an account of overwhelmed staff and inconsistent relational experiences for babies. Though the field sites strived to comply with regulatory directive (DfE, 2021a), challenges maintaining statutory ratios were apparent, typified by staff absences, shift patterns and lunchbreaks. As a result, babies were frequently introduced to varying staff members for short periods of time to support transitions of core staff in and out of staff breaks and shift changeovers. Organisation of staff lunch breaks compounded fragmented practice, with evidence of babies being fed by up to three different adults during one mealtime. It was documented in the study that younger babies (under nine months) were affected by repetitive changes in staff over mealtimes significantly which aligns with previous studies (Pinto *et al.* 2019). As such, evidence challenges assumptions that centralising relationships in pedagogy is straightforward undertaking. Rather data points to a discontinuity of practices akin to those documented by Tizard and Tizard (1971) and Bain and Barnett (1980) where variance in staff teams often resulted in very little rich, intimate conversation between adult and baby (Datler *et al.* 2010), leading to overlooked voice initiations and subsequent crying, agitated movements elicited by the babies.

Although moments of intimate, responsive interactions between adult and baby were recorded, it was during the busier routine moments where interactions were momentary and often transient and disconnected (Goouch and Powell, 2015; Bussey *et al.* 2021). A prominent feature of feeling overwhelmed by the number of babies educators had to 'manage' was particularly acute in the data, with educators citing this intensified during settling in periods where new babies required one on one care to support their transition, which normalised crying as a typical occurrence (Quiñones and Cooper, 2022). As a consequent, staff felt they were unable to be consistently responsive to babies' voice initiations and opportunities to establish sustained interactions were limited (Dalli and Kibble, 2010) as they felt continually overstretched and in demand. Inconsistencies in care were amplified during routine care moments when staff had to move to nappy changing areas, when new babies settled in or if management requested staff to support other activities within the nursery.

Consequently, an emerging cultural of pressure overpowered opportunities for responsive interactions to materialise.

Adjusting to abrupt ruptures in consistent care and interaction with familiar persons over a prolonged period can have significant implications for very young children (Fleer and Linke, 2016; Bussey *et al.* 2021). Responsive interactions are dependent upon the characteristics of those enacting them as well as the context in which they materialise (Pessanha *et al.* 2017). This gives weight to the concerns raised by educators that the discontinuity of the workforce to 'cover' absences reconceptualises the types of interactions that take place (Pinto *et al.* 2019). Core staff at Little Birdies communicated sensitivity for maintaining regularity for babies but a resentment towards other colleagues not fitting their ideals of care, and subsequently, the cultural dynamic of the setting shifted regularly. Detachment from babies and colleagues (Colley, 2006; Andrew, 2015) permeated practices and appeared to correlate with irregular staff teams and changes in shift pattern. In dialogue, it was difficult for educators to disentangle unworkable ratios and the demanding needs of babies, with individuals frequently citing they did not have enough staff to cope in moments of heightened stress.

The insights from educators align sector concerns that workforce continuity and maintenance of high adult: child ratios are intrinsic to responsive relational practices (Bonetti and Brown, 2018; Pinto, *et al.* 2019). Apparent in my findings was the influence compliance to statutory guidance has on establishing an effective and workable, nursery culture. Undeniably complying with legislative guidance is critical in standardising education and care internationally (DfE, 2021a). That is not disputed in this study. However, there were incidences recorded where the voices of babies did not align with knowledge held by educators, who were irregularly working in the room to support staff changeovers. Consequently, although interactions took place, these were unpredictable, often challenging the baby's confidence and consistency of care practices. This study frames the continuity and regulation of staff teams as vital to achieving a secure and consistent baby room environment where babies can experience predictable interactions with familiar educators. What is clear is positioning babies' voices as a central tenet of practice remains a complex and multifaceted challenge when the workforce is inconsistent and overstretched. Moreover, the culture of the setting is deeply entangled within personal anxiety of the workforce and policy directives that frames accountability for interactions between adult and baby.

9.6.4 Staff felt the nursery culture provoked a feeling of being in conflict between prioritising practical tasks with efficiency and giving prolonged time to babies.

A culture of feeling 'in conflict' transcended all dialogue and draws attention to the paradoxical role educators navigate each day. Oscillation between priorities placed an overwhelming pressure to accelerate practice rather than spending sustained time responding to, and interacting with, babies. Time during established interactions was often ruptured with educators reflecting on these moments with frustration, 'there is always something else'. Rapidity underscored practices documented and was reflected upon during the VID process. Tovey (2017, p.42) asserts early childhood practices should ensure 'time is not filled but freed from all unnecessary interruption', reflecting a Froebelian philosophy, yet moments documented in this study challenge this notion as time was continually occupied and constantly moving. Pacini-Ketchabaw (2012, p.157) examines the entanglement of clocking practices, children, and educators, determining that the clock 'defines, regulates, schedules, organises and synchronises lives'. Movement into and out of daily practices with babies was regulated by time as the team regularly checked in with each other, recorded calling 'next stop, nappies!' and asking when it was time for mealtimes to be prepared. This indicates attempts to foster a supportive and nurturing culture for colleagues but also confirmed a culture of productivity entrenched in practice. Routine moments including nappy times were often rushed, with staff propping open doors to maintain supervision and mandatory ratios. Pressure to be hurried and move indiscriminately through routine duties bypassed the 'sacred and respected' moments of intimate interaction with babies.

Movement of educators above the babies enacted an upstairs; downstairs superiority whereby adult activity accelerated and superseded the movement of babies resting on the floor below. Not only did this reflect a distinct power imbalance (Cassidy *et al.* 2022), prioritising adult activity, but determined that any intermittent interaction was dominated by adult motive (Bakhtin, 1990; Hedegaard, 2009). Reflections from educators and my own field diaries fits with Orr's (1996) interpretation of slow knowledge affiliating with fast knowledge creating a power structure that ultimately only offers benefits for the short term and will likely negatively compromise future outcomes for babies. Crucially, educators' attempts to manage all aspects of pedagogical practice, while overlooking the

immediate motive orientation of babies, altered the children's positive experiences of nursery care and burdened educator's reflections.

Temporal aspects of early childhood education are thought to be historically and culturally shaped (Barad, 2007). Reference to management and institutional demands juxtaposed a desire to slow down at both sites, adding to staff anxiety that they were not fulfilling the children's needs nor completing organisational task sufficiently. Externally imposed demands cultivated a cultural environment of high intensity and efficiency (Orr, 1996). This is significant because it presented as a direct contradiction to educator desires to slow down and be 'with' the babies and is not sustainable in the long term for the workforce. Pressure to fill time cultivated a culture that impedes opportunities to be slow and still with babies. Even planned small group times resulted in educators feeling consciously rushed and unable to support all the needs of the children. It remains difficult to determine if this was due to the externally imposed demands or educators own desire to 'look' busy and maintain order and stability in the room (Goouch and Powell, 2017). Maintaining active pursuit of routine and time filling practices (Tovey, 2017) with routine-based tasks dominated time in field sites, except for a handful of unhurried captures over six months, which encapsulate slow, unfolding moments of interaction where bodies and voices aligned.

An increased impetus in research is drawing attention to the need to slow down and adopt a slower pedagogical approach (Clark, 2022). What is striking, is the way in which educators desire this stillness and seem to acknowledge its necessity to work with babies yet feel prevented in adopting slower interactions in everyday practices due to external responsibilities dominating practice and educator anxiety. Orientation towards faster paced practices encompassing efficiency and excellence, overshadow opportunities to respond to babies' voice initiatives which are lost in the milieu of practice. The consequences of maintaining a fast paced, efficient nursery culture are likely to be unsustainable for individual educators, leading to high staff turnover and emotionally burnout workforce (Coffey, 2006; Løvgren, 2016). More pressing is the potential impact such hastened practice will have on babies' understanding of socially valued voice acts and developing understanding of early mutually responsive relationships. There is an urgent need to challenge rhetoric that assumes nursery practice is a performative sprint rather than a slow, attentive, dialogic walk mutually shared with babies and young children.

9.7 Summary and Implications for Early Childhood Education

Chapter Nine has discussed findings emerging from this study and foregrounded the competencies of babies as dialogically intelligent individuals whose voices are a visibly tangible attribute of nursery culture. Throughout, it was not my intention to make generalisations but to represent the stories of a small sample of babies participating in nursery life and for their experiences to act as a channel to stimulate further sector wide dialogue.

Voice is used as a mechanism to source an identity in the nursery community and is currently undervalued in everyday early years practice. Key findings emerging from this study can be summarised briefly as follows,

- Babies were frequently left to occupy themselves and received little individualised, sustained interactions from educators who worked very hard to manage a range of opposing professional responsibilities.
- Babies are motivated and work hard to enact voice strategically in a bid to establish themselves as valued contributors to the baby room. This appears to be closely linked to seeking acknowledgment from others.
- Voice reveals itself to be a dialogic thread of connection to adult worlds, deliberately structured and intentionally directed into adult spaces. Five distinct modes of voice were consistently documented, emerging just beneath the surface of nursery activity and categorised as follows,
 1. Committed surveillance,
 2. Facial expressions,
 3. Physical movement in direction of eye gaze,
 4. Engagement of external objects as a catalyst for response,
 5. Sporadic vocalisations or crying
- Babies' voice structure is tightly bound to the social cultural experiences in their home. The confidence they enter nursery with is often challenged by the external demands they negotiate as they acclimatise to nursery life.
- Voice initiations are irregularly acknowledged by hard working, early childhood educators for multiple reasons examined in the study.

- Voice acts accelerate to include ‘funny little tricks’ (Reddy, 201) of differing temporal dimensions following unsuccessful bids for connection. Acceleration of voice create external demands for educators.
- Babies entering nursery provision a) under 6 months of age, b) on a part time basis, c) as an only child, may be more at risk of experiencing limited or inconsistent adult contact and subsequently will have fewer opportunities to explore their voice patterning within dialogic interactions in nursery.
- Typical response patterns elicited by early childhood educators were variable but did offer *some* opportunity to establish strong, mutually responsive relationships. These opportunities were limited and were not consistent nor sustained for all babies.
- Amalgamation of organisational responsibility and personal anxiety about the personal involvement and attachment arising from the prospect of prolonged interaction with the babies present a complicated picture of nursery provision for early childhood educators.
- Management cultures and institutionally placed demands did not appear to support continuity or sensitive attention for babies.

9.8 Contribution to originality in research

Findings emerging from this study indicate that babies entering nursery provision a) under 6 months of age, b) on a part time basis, c) as an only child, may be more at risk of experiencing limited or inconsistent adult contact and subsequently will have fewer opportunities to explore their voice patterning within dialogic interactions in nursery. This adds to the growing calls for educators to plan time to ‘be with’ babies in regular, prolonged, close, and responsive interactions, in addition to routine care moments such as nappy changes (Goouch and Powell, 2013a; Bussey *et al.* 2021). I argue this should be prioritised for all babies, especially those with irregular attendance patterns and those who may be at risk of limited interactional moments with adults outside of the setting.

While tenets of intersubjectivity were evident in some interactions, these lacked depth and the enduring nature of interactions typically recorded between baby and parent. This is not surprising, given the distinctly differing social context, but this challenges the expectation that interactions between professionals and babies should mirror intersubjective exchange in totality, as guidance often alludes (Early Education, 2021). To this point, I contend that features of intersubjective

exchange are important but materialise differently in nursery. When established, interactions are dialogical in tone, and as they unite in dyadic interactions, responsivity only emerges when educators adopt a slower mode of *being with* babies. To be totally absorbed in the moment with baby, educators had to challenge the assumption that they were not busy enough by remaining still, attuned, and resisting external distractions. Only then did babies' voice initiations flourish and they seemed to be truly valued. Findings strengthen calls to adopt unhurried practices (Clark, 2022) and verify the need to construct spaces where early years educators and babies can join dialogically in sustained moments of togetherness.

Findings point to the nursery culture acutely dominated by institutional practices rooted in a governmentality and accountability (Osgood, 2011; Campbell-Barr, 2017) creating a pedagogical tension for the workforce. Such rhetoric appears to contrast sharply with educators' desire to source time and space to establish unhurried practices with babies which remained problematic and muddied by personal anxieties and complying with legislative guidance. The workforce experience conflicting priorities, fitting in snatched moments of interactions with babies around established pedagogy, challenging their own deeply held moral accountability to establish intimate care moments for babies. A working culture of conflict resulted in an intensely pressured environment for educators and an accelerated relational experience for babies. The data tells a story of a complicated, dynamic interplay of societal, institutional, and personally located demands (Hedegaard, 2012). Maintaining and working within the constructs of adult: child ratios (DfE, 2021a) tested relationships and revealed convoluted working practices. I argue that agendas promoting efficiency and outcome-based performativity are not conducive to creating a space where the voices of babies are visible. Instead, this culture drives a workforce conflicted between task-based activity and deep held aspiration to be more responsive to babies' needs. Divergence between these two extremes results in overstretched and exhausted employees who feel that they fail babies and resent completing operationally imposed tasks. Moreover, although the adult: child ratios largely complied with current government directives during the study, there were challenges which indicates such mandates limit opportunity for babies to experience prolonged, responsive interactions with adults. This study adds to calls to embed a pedagogy where the workforce can step outside pressured nursery environments to dismantle the emotional complexity involved with fostering close, responsive, and connected interactions with babies (Elfer and Wilson, 2021). Furthermore, this approach can alleviate some of the aspects of

emotional labour so readily experienced by an undervalued and underpaid workforce (Osgood, 2011; Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018).

Based on discoveries from this study, my contribution to originality of findings to research concentrates on validating babies' voices and supporting early childhood educators to feel empowered to identify, acknowledge and respond to babies' voice patterns. This study presents the notion of **Adagio interactions** to encapsulate the uniqueness of baby: educator interactions. Inspired by the widely recognised term communicative musicality (Malloch and Trevarthen 2007), Adagio advances a practical concept to promote slowing down to a walking pace where interactions between babies and early childhood educators can materialise, adopting some of the recognisable principles of intersubjective interactions. Interactions between educators and babies they care for are, and should be, different to those occurring between baby and parents, although it is vital to recognise that emotions between educator and baby will still be exchanged. Offering a concept to validate baby-educator interactions facilitates the prospect of educators embedding a tangible pedagogical term into practice which can enable them to plan for, and respond to, babies' voice initiations. The concept of Adagio does not seek to remove opportunity for in the moment interactions to materialise organically. Such moments play an integral role in fostering natural relations with young children. Rather, it seeks to underpin spontaneous and planned for interactions, where baby and educator can be at ease with one another. Moreover, the concept acts as a prompt for the workforce to feel they have permission to plan for moments of pause, to slow down so babies are more readily recognised to be valued communicative contributions, their voices reconceptualised in everyday practices.

Central to this study was the engagement the **Video Interaction Dialogue model (VID)** developed within the methodology. Inspiration to create this model came from two established methods, Video Interaction Guidance (Kennedy *et al.* 2011) and Work Discussion (Elfer and Dearnley 2007; Elfer *et al.* 2018; Elfer, Dearnley, and Wilson, 2018). I propose that the VID model offers scope to strengthen opportunity for the workforce to reflect on their interactions with babies and young children. It can act as a conduit for reflection to support educators identify the diverse patterns of communication babies elicit as a voice whilst in their care. Not only can this lead to a heightened attunement to babies' emerging agency but can increase responsiveness and deepen knowledge of young children's developmental trajectory. Additionally, based on emergent findings from this study, educators

reported a reconceptualization of babies' voices, challenging previously held assumptions that operational practices must dominate nursery culture, instead making attempts to reposition babies as a central aspect of pedagogy. The sensitive role of the researcher proved to be integral to the successful implementation of the VID process, with human connection between researcher and educator as important as their connection with the children. Educators alluded to the importance of the facilitator of the model to distinctly different from nursery management and someone who they felt 'at ease' with to share affecting moments, without judgement. Strands underpinning the model affirm principles of dialogism and answerability (Bakhtin, 1984;1990) promoting the ethical and moral responsibility early childhood educators hold to be accountable for the responses they evoke to babies. Moreover, this model can support a move towards a more responsive, relational pedagogical approach where babies and the workforce are valued and respected as citizens, with voices that must be amplified. There is limited scope in this thesis to examine, in depth, the impact this model had on the educators in this study, but I address these findings in greater detail in my journal article, *'It's the little bits that you have enabled me to see'*. Reconceptualising the voices of babies using the Video Interaction Dialogue model with Early Childhood Educators, (Guard, 2023) published in *Early Years, An International Research Journal* in March 2023.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

10.1 Introduction.

The final chapter of my thesis considers key findings and contributions to originality in research emerging from this study. The thesis journey is reflected upon, and strengths and limitations of the project considered. Broader considerations concerning the societal, institutional, and personal perspectives, as Hedegaard's (2008) wholeness approach conceptualises, frame some of the reflections in this chapter. Theoretical underpinnings are considered in addition to a reflection of methodological and analytical approaches. I conclude the thesis with my final reflections and recommendations for future research, policy and practices associated with hearing the voices of babies in nursery.

10.2 A brief review of the study.

This study set out to investigate how the voices of babies enrolled in English nurseries can be made visible through close examination of interactions they have with Early Childhood Educators. Chapter One set out how investigating the voice contributions of babies was driven by a personal interest in their nursery experiences and my concerns that babies may not be positioned in enacted nursery practices favourably. Based on my experiences as a nursery manager in the early 2000s, I felt this was largely driven by the political discourse that prioritises educational outcome and drives a marketized, business model in private provision (Moss, 2014; Moss and Robert-Holmes, 2021). My experiences conducting this study reveal a more complicated, nuanced story. While it is clear a neoliberal agenda is closely entangled with the nursery sector, it is institutional culture and people who make a difference to how babies are valued and recognised in baby rooms. Conflict arises when institutional demands collide with individual, personal desires to establish prolonged social encounters with babies. Consequently, babies' voices remain suspended in environments regulated by a combination of external and internal demands that overshadow responsive, relational practices. My findings reveal individual educators advocate to change this narrative, but recurrently face complex work cultures that oppose priorities of care and suppress their own voice contributions.

When I set out to design this project, there were few published studies examining the voice contributions of babies in early childhood settings. Over the course of my doctoral journey, interest in

the voices of very young children has increased although babies' specific contributions have remained scarce. Wall and colleagues at The University of Strathclyde (Wall *et al.* 2019; Cassidy *et al.* 2021; Arnott and Wall, 2021; Wall and Robinson, 2022) advocate for eight factors to facilitate the voice of young children. Their work has gone some way in enriching discourses concerning how early childhood educators might translate the intentions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) into deliberate practices that respect the voices of very young children. Degotardi and Han (2022) position babies as 'knowers' whose voice is reliant upon the sensitive perception of educators attributing meaning to communicative cues. Affording voice to young children is bound within the construction of interactions with educators (Degotardi and Han 2022). Advancing this principle, Lawrence (2022, p. 86) recommends adults have opportunity to facilitate comprehension of the multimodality of voice dialogues and calls for further recognition of 'how adults and children are integral to each other's voices'. While all these contributions strengthen dialogue pertaining to the voices of babies, my study responds to their calls for action, purposely tackling the explicit absence of children's voice contributions. Despite challenges along the way, some of which are considered in this chapter I feel assured that the final thesis captures an authentic account of babies' voice patterning in the context of nursery settings and contributes to discourses concerning baby room practice.

Before continuing this chapter, I would like to acknowledge the courage and resilience of all participants involved in the research process. Particularly I want to highlight the tireless efforts of the staff teams as they navigated the nursery landscape and remained open, reflective, and courageous engaging in this process. Moreover, I want to recognise the babies, who demonstrated resolute determination to establish themselves as individuals in the nursery. Their distinct, spirited characters added a richness to the educators' experiences in the setting, demonstrated clearly within the unfolding dialogic encounters documented.

Both field sites involved offered exemplary care in many ways for all children, an achievement that has been publicly recognised in recent Ofsted inspections (Ofsted, 2021) and reflected in parent dialogue. It was never my intent to draw out weaknesses in working practices but to highlight how babies are positioned in the nursery climate and examine how their voice is distinguishable in practice. I hope that my work reflects these intentions and adds value to ongoing sector wide dialogue concerning babies, the early childhood workforce and wider policy implications.

10.3 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the doctoral journey.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the influence of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) global pandemic on this doctoral study. While the early stages of the project were conducted prior to the pandemic, field work was underway as the national lockdowns were mandated in England (March 2020). I was three weeks into the third and fourth field sites when the country locked down and early childhood settings, along with educational provision were required to close, apart from offering childcare for those most in need and key worker children (DfE, 2020). Initially, possibly naively, I believed that I would be able to return to the field in the June or September of 2020. Realising the grave situation the country faced, this was untenable and in December 2020 it was decided with my supervisory team that I should progress with data analysis for the completed data sets from settings one and two (Little Birdies and Little Pandas). I was concerned that by not completing four sites would substantially impact the quality of the thesis and its relevance to the field. However, as I advanced into the deep process of analysis the vastness of the data generated became clear. The data sets were rich and had potential to offer new insights into the relational worlds of a small sample of babies and contribute to the research field in many ways. Primarily, by amplifying their voice contributions and affirming their rights as valued individuals in society.

10.4 Summary of Findings.

My study is unique in the way it contributes the field of babies' rights and the professional development opportunities for Early Childhood Educators. It has potential to directly impact those who work with very young babies as well as shaping the experiences of young babies accessing early childhood settings.

While the intent of this study was never to make generalised claims regarding all babies or all nursery providers, it has developed dialogue regarding the complex contemporary realities of baby room experiences for babies and the early childhood workforce and offers insight into how the voice of individual children manifests in nursery spaces. Reviewing findings in relation to research questions one and two, voice has revealed itself to be a largely silent endeavour, though deliberately and intentionally authored to bridge the gap between baby and adult worlds. Babies work hard to establish an identity in the nursery room, intentionally positioning voice acts into adult spaces, a bid for acknowledgment and connection. While silent endeavours of voice conflict directly with noisy

reality of nursery life, babies are creative and resolute to be seen, amplifying voice acts through teasing, humour, and strategic movements to orient adult attention into joint attentional episodes. In turn, amplification of voice creates external demands for educators, who conscientiously try to balance conflicting institutional priorities. Findings associated with research question three reveal babies draw on their communicative experiences in the home to establish confidence of voice acts in setting. Momentary shifts in self-assurance during interactions with educators indicate the importance of establishing slower, responsive, playful interactions with familiar adults to build confidence and complexity of voice and emotional resilience. Research question four documented variable interactional experiences, ostensibly restricted by the emotional and physical availability of responsive educators. Adult response patterns influenced voice orientation and determined if babies established a secure identity in the setting. The emotional and physical presence of educators was the single most influential motivator to shape voice acts. Rich educator narratives generated in response to research question five draw attention to how institutionally placed demands directly impact the availability of the workforce, who in turn, individually experience heightened emotions when endeavouring to engage in close, responsive communications with babies amid professional boundaries. Most significant was how data brought to light how often babies were left to occupy themselves, receiving little individualised interactions from adults. This discovery was openly acknowledged and accepted by educators as normal practice. Such open recognition of the limited responsive interaction pervades everyday practice and shapes how new staff adjust to baby room practices, leaving little scope to challenge if this is appropriate for young children. This reinforces the central role of early childhood educators and the essential need to retain high adult: child ratios and implement quality professional training opportunities to safeguard babies from missing out on rich social encounters with caregivers.

Overall, findings reveal that, in line with existing research (Delafield-Butt and Trevarthen, 2018; Burr and Degotardi, 2021), babies grow in confidence during moments of reciprocal, synchronous interaction. This directly influences the complexity and interconnectedness of voice acts, increasing visibility to educators, whose responses act as a spark, igniting lingering moments of communication. The early childhood educators involved in this study shared their desire to spend more time with babies and cited a culture of conflict that pervaded relational moments. During reflections, nearly all participants highlighted their sense of vocation and strong desire to 'make a difference'. Episodes of

close interaction reviewed revealed that they enjoyed their time with babies, and they sought to establish more moments of rich communication, not just for the babies but for their own gratification. However, these remained complex endeavours. Educator narratives were firmly rooted in a relational based pedagogy (Dalli, 2016; Page, 2011, 2015), yet challenged within the everyday structures of organisational culture. Accepted institutional practices distracted from establishing sustained interactions, and babies were left pursuing connections with adults who were busy elsewhere. While there is indication that fragmented moments of interaction were attributed to organisational culture, individual avoidance behaviours also emerged in dialogue that echo other studies (Page and Elfer, 2013; Brace, 2020) and warrant further consideration.

In the haste to transform and professionalise the sector, it may be that we have accelerated too fast away from the principles that position relationships and care at the heart of pedagogy with babies. The care/education discourses are well founded and contentiously recurrent (Noddings, 2002, 2010; Page, 2011; Taggart, 2015; Cameron and Moss, 2020), but from my time in the field, I argue that the unrealistic demands placed on the workforce, are driving highly skilled and qualified, emotionally mature educators away from spending time with children and subsequently out of the sector. Typically, participants shared they come into the sector with a deep desire to make a difference to young children and acquired pleasure from their interactions. Instead, educators are met with a contrasting picture where time with children is minimal and accomplishing organisational tasks are prioritised which creates conflict and unclear professional boundaries.

10.5 Original contribution to knowledge and research.

This study offers an original contribution to research as one of the first multimethodological studies in England to closely examine the voices contributions of babies in early childhood settings. The study adds value to an existing body of knowledge in four areas:

1. Authentic and vivid contributions of babies' voices are added to an established discourse arising from The Baby Room Project (Goouch and Powell, 2009-2015). This study differs from Goouch and Powell's (2013) contribution in the way it represents the baby room through a new theoretical lens, concerning itself principally with the children's voices but affording attention to the personal, institutional, and political complexity of reality in baby room pedagogy in England.

2. The study contributes to cultural historical discourse in a new way, depicting original reflections of babies' learning and development of voice in early childhood settings. Motive of voice is illuminated through digital visual methods and strengthened with contributions from multiple perspectives, including the voices of parents, early educators, and the researcher. Emotional dimensions of research with babies are considered and reflected in data presented, emphasising value in researcher contributions.
3. The study enriches connections with Froebelian principles indicating infancy is a valid phase of childhood in its own right (Bruce, 2021). Voice is an essential tool to connect babies with the social world and arises as a manifestation of the child's inner life, presenting as self-directed and intentional external pattern to connect relationally with others to achieve a sense of becoming (Bruce, 2021).
4. The study enhances research that considers social defences in early childhood settings (Hopkins, 1988; Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Elfer and Wilson, 2021) by highlighting the challenges early childhood educators face attuning to babies' voice contributions amidst the complexity of being emotionally available without sufficient and sensitive professional support mechanisms in place.

Chapter Nine concluded with implications for practice and while there are several areas which may require further consideration, I will focus this section on what I consider to be two distinct and valuable contributions arising from this thesis.

Methodologically, **Video Interaction Dialogue (VID)** (Guard, 2023) offers a reconceptualised research model that promotes opportunity for professional reflection, through a strength-based approach. The model builds upon and extends contributions from others (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Kennedy *et al.* 2011) but distinguishes itself by focussing reflection on the baby's own contributions to the social environment as well as considering how educators are answerable to babies' voice initiations. As discussed in Chapter Three, the model is firmly rooted in the theoretical strands underpinning the doctoral study and positions dialogic communication as a central component to its success. VID is a model that promotes human connection via respectful dialogic interactions between participants and researchers. It extends the dialogic strands of answerability and trust to the researcher, educator relationship and promotes sensitive and attuned dialogue, particularly during

moments of affecting reflection. Evidence from across this doctoral journal points to VID offering a 'convincing professional tool for educators working with babies to become accountable for the way in which they interact with babies' (Guard, 2023). Furthermore, educators in this study reported they found the process empowering in the way VID promoted a slower pace to review and reflect on the deeply connected moments they have with babies and consider the impact of external influences such as institutional and policy tensions. Essential to the success of the process was the sensitive role the researcher adopted when educators viewed moments of conflicting responsibility that brought to the surface anxieties and emotional reactions. Trust between the researcher and educator was vital as was the distance the researcher had professionally from the setting and management, with one educator reflecting they would not have been so open if the process was facilitated by the leadership team. While there remains scope to expand and further trial Video Interaction Dialogue in the sector, I consider the model to offer an innovative and robust system to promote increased professional and moral 'answerability' in parallel with reigniting the valued and significant role early childhood educators foster in promoting positive, reciprocal early relationships.

Well defined throughout my findings was the conflicting temporal dimensions of working with babies. I refer to this in Chapter Nine as a distinct enactment of an 'upstairs downstairs' movement, where educators moved at speed to fulfil the enormity of responsibilities while babies remained on the floor below, still, and anticipatory of catching the eye of staff. Based on my findings, I view the conflict of desiring to *be with* babies in deep connection and feeling overwhelmed to complete organisational tasks to be at the root of educators feeling they do not have 'permission' to pause for prolonged interactional moments. To counter this narrative, I propose 'slowing to a walking pace' through the concept of '**Adagio Interactions**' which can assist educators and those working with young children to feel at ease when they adopt a stillness in their practice.

In 2021, I was fortunate to present some of my doctoral findings at The International Froebel Society Biennial Conference (Guard, 2021). Following my provocation of Adagio, I was contacted by Professor Alison Clark who was working on a concept of Slow Pedagogy (Clark, 2020; 2022). We shared our reflections and similarities of our work, particularly our Froebelian outlook and the notion of 'being with' and adopting an emotional and physical presence of integrity during interactions with young children. I consider the concept of Adagio Interactions to be an opportunity for early childhood settings to rethink their relational approaches, particularly those with very young children. Fostering

such a concept has the potential to enrich moments of interaction, connect deeply with Froebelian philosophy to 'free' rather than 'fill time' (Tovey, 2017, p.42) and align with a slower pedagogical approach advocated by Clark (2022). A continued focus on teaching, learning and extension of dialogue will always remain rooted at the core of education. However, I firmly believe that without the roots of relational encounters being established first, through a present, slow, and dialogic approach, the tensions associated with early education will fail to dissipate and babies who enter early childhood settings will be at continual risk of remaining invisible and undervalued.

10.6 Theoretical framing.

The theoretical foundation of this study infused three theories which I determine created a comprehensively sound and innovative framework to drive the study. From the outset, there was no one theory which I felt corresponded with the aims of this project, so took inspiration from Alderson (2013) who affirms children's research contributions cannot be authenticated within one rigid theoretical framework. I overlaid three differing but complementary theories to derive an original frame to direct all aspects of the study.

To the child the sight of the grown-ups around him-and this is very true of his parents who are first command his whole field of vision-is the sun which draws him out; and when he establishes other relationships within and beyond himself, these are the climatic conditions, the broad sky, under which he grows up.

(Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 78)

From its inception, the way Froebel positions the young child in the relational world inspired this study. Recognition of the strong identity babies foster within the family and the way parents command a baby's field of vision helps to deepen awareness the way children settle in nursery. Findings from this project align with Froebel's belief that babies are born relational, and their external behaviours are internally driven to connect with the social world (Froebel, 1896; Bruce, 2021). However, joining unfamiliar social surroundings places demands on the child, rupturing founding confidence and intention of voice (Vygotsky, 1998; Hedegaard, 2020). While parents sow the seeds of early communication patterns, such strategic narratives are placed under pressure as babies adjust to the climatic conditions of early childhood settings.

The recommendations emerging from this study contribute to our contemporary application of Froebelian principles. Froebel's pedagogical view encapsulates the whole child, and his emphasis of the child's self-awareness to their connection with family, others, and the environment supports the framing of this study (Tovey, 2020; Bruce, 2021). Integration of parental contributions to the data set was intentional to recognise the importance of their role but to achieve a greater understanding of the connection between home and nursery. Froebel's focus on unity and interconnectedness enriches this study, in the way he believed self-awareness to be closely bound within 'sustained connection with and linking to learning through and with others and relationship matters of the universe' (Bruce, 2021, p. 33-34). For Froebel, the baby works hard to 'find sensory proof of self-existence' (cited in Lilley, 1967, p.77) and it is in the responses they receive from loving adults that implicate their consciousness. Discoveries from this project suggest that, in early childhood settings, babies' self-awareness can be understood by closely observing their intentional voice acts but contend these are entangled in the responsivity and availability of educators. In turn, the emotional and physical availability of educators is deeply intertwined in the institutional traditions and demands that shape the time and spaces of everyday practices, conflicting with Froebel's philosophy that promotes unhurried moments of connection (Clark, 2022). Nurturing the child through moments of connection offers the potential to empower babies to feel validated and respected in early childhood settings. Without moments of connectivity, evidence in this thesis points to some babies being at risk of becoming lost or invisible to educators and their communicative contributions stifled by adult centric practice. Therefore, if the essence of being 'seen' *by* another and being 'present' *for* another misaligns, then the threads of connection between baby and adult are weakened resulting in practices where the emotions of babies and educators are not prioritised. Early childhood educators need to advocate for the voices of babies to be a pivotal feature of everyday practices and need access to regular high-quality, in-depth child development training programmes to advance their knowledge in this area. While educators are not, and should not strive to be, a parental figure, they do have a moral and ethical position to act as the 'sun' to draw out the child's voice into nursery environments, to show the child their contributions are valued and cherished.

I had previously applied Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) concept to my master's study, so I was aware of this growing influence on ECEC research. Like Froebel, Bakhtin's writing examines internal and external influences, and this offered greater depth to the positioning of babies

as authors of their own intentional communication patterns (Bakhtin, 1990). Conceptualising voice through Dialogism as 'utterance' (Bakhtin, 1981) comprising more than the spoken word to include gesture, and body language created a point for observational focus, and analysis. Babies have been typically viewed in early childhood education literature from a deficit position (Johansson and White 2011), so fostering Bakhtin's (1981;1993) theory of Dialogism and its associated characteristics contributed towards a realignment of their social competences. Specifically, viewing 'utterance' as a motive of voice and answerable act, Bakhtin (1993, p.30) considers, '...the one who answerably performs the act knows a clear and distinct light, in which he actually orients himself'. Incidentally, Bakhtin's (1990; 1993) view on answerability afforded appreciation of the moral and ethical position educators find themselves balancing, navigating the deeply held emotions associated with responding to babies, and fulfilling the organisationally motivated demands. By considering both baby and educator are mutually answerable to one another through the 'emotional volitional tones of love' (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 49) emitted during dialogic encounters, this has potential to shift our understanding of babies towards a favourable and visible social authority.

Complementing notions of both Bakhtin and Froebel philosophy, a cultural historical theoretical approach, inspired by the work of Marianne Hedegaard (2002; 2008) was overlaid to complete the theoretical framework. Cultural Historical Theory concerns itself with children's development, specifically their own active contributions to their learning and development in social surroundings (Hedegaard, 2008). Interconnecting Hedegaard's (2008a) notion of motive orientation with Bakhtin's orientation of answerable acts contributed towards a strong recognition of babies' motivation to act strategically to draw others into social interactions.

Motivated acts of voice oriented into the nursery space were viewed to place demands on the external environment, specifically in this case, for educators, which is clearly documented across this thesis. The concept of 'demands' in early childhood education needs further attention to challenge the idealisation of provision that implies babies are 'fine' and will simply adjust to new social surroundings over time. I examined the adjustment of voice with this in mind, reflecting Vygotskian neoformation theory (Vygotsky, 1998), which was brought to life specifically in Taylor and Yolanda's narratives. Further, Hedegaard's (2009) wholeness approach focussed attention to interplay between three perspectives, the societal, institutional, and personal which I firmly believe strengthened the emerging understanding of voice contributions and the entangled landscape they materialise.

The theoretical framing of this study provided a rich understanding of voice from a social and cultural position. It provided a sound basis from which voice and the social, cultural surroundings could be theorised and babies' contributions can be repositioned to reflect their actively conscious presence. Babies were positioned from the outset as authors, contributing to their social surroundings, capable of strategically orienting voice into adult spaces, consequently placing demands on adults in a bid to reorient attention and establish a connection with key adults. All three theories aligned, locating the 'whole child' within the research aims and acknowledges their active and deliberate contributions to their own development in the nursery environment. Moreover, all situated the researcher as an integral and valuable stakeholder in the research process, to bring to life the contributions of participants by 'generating visibility with others' through a 'social process of seeing' (White, 2020, p.9). One of the core aspects of dialogism is the recognition that each dialogic partner is deemed equal to the other (Bakhtin, 1990). I worked hard to navigate this approach, ensuring that educators and babies saw me as distinctly removed from the setting but a trusted companion who would listen and engage with a level of communicative accountability. Combining these three independent theories as one, offers innovative framing of voice which can aid sector understanding of babies' active and multidimensional contribution.

10.7 Review of methodological approach.

Qualitative research is subjective in nature and subject to ethical complications (Edwards, 2010; Miller *et al.* 2012) but endeavours to provide an in depth and intricate meaning to its subject (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). As aforementioned, this study did not set out to determine the absolute 'truth' regarding the meaning underpinning babies' voice. Rather it set out to increase knowledge and awareness concerning how voice materialises within the context of nursery environments and the design of my methodological approach complements this objective. I contend that illustrating the voices of babies has been achieved but acknowledge that the subjective nature of the study may bring with it extended dialogue and reflection regarding its complex methodological approach.

Employing an ethnographic approach (Hammersley, 2013), channelling doctrines of Cultural Historical Theory (Hedegaard, 2009; 2012) to the study, reinforced with a multilateral theoretical framing, granted opportunity to embrace a protracted period of naturalistic field work and 'look beyond' the ostensible baby room experience (Coffey, 1999; Gonzales *et al.* 2008). Ethnography

requires researchers to immerse themselves in the field and declare this presence explicitly in data sets (Spindler and Spindler, 1992). Prolonged attention was focussed on the babies' orientation of voice acts, and the social and cultural dimensions of the field were noted and reflected upon from different perspectives, including the educators. Embracing an ethnographic approach meant I could focus my attention specifically on one child but absorb myself in the encircling activity of nursery life, which I contend enriches the outcome of my study and supports the theorisation of voice as 'more than verbal utterances' (Wall *et al.* 2019, p. 268).

Specifically, two primary challenges transpired across the field work duration from my perspective as a researcher. The first related to the sheer amount of rich data generated which I attribute to the broad research questions developed at the project's inception. Derived at the outset with the intent to generate data across four settings, the five research questions proved to generate considerable data requiring careful ongoing scrutiny and analysis. The analysis process revealed that rather than having too little data (which was a concern initially following the national lockdown), the volume of data generated from two field sites was extensive and at times unmanageable. It took nearly a year to fully analyse all data and to bring this into an appropriate format to present in chapters, another nine months. I worked reflexively and repeatedly to develop a clear understanding of the data sets, taking care not to adulterate the authentic contributions from the babies, nor overlook nuggets of insight from parents of educators. Chapter Five provides a detailed overview of how the analysis process drew out meaning and interconnected emergent themes from participant dialogue. Analysis mirrored a cyclical process which supported me to consider all aspects of data and develop a deeper understanding of the interplay between voice acts, home experiences, educator responsivity and broader cultural and institutional influences. Such an approach was prolonged and intense but afforded possibility to establishing new knowledge and greater understanding of babies' social contributions.

The second challenge related to the emotional toll deep immersion in observing babies and staff navigating the challenges of nursery life. Confronted with the emotional aspects of early years practice challenged my role as a researcher, educator, mother, and outsider tremendously. I had underestimated the emotional impact of watching babies from afar seeking emotional connection with adults who were overstretched and orbiting several levels of responsibility, with few breaks and little support in place. I found myself at an intersect between the professional and personal lines of

emotion, trying desperately to remain impartial but leaving the field weighed down with suppressed emotion from absorbing the heightened levels of anxiety exuded from participants. To date, there is very little theorising of the emotionality associated with researching the lives of young children. I took solace from Coffey (1999) and Gottlieb (2012) to reflect intensely on how field work required an embodiment of self, head, and hearts, and we should not 'divorce our scholarly endeavours from the bodily reality of being in the field' but embrace the ripples of self, experienced (Ely *et al.* 1997, p.329; Coffey, 1999, p.19). Furthermore, Cultural historical theory acknowledges the 'doubleness of the researcher' (Hedegaard, 2010) and importance of emotion as a 'rich dimension of any research project and its absence reduces the quality of the analysis and interpretation' (Fleer, 2014, p. 28). As discussed in preceding chapters, field diaries and the supportive nature of my supervisory team granted dialogic space to move through a process connecting all aspects of the research journey to reconceptualise these as valuable qualities in my unique project. Teusner (2016) maintains emotions entangled with conducting research need to be recognised on a broader scale. Whilst a quest for authenticating research has traditionally been rooted in remaining impartial and objective, I suggest that by apportioning reflective space to the emotional dimensions associated with research with young children, we may find our discoveries and understanding of children's contributions reap greater benefit to children and wider broader research sector.

The transferability of this study may be limited, though was never intended to generalise nor represent every baby or setting. A strength of this study is how it reiterates the individuality of voice and how the culture of every early education setting will be defined by different rules and rituals which implicate enacted practices of seeing voice. Consequently, whilst there is scope for aspects of the methodology to be applied to a larger study, I would recommend that any future research adopting aspects of my methodological orientation should be differentiated to reflect the individual cultural aspects it seeks to examine. I firmly believe that the methodological design offers potential to examine a larger sample size to aid greater representation and understanding of how voice emerges against diverse environments.

10.8 Implications for Personal perspectives – increasing the visibility of voice.

According to Hedegaard (2012, p. 21) consideration a personal perspective involves the examination of children's own contributions to the social environment, through their acquisition of competencies,

motives, and intentions which can be characterised 'as a movement initiated by the learner's emotional experience related to the activity setting'.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that babies' voice acts are underlined by intention, motivated to increase their presence and contributions within nursery. Voice revealed itself to be intentionally engaged by babies to connect with familiar adults and was dialogically structured and historically rooted in the babies' previous social encounters. Despite this, voice was often silently rippling underneath typical baby room practices, difficult to decipher without opportunity for educators to slow down and connect closely with the children. Hedegaard (2012, p. 21) claims motives are seen as 'a movement initiated by the learner's emotional experiences related to the activity setting'. From this, I considered the strategic narratives observed to be indications of the emotional dimensions associated with their social experiences. This came to life in the vignettes where baby and adults were closely connected, dialogically in tune together in playful and intimate episodes. My findings highlight the entanglement between individual baby's voice motives and the alignment to early childhood educators demands which will always influence how and if voice is acknowledged. The study's findings contribute to sector knowledge as it offers detailed, authentic narratives of voice, that have not been documented so intricately in English nurseries before. While it is acknowledged throughout the thesis that every child's voice patterning will differ, the commonalities documented reveal themselves to be significant and go some way to bring to life the fragile nature of babies' communication patterns. It is undeniable that voice acts reveal themselves to be strongly connected with the desire to secure closeness and companionship with special adults. Such stark indications align with an established discourse calling for relationships between adults and children to be a principal pedagogical feature in early education (Dalli, 2016; Degotardi and Pearson, 2018). The correlation between responsive interactions and positive brain development in the first two years is well recognised (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2018; Parent Infant Foundation, 2021). We know the numbers of children accessing early childhood institutions is ever increasing, with significant numbers of babies spending time in settings like Little Pandas and Little Birdies (Goouch and Powell, 2015; OECD 2015). With that in mind, their contributions in early childhood settings should be valued with ample opportunities to establish relational encounters with reliable, knowledgeable early childhood educators prioritised. Accordingly, the evidence in this study

contributes to a growing discourse for wider recognition that relational encounters in the earliest years shape later experiences (McCrory, 2023).

Although the study primarily concerned itself with babies' motives, the personal competencies and motives of early childhood educators revealed themselves to be significant in the analysis process. It became clear early on that prior to engaging reflexively with the VID process, subtle patterning of voice had gone unnoticed, perceived only when voicing had advanced into more demanding elicitation that warranted adult attention. Entangled within dialogue were the conflicting burdens creating daily anxiety and suppressed emotions which undoubtedly shaped how emotionally present educators could be (Elfer *et al.* 2018). Engaging in the VID process led me to appreciate the lack of space afforded to educators to reflect the richness of children's development and their own professional contributions to the nursery culture. It was in moments of viewing intensely responsive interactions did educators begin to embody a physical and emotional reaction in response to babies' reactions to their involvement. It was as if they were physiologically elevated and inspired to consider how significant their own social contributions were to babies. Trevarthen, Dunlop and Delafield-Butt (2018, p.3) suggest the spirited nature of the young child can take us 'into new possibilities...' and I would argue that viewing moments of intimate, responsive interaction opened space for educators to visualise how concentrating on moments of unhurried connection with babies could enhance and strengthen relationship with babies. Such discovery underlines the importance of settings implementing a consistent Key Person Approach that prioritises time for close, synchronous interactions with babies as a natural part of everyday practice. Further highlighted is the need for educators to have access to high quality training programmes that enhance their knowledge and advocacy of babies' voices and, in parallel, robust systems giving time for professionals to reflect deeply on their emotional encounters with young children must be established.

10.9 Implications for Institutional perspectives – responding to the babies' voices.

Informed by wider policy, early childhood settings establish their own culture and traditions in relation to baby room practice (Hedegaard 2012), which are highlighted specifically in research question four and five. This study demonstrates how institutional structures determined the culture and conditions of the workplace for educators and daily experiences the children encountered. The norms that guided practices were closely entangled with management styles of senior managers, room leaders

and individual educators. Findings reveal that while relationships between adults and babies were seen as valuable and openly promoted in management rhetoric, the reality of establishing interactions as a basis for close relationships with babies conflicted with institutionally imposed tasks. The educators reported increasing frustration associated with balancing the demands imposed institutionally (deep-rooted in policy) and the needs of babies, citing time with children was not seen as 'sacred or respected' by management. This highlights tensions between the complex work required in baby rooms and the lack of recognition concerning the importance of sustained, high-quality interactions with caregivers. Despite practices emerging from the principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2021a; DfE, 2021b) which position positive relationships as a central component to early education, the experiences of babies and educators in this study reveal significant challenges and distinct limitations associated with establishing consistent relationships with babies. This study presents distinct evidence affirming that, with time, educators and babies can foster strong bonds, but this arises only when educators are emotionally and physically present, in the moment with babies. Sourcing time to be with babies as well as feeling like educators needed 'permission' to extend interactions was a recurrent issue emerging from this study. The reality is that babies in this study spent large amounts of their time in nursery without close or consistent interaction from an adult. I would like to suggest, should a larger more diverse sample corroborate these discoveries then this presents a serious and urgent concern for babies, their families and wider society. I contend that educators need to challenge established rigid institutional practices that do not promote a relationship-based ethos and advocate for unhurried moments of interaction between the 'gaps between the beats' (Lefebvre, 2004; Mitchelmore *et al.* 2017) of routine requirements to source potential opportunity for rich, responsive interaction. This should be in addition to the routine encounters already established during caregiving moments. My concept of Adagio Interactions offers a useful approach to validate time with babies and promote permission to prioritise interactional moments in practice.

The emerging narrative from this study suggests that while educators work tirelessly to fulfil responsibilities, and know the babies' essential needs well, there is a gap between knowledge of children's social and emotional development that pervades current professional training opportunities. Educators need access to high quality training programmes that uplift their knowledge and advocacy of babies' voice initiations and the value of consistent, attuned interactions with

babies. Further, robust support systems must be in place that permit educators to reflect and grow their professional knowledge individually and with colleagues. Intergenerationally driven dialogue (Monk, 2014) has a distinct bearing on established institutional rituals which is rarely challenged or re-examined by colleagues. Consequently, this puts practice at risk of remaining indiscriminately and habitually enacted (Brace, 2020), rather than responsively constructed for and with babies in mind. From this study, it appears current working conditions in large nursery settings are not always conducive to establishing a purposeful reflective space where educator or babies; contributions to practice are valued. It is possible the VID process offers scope to be revisited and tested more widely as a professional reflection tool that could be embedded into institutional practices long term.

10.10 Implications from a societal perspective – perpetuating the voices of babies.

Positioning this study within a cultural historical context necessitates consideration of the societal values and beliefs concerning babies (Hedegaard, 2012). Chapters One and Two examined the current context of the early childhood sector in England, highlighting significant inequalities facing babies in policy and regulatory guidance (Johansson and White, 2011; Cameron and Moss, 2020; Parent Infant Foundation, 2021). Early education is highly political issue, and amid policy directives, are babies who are seldom acknowledged as active stakeholders in society (White and Dalli, 2016). According to Hedegaard (2020, p.8), 'in a society, the different institutions are created in relation to societal needs and through laws and traditions, which influence persons participating in the institutional practices and their activities'. In the case of the settings featured in this study, they exist within a system of ideals that has a fragmented history, lacking coherence of purpose, funding and 'absence in policy of an integrative and holistic concept, which understands care and education as fundamentally inseparable.' (Moss, 2020, p.2). Private for-profit companies, like Jolly Jungle, are in abundance nationally, designed to provide access to high quality childcare for working parents. Therein lies part of the problem. Historically, early education offers childcare *for* parents, and 'lacks a coherent and visible political strategy' centralising the needs of children (Goouch and Powell, 2017, p. 145). I return frequently to Goldschmied and Jackson's (1994, p.1) words, 'a society can be judged by its attitude to its youngest children, not only in what is said about them but how this attitude is expressed in what is offered to them as they grow up.'

While there is no denying that the transformation of accessible early education services for parents and their young children is vast, there is a profound sense that babies are overlooked in their representation across these services. The ethos of the settings in this study promoted care and quality for all children, with purpose-built baby units and a child centred provision prioritised. Both managers shared how relationships with babies were at the heart of their practice, and they were proud of the effectiveness of the key persons approach (DfE, 2021a). Accordingly, evidence emerging from this study indicates the babies worked hard to shape a sense of self through their voice acts and their priority remained focussed on staying close to adults. While the importance of relationships with others is at the heart of early education guidance (DfE 2021a), appreciation of the active role babies play remains notably absent and underrepresented. Recent changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance (DfE 2021a; DfE 2021b; DfE, 2023b) sought to realign the focus away from an outcome-based narrative towards a responsive, relational pedagogy, yet still fails to emphasise the positioning of babies as separate to preschool aged children or the extraordinary value of prioritising relational aspects of care. Findings from this study emphasise how failing to acknowledge babies as independent individuals coupled with prolonged absence policy prioritising relational care has a trickledown effect on babies' everyday experiences in nursery. It is not that the babies were physically absent, on the contrary, they worked very hard to be noticed and heard. Rather, it appeared that they were considered no different to the older children in the nursery, recipients of transient staff teams and planned purposeful activities where learning appeared prioritised over their social and emotional needs. The significance of the deep bonds between baby and adult notably omitted and only recognised through a protracted process of reflection. Upholding rigidity in practices to guarantee mandated regulations came at a cost, implicating the direct emotional needs of the children resulting in missed opportunities for dialogic encounters to unfold. A sense of moving hastily to achieve required directives overshadowed the children, resulting in staff having limited capacity to offer their presence to the babies.

The intentions of the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance (DfE, 2021a, p.8) are clear, 'the number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial'. While the settings worked very hard to establish a language-rich environment through planned activities and structured routines, it was these events which largely appeared to contribute to the 'busyness' of the staff, redirecting attention to organisation rather than

grounding practices in relational responsivity to tune into babies' voice contributions. Evidence points to snatched moments of rich interaction, which were vital for babies' emotional needs, and enjoyed by baby and adult alike. Yet interactions were documented to be often few and often fragmented, their significance downplayed by educators and management. The consequence of this finding for babies' long-term cognitive and emotional outcomes cannot be overemphasised (McCrory, 2023).

Ratios and maintaining a constant, enthusiastic staff team had a distinct bearing on opportunities for the voices of babies to be seen and acknowledged. In England, the 1:3 adult: baby ratio (DfE, 2021a) is seen to be optimal by many (OECD, 2017), yet findings from my study reveal how challenging balancing the needs of three babies and wider institutional responsibilities is for educators. Policy makers, and other stakeholders must be alert to the realities of everyday happenings in nursery environments for babies and staff. More widely, as a society we need to ask the uncomfortable question; Are we content knowing that some babies receive very little individualised attention when they attend nursery? Given what is known about the strong links between reciprocal interactions in infancy and robust neural connections (Murray 2014; McCrory, 2023) is the time they do receive sufficient to promote rich language encounters, grounded in Professional Love (Page, 2011) and affection, to contribute to positive social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes? I would like to suggest that the evidence in this thesis presents a robust case to pursue a national dialogue, involving all stakeholders to ascertain how everyday practices in baby rooms can adopt a more rigorous and consistent approach to relational pedagogy.

The distinct challenges facing educators working with babies must be acknowledged and the complex emotional weight of responsibility reflected in future policy documents. More pressing, however, is the distinct and recurrent absence of babies' contributions in policy directives which shapes how babies are characterised societally and more importantly, institutionally. Paying attention to voice and the specific contributions of babies in nursery settings requires urgent attention. Acting on the national 'baby blind spot' (Parent Infant Foundation, 2021) must be prioritised in early education. Doing so will only enrich opportunity for sector wide dialogue and enhance experiences for babies. This thesis acts as a platform to amplify the agentic contributions of babies and hopes to reconceptualise the baby as a valuable stakeholder joining dialogue pertaining to their everyday experiences in nursery and beyond.

10.11 Recommendations – a summary.

Key recommendations arising from this study can be summarised as follows:

- Voice acts as a bridge to connect babies to adult worlds. It typically emerges as a thread of connection just beneath the surface of nursery activity. Therefore, being alert to and tuning into babies' unique but strategic voice initiations must underpin baby room pedagogy. The relational and temporal uniqueness of voice initiations must be central to work with babies and such practices must prioritise close and consistent interactions between babies and familiar adults and should be recognised in statutory curriculum guidance.
- Early childhood settings must develop strategies to embed a slow relational approach between educators and babies. A concept such as Adagio interactions could assist the workforce to validate, implement and sustain interactional moments with babies outside of typical routine occurrences.
- There needs to be sufficient highly trained and knowledgeable educators to respond sensitively to babies' voice contributions. Without a sufficient and consistent workforce, babies' unique contributions are vulnerable to misalignment or missed altogether.
- Nursery cultures need to emphasise the emotional dimensions of practice through establishing institutional customs and policy that actively promotes relational care through consistent implementation of the key persons approach, staff continuity, child led planning in day-to-day practices.
- Policy leaders must commit to establishing policy guidance to prioritise an advantageous conceptualisation of babies and must prioritise attention to policies that actively promote relational pedagogy and investment in the workforce.
- Early childhood settings should have access to robust, evidence-based professional development models, such as Video Interaction Dialogue to promote looking beyond the surface of daily interactions between educators and babies.
- Further, other models, including Work Discussion (Elfer and Dearnley, 2007; Elfer *et al.* 2018) should be a statutory requirement in settings to give appropriate attention to the emotional experiences of work with young children.

10.12 Limitations to the study.

Field work took place in the same company and in the same geographic area, therefore the overall study does not afford opportunity to consider broader understanding of baby room experiences, which is a potential limitation. Participants were recruited from homogeneous groupings, with all parents employed professionally, and paying privately for nursery care. Babies, were, according to their parents' accounts, from close, loving traditionally nuclear families, with regular access to extended family and friends. No educators were early years graduates, though all but one qualified in line with mandated requirements for early childhood educators (DfE, 2021a). I acknowledge the small sample but also note the similarities between the demographics accessing private for-profit nursery provision, and educators typically assigned to work in English baby rooms as the 'least qualified' (Goouch and Powell, 2013a, 2013b).

Documenting the voices of babies is a contentious and ethically problematic endeavour (Elwick, Bradley and Sumsion, 2014). Much time was taken to design this study to counter many of the known contentions associated with research with very young children, though it is acknowledged that the nature of research focus will undoubtedly prompt debate. I endeavoured to include voice contributions from the babies but navigated this with caution and sensitivity. The research never claimed to offer insight to the babies' perspectives explicitly but sought to foreground how their communication patterns influence how interactions manifest in nursery and the subsequent bearing this has on their social experiences away from their families. Significant to this project is the theoretical underpinning which sought to inform a methodological approach that explored voice from several different perspectives, including visual methods (Hedegaard, 2008a; 2012). I purposely refrained from adopting visual methods that warranted attaching cameras to the babies (Sumsion *et al.* 2011), as I felt this invaded their personal space, objectified them as participants and conflicted my own epistemological beliefs. Throughout the study I returned to my 'ethical responsibility' (Bradley *et al.* 2012) and 'affective positioning' (Quiñones, 2014) to embrace the uncertainty of developing research with babies as foci and acknowledge the 'impossibility of knowing' (Elwick *et al.* 2014a) with certainty the full extent of babies' voice.

10.13 Final reflections.

As I draw my thesis to a close, society is moving out of the grips of the Covid-19 pandemic which saw several national lockdowns comprising limited social interaction with others and restricted access to nursery provision for most children (DfE, 2020). As society adjusts to a post pandemic life, researchers have started to highlight concern surrounding the impact on the social and emotional and language development of babies and young children (Francis, 2023). The Parent Infant Foundation highlighted a baby blind spot (Reed and Parish, 2021) in the way in which the needs of babies and their families were absent in the government's pandemic response. While the absence of babies in policy directives is not a new issue, as discussed in the introductory sections of this thesis, concern relating to limited and restricted social contact for many children and its potential implications on development were not acknowledged in the Government's response plan.

While the prolonged impact of the pandemic has yet to be fully understood, early reports indicate marked disruption to babies' emotional security and the subsequent social, emotional and language skills due to recurrent lockdowns and limited social experiences (Byrne *et al.* 2023). Ofsted's 2021/22 Annual Review states 'young children were particularly hard hit' (Ofsted, 2022, p.2) by the pandemic impacting their social and emotional development. The report points to specific delays in children's speech, language and young children lacking confidence during social interactions. The findings from my study highlight that even prior to the global pandemic, social interactions in nursery were variable in frequency and quality. Interactions that appeared to contribute to the acceleration of babies' voice skills were those that were sustained, reciprocal and affectionate. The characteristics of interactions were directly reliant upon the availability and desire of individual staff to engage with babies and see them as valued communication partners. Relationships with valued educators, typically the baby's key person were disrupted and, in many cases, ruptured long term due to repeated closures and children returning to settings into different rooms and to new staff teams (Walton and Darkes-Sutcliffe, 2021). Research commissioned by the British Educational Research Association calls for more studies to examine the 'processes involved in moment-by-moment relational interactions' (Walton and Darkes-Sutcliffe, 2021) to understand the impact of the pandemic on babies, educators, and families. Although data from my study was generated prior to the first national lockdown, it offers insight into the moment-by-moment dialogue that unfolds between educators and babies. Rich relational encounters transpire in moments of stillness, where educators align their communication

responses with the baby and there is time and opportunity for harmonious exchange to develop, and external distractions are minimised. Notably as a 'catch up' agenda emerges as a government response to make up for 'lost learning', this appears to directly contrast findings from my study that points to a need to slow down and establish relational moments to *be with* babies to acknowledge their voice contributions. In line with pandemic recovery priorities (DfE 2021b; Ofsted, 2022; Byrne *et al.* 2023), my concept of Adagio Interactions offers scope for early childhood educators to implement purposeful moments of interaction in everyday practice giving precedence to close, dialogic encounters.

Staff reported in my study that they felt uncomfortable interacting with babies for prolonged moments, concerned they were letting their team down and were frustrated that interactions were not a 'sacred' or valued aspect of pedagogy. Moreover, they cited that workforce discontinuity and conflicting professional responsibilities directly influenced how and when interactions with babies materialised. As we emerge from the pandemic, the issues of workforce stability are more acute. The early childhood workforce was a resilient and resolute army of responders during the pandemic, leading on the front line to offer care and education for the most vulnerable children (La Valle *et al.* 2022). Notwithstanding, the workforce was scarcely recognised in Department for Education directives or governmental policy directives, which exacerbated the narrative of undervalued and marginalised and reiterated the void between policy and reality of working with young children (Bonetti *et al.* 2021). Sustaining a prolonged pandemic response coupled with an already struggling and fragmented sector has now contributed to a workforce recruitment crisis (La Valle *et al.* 2022). Staff continuity has been highlighted in this study as attributing to the opportunity and consistency to respond to babies' voices and establish rich interactional moments and directly affecting staff morale. Notably, one of the field sites in this study has closed due to lack of staff and the children transferred to other local providers which seems to be indicative of the turbulent early education climate.

Research examining the effect of the pandemic on babies born just before and during the pandemic will continue to be a cross sector research priority for years to come. Urgent, however, is challenging the combined discourse faced by the early childhood sector concerning a deficient workforce and babies and toddlers who require more time and close attention with familiar adults than ever before. My field work has emphasised an institutional landscape, underpinned by policy, that directly conflict

the individual needs of babies and at times, educators. It is essential policy makers work hard to listen to the sector and respond to the calls for additional funding and prioritisation.

At the time of writing, two pivotal movements have started to shift the early education sector. The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood has launched a campaign to advance societal awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences on later life (Royal Foundation. Centre for Early Childhood, 2021). The campaign advocates that 'Early childhood represents one of the best investments we can make for the long-term health, wellbeing and happiness of our society' (Royal Foundation. Centre for Early Childhood, 2021, p. 5). Advancing this vision, The Scottish Government pledge to 'take account of infants' views and rights' (Scottish Government, 2023, p. 3) in matters concerning them is another indicator that the tide is turning for babies' and there remains hope for the reprioritisation of young children in societal and political discourse. Good intentions must be met with backing from current and future governments to guarantee babies are repositioned in policy as socially agentic individuals with voices that warrant respectful listening from adults. Equally, for the early childhood workforce to be appreciated for their unrelenting efforts to offer babies a loving and consistent professional presence, they too, must be recognised as professional and highly skilled advocates for babies' rights.

In parallel, The Department for Education have pledged additional investment to expand funded places for children as young as 9 months old (DfE, 2023a). Seen as a progressive and promising movement for families, this study has highlighted the precarious political and fragile societal context baby room provision finds itself. Babies need to experience formal day care that prioritises their rights and where their voices are positioned advantageously. They must have access to emotionally available individuals to care for them who work in an organisational culture that cherishes and promotes responsive, caregiving that promotes a sense of belonging. Whilst investment from governments is always welcomed, there needs to be more joined up thinking and cross sector dialogue to ensure the rights of babies and working conditions of the workforce are central to any expansion now or in the future.

To this end, as a society we remain mutually, morally, and ethically answerable in the 'temporal sequence of life' (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 2) to act as the sun to draw out and value the social contributions of babies as they navigate the climatic conditions of the modern world (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967).

We are all implicated in children's earliest experiences. Each of us closely 'bound in association with everything else in the great chain of being' (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967, p. 20) and in turn are morally accountable for the decisions made or the political blind spots created. This study has reinforced that babies have important things to tell us, so policy makers and indeed all of us must act urgently in a unified way to ensure that babies and those who work with babies are valued, respected, and heard.

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Appendix 1 – Recruitment advert



Expression of interest

A Doctoral researcher from Roehampton University is seeking several day nurseries to join an exciting project exploring baby social experiences in day nursery environments.

“Hearing babies’ voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision”* will explore how babies convey their voice/s in nursery provision across a small sample of settings in England. The primary focus will be to observe the patterns of communications babies use to attract the attention of adults caring for them, the responses of the nursery practitioners and differences in communications and interactions that follow. The study will also explore the influence the nursery culture and environment have on interactions between babies and practitioners.

What commitment does the nursery need to make?

The study would involve commitment for up to 6 months and would require a selection of observations (written and video recorded) of babies interacting with practitioners in the setting to be documented each week. Additionally, practitioners based in the baby room would be invited to participate in reflective dialogues following any video recording to explore their awareness of their role as well as their interpretation of the interactions with the children. The project also invites parents of the children for a one-off interview to inform the researcher about the child’s earliest home life experiences.

Four settings will be invited to participate in this study and a total of 40 individual participants will be involved.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Caroline Guard email: guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk.

Please note, expressing an interest does NOT automatically commit you to the project. This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton’s Ethic Committee. *The project is funded by The Froebel Trust.

Appendix 2 - Recruitment guidance for settings.

The following represents key information required from any respondents (settings) of the expression of interest advert. Prior to confirming participation, settings will discuss their suitability for the study with the researcher. It is important to collate the information at this early point to ensure suitable settings and the staff teams are recruited. It is deemed appropriate to request the following information to assist in the selection of appropriate settings for the study as it is important to ensure that the setting is not going through any major organisational changes which the presence of a researcher may adversely affect. The bullet points represent areas for discussion and consideration *prior* to settings and researcher agreeing to project taking place. This is not an exhaustive list and is subject to alter. The framework of prompts is seen as a guide and reflects the emerging nature of any discussions that may take place between the researcher and setting owner.

General

- Date opened.
- Children on roll (total) and children under 1 and 2 on roll
- Future enrolment plans
- Current Ofsted grade and date of last inspection. Access to report.

Structure of Nursery

- Nursery structure, specifically any key information relating to baby or under 2s units.
- Management and Staffing structure
- Daily routine – baby unit and under 2s.
- Shift patterns of staff - Staff organisation across setting e.g., lunchtimes/beginning and end of day
- Settling in processes for children of all ages

Staff/management focus

- Any recent or upcoming changes to organisation/structure/ownership
 - Process of recruitment
 - Staff Turnover in past 12 months
 - Training opportunities for staff
 - Staff aspirations
 - Any focus/corporate goals are priority in the current climate.
-
- Additional relevant information

RE: Ethics Application Ref: EDU 19/ 173 - Approval with Conditions

From: Jan Harrison
Sent: 02 May 2019 14:15:38
To: Caroline Guard (Research Student)
Cc: Antonia Zachariou; Vini Lander; Peter Flew; Fengling Tang
Subject: Ethics Application Ref: EDU 19/ 173 - Approval with Conditions

Dear Caroline,

Ethics Application

Applicant: Caroline Guard
Title: Hearing infant voices within patterns of infant-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.
Reference: EDU 19/ 173
Department: Education

Under the procedures agreed by the University Ethics Committee I am pleased to advise you that your Department has confirmed their approval of your application and that any conditions for approval of this project have now been met (apart from the condition relating to DBS below), and that the risk assessment for your project has been reviewed and approved by the Health & Safety Office.

Major Condition:

- 1) DBS Check: Please let us know once this has been obtained.

Minor Conditions:

- 2) Application, P1: please give your programme of study (PhD).
- 3) In the cases where you refer to not sharing data or participants' information with the funder, you only refer to not sharing personal data. The focus should be on not sharing personal data. Please double check p. 21.
- 4) P21: we believe that there is a typo in the last line of para 1 under Publication of Results – could you change "in addition, personal data or participant information will be shared with the Froebel Trust." to "will not be shared."

As these are only minor conditions it is assumed that you will adhere to these conditions for approval and therefore we do not require a response.

Please Note:

- This email confirms ethics approval with conditions. Final ethics approval is not confirmed until we have advised you by email that all conditions have been met. Data collection should not commence until final ethics approval has been received.
- University of Roehampton ethics approval will always be subject to compliance with the University policies and procedures applying at the time when the work takes place. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar

Appendix 4 – Example Plain Language Statement (Parents)



Plain Language Statement

Purpose of the Research: An exploration titled 'Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.' which investigates the interactions that take place between babies attending nursery provision and the adults who care for them.

Researcher: Caroline Guard PhD student from Roehampton University

Research Supervised by: Dr Peter Elfer, Dr Sue Robson and Dr Fengling Tang at Roehampton University

What will be expected from you: If you agree to participate in the research, you will be agreeing to take part in a **semi structured interview** whereby we will discuss your child's earliest days and evolving temperament, personality and communication experiences within the home. It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 1 hour and would be recorded using an audio recording system (Dictaphone) and the researcher would also make shorthand notes as you share your experiences.

Location: Nursery setting or other mutually agreeable location.

What will be expected from your child: As their parent and legal guardian, if you agree to consent for your child to be observed as part of the research study, you are consenting for them to be observed within their nursery setting weekly for the duration of up to 6 months. Observations will be in written narrative format and will also be filmed using a video camera. Observations aim to record their communicative interactions with the adults who are caring for them and carrying out routine tasks such as mealtimes and care practices. Written observations are thought to take up to 1 hour each whilst video recordings will focus on capturing care routines between your child and practitioners. Your child will not be left unattended with the researcher at any time.

Potential Risks to you and your family: There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to you or your child. All information collected is anonymised and findings can be shared with you and the setting in summary form. The project does not aim to assess your child's development in anyway, it aims to explore the experiences of your child in nursery provision and investigate the types of interactions that take place across their time in the setting.

The researcher is experienced and trained to observe babies naturalistically and can professionally and objectively recognise when the child may become distressed or uncomfortable when being observed. If this situation occurs, the researcher will halt the observation with immediate effect and the suitability of continuing with the study will be discussed with you and relevant staff in the setting. The babies' best interests will always be upheld.

Confidentiality: Full confidentiality of your, your child and family's identity will be maintained at all times. Data will be used to form the main part of the Thesis and pseudonyms are applied to ensure no traceable features are disclosed either within data records or final dissemination of findings. All manuscripts and audio recordings are stored securely on an encrypted memory stick and backed up with a password protected hard drive.

Storage of Video Footage: Storing of video footage and audio recordings will adhere to the above. Permission will be sought from you directly to request your permission to use any stills/images from video footage for any final dissemination of results or for use at conferences.

Withdrawing from the study: Your participation in the study is on a voluntary basis and you are free to withdraw yourself or your child at any time with no prejudice and without giving any reason. It is asked that withdrawal from the study is discussed and decided by XXXXX prior to the final Thesis submission.

Research Period: It is anticipated that all data collection will be conducted between XXXXX 2019 Exact times and dates are to be diarised and confirmed directly between you and the researcher.

Results from the Study: All findings from the data collection will be analysed, evaluated and developed into a final Thesis and recommendations for the research sector.

This research study is carried out in line with the BERA 2018 ethical guidance for research and the Roehampton University Code of Ethics.

Persons to contact: Researcher: Caroline Guard – guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

If during the course of the study, you are unhappy with the researchers conduct, please contact the Director of Studies: Dr Fengling Tang f.tang@roehampton.ac.uk

This information is yours to keep.

Appendix 5 – Exemplar Participant consent form – Settings, parents, child and educators



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Hearing babies voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.

Brief description of research project and what participation involves:

This exploratory study is titled 'Hearing babies voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision' which investigates the interactions that take place between babies attending nursery provision and the adults who care for them.

The project will take place between XXXX and XXXX 2019 for a maximum of 6 months.

Up to 40 participants across four settings will take part in this study.

Agreeing to participate in this project will involve you taking part in the following data collection methods:

If you are a **parent** of a child*: You will be required to consent to take part in a semi structured interview where you will be asked to share your child's early communication experiences within the home. It is likely that the interview will involve discussing how your child communicates with you and the immediate family within the home and anything in their earliest development which you feel may have influenced their social development. It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 1 hour and (with you consent) will be recorded using a Dictaphone. The researcher will also make shorthand notes throughout the discussion. Notes and audio recording will always be securely stored and processed upholding your anonymity. Your information will be used alongside observational footage of

their time in nursery to create a holistic picture of their development and how they manage their transition and communications with adults outside their immediate family.

If you are a *parent/legal guardian* of a **child**: As their parent and legal guardian, if you agree to consent for your child to be observed as part of the research study, you are consenting for your child to be observed within the nursery setting. Observations detailed in written form and recorded on video cameras aim to document the interactions between your child and the adults who work within the setting. The aim to capture your child's experiences and 'voice' via gestural cues and utterances between the staff and baby at regular occurrences across a week. Observations will take place within the baby room and record interactions throughout their day, including care practices. No images of your child will be distributed to anyone outside the research project without your explicit consent.

Observation expectations: **Written observations** will take place no more than two observations per week, lasting no more than 1 hour in total. Across a week this will equate to no than 2 hours per individual. In total across the research – up to 48 hours of written observation per participant.

Video recorded observations will take place for a maximum of twice weekly recordings of routine situations which would last up to 15 minutes per activity. A total of approximately – 30 minutes per participant per week for a duration of up to 6 months (24 weeks). Each participant may be filmed for an approximate total of up to 12 hours across data generation period.

If you are a **staff member***: You will then be required to consent to being observed within the baby room interacting with children throughout routine situations and day to day practices. The purpose of this is to explore the babies' experiences of nursery provision and how your role as a practitioner is organised across the day.

The recordings taken of your interactions with the children will then be played back to you at a later date in the presence of the researcher where you will together conduct a reflective dialogue about your own experiences with the child.

A minimum of two and maximum of four reflective dialogues will take place with each participant across the total research generation period.

Each dialogue will last no more than *one hour* in duration.

1 x practitioner x (max) 4 hours = 4 hours in total.

16 practitioners x (max of 4 hours) = 64 hours maximum reflective dialogue data

If you are a **nursery setting***: As the owner/manager of this setting, you are invited to consent to this research project being conducted within your nursery setting. The project consists of collecting data from multiple perspectives to document the experiences of the very youngest children attending the nursery. Observations will take place within the baby unit to record the interactions between the babies and practitioners. The observations will be in

written form and recorded on video cameras. The project will also require access to staff members to carry out focus groups and reflective dialogue with individuals who work directly within the baby room.

For ALL participants: Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. That means you have the right to decline/withdraw yourself at any time throughout the research process, without risk of discrimination. This can be done by contacting the researcher directly on the email below. If you choose to withdraw yourself or child from the study after the point of analysis, please note that data may not be erased, but it may remain in anonymised form as part of an aggregated database within the final report.

If you have any reservations about your participation throughout the research process, please do not hesitate to raise this with the researcher at any time.

All forms of data (written, recorded) will be handled and stored in accordance with the expected codes of conducting ethical research. No names or identifiable features will be disclosed to anyone at any time. Notes taken during data collection will be coded and pseudonyms or alias used to protect the identity of the settings and individual participants. All processed data will be stored digitally, encrypted and password protected and not shared online with anyone.

Visual data (video recordings/audio) will be stored securely on the secure University system and individual files encrypted, and password protected, only accessed by the researcher. No files or digital images/videos will be transported online at any time.

Additional consent is sought for the use of any imagery in the distribution and sharing of the project to ensure that the identity of individuals is only shared with the consent of the participant and used only alongside a pseudonym. Complying with GDPR (2018), and University of Roehampton's Record Retention Schedule, all research data will be stored securely for at least 10 years from the date of submission and publication.

Please note: In the event of the researcher witnessing or being concerned that a participant or other is at risk of serious harm, the researcher may be required to break confidentiality and inform the relevant organisations on a 'need to know' basis.

Please note: This study has been made possible in part through funding from The Froebel Trust. However, please be aware that no personal information or individual responses will be made available or shared directly with The Froebel Trust.

***Denotes relevant sections deleted for individual stakeholders.**

Investigators contact details:

Caroline Guard
Education Department
University of Roehampton
Froebel College
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

Consent statement:

I agree to take part in this research and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason by contacting Caroline Guard. I understand that if I do withdraw after the point of analysis, my data may not be erased but will only be used in an anonymised form as part of an aggregated dataset. I understand that the personal data collected from me during the course of the project, including images from visual data may will be used to support distribution of findings (as detailed above) in the public interest.

By signing this form, you are confirming that you have read, understood and agree with the University's [Data Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#).

Name

Signature

Date

The information you have provided will be treated in confidence by the researcher and your identity will be protected in the publication of any findings. The purpose of the research may change over time, and your data may be re-used for research projects by the University in the future. If this is the case, you will normally be provided with additional information about the new project.

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of the project or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies, Dr. Fengling Tang, Department of Education, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. F.tang@roehampton.ac.uk 0202 3892 3686

However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Research Lead in the School of Education.

Research Lead, Professor Vini Lander, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. vini.lander@roehampton.ac.uk 0208 392 3865

This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethic Committee.

Appendix 6 – Participant Debrief form (parent and child)



DEBRIEF FORM

Title of Research Project: Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.

Thank you for participating in this research project. The time and commitment you have dedicated is appreciated. It is hoped that you found the experience enjoyable and beneficial. If you would like to discuss any areas of the research or your contribution, please do contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form. If you feel that you need additional support following your contributions, please contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form who can advise you further.

Brief description of research project and what participation involved:

This exploratory study 'Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision' investigated the interactions that took place between babies attending nursery provision and the adults who care for them.

As a parent of a child, you participated in a semi structured interview where you provided information relating to your child's earliest communication experiences in the family home.

Your child took part in several written and video recorded observations documenting the interactions between your child and the adults who work within the setting. The aim was to capture your child's experiences and 'voice' via gestural cues and utterances between the staff and baby at regular occurrences across a week. Observations took place within the baby room and recorded interactions throughout their day, including care practices. No images of your child will be distributed to anyone outside the research project without your explicit consent.

Your participation in the research was entirely voluntary. That means you continue to have the right to decline/withdraw yourself or your child at any time throughout the research process, without risk of discrimination. This can be done by contacting the researcher directly on the email below. Please note, if you withdraw after the point of analysis, your data will not be erased but may still be used in an anonymised form as of an aggregated database. If you have any reservations about your or your child's participation throughout the research process, please do not hesitate to raise this with the researcher at any time.

Results: Results from the study have been analysed and written up into the final thesis report. You are entitled to request a short summary of the research findings, and this can be done by contacting the researcher directly using the details below.

Please note: This study has been made possible in part through funding from The Froebel Trust. However, please be aware that no personal information or individual responses will be made available or shared directly with The Froebel Trust.

Investigator contact details: Caroline Guard
Education Department
University of Roehampton
Froebel College
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of the project or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies, Dr. Fengling Tang, Department of Education, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. F.tang@roehampton.ac.uk 0202 3892 3686

However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Research Lead in the School of Education.

Research Lead, Professor Vini Lander, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. vini.lander@roehampton.ac.uk 0208 392 3865

This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethic Committee.

Appendix 7 - Participant Debrief form (Early childhood setting)



DEBRIEF FORM

Title of Research Project: Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.

Thank you for participating in this research project. The time and commitment you dedicated is appreciated. It is hoped that you found the experience enjoyable and beneficial. If you would like to discuss any areas of the research or your contribution, please contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form. If you feel that you need additional support following your contributions, please contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form who can advise you further.

Brief description of research project and what participation involved:

This exploratory study 'Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision' investigated the interactions that took place between babies attending nursery provision and the adults who care for them.

As a nursery setting, you consented for this project to be conducted in your provision. The project comprised of collecting data from multiple perspectives to document the experiences of the very youngest children attending the nursery. Observations took place within the baby unit to record the interactions between the babies and practitioners. The observations were in written form and recorded on video cameras. The project accessed parents, children and staff within the setting who access the baby room.

Your participation in the research was entirely voluntary. That means you continue to have the right to decline/withdraw yourself at any time throughout the research process, without risk of discrimination. This can be done by contacting the researcher directly on the email below. Please note, if you withdraw after the point of analysis, your data will not be erased but may still be used in an anonymised form as of an aggregated database. If you have any

reservations about your participation throughout the research process, please do not hesitate to raise this with the researcher at any time.

Results: Results from the study have been analysed and written up into the final thesis report. You are entitled to request a short summary of the research findings, and this can be done by contacting the researcher directly using the details below.

Please note: This study has been made possible in part through funding from The Froebel Trust. However, please be aware that no personal information or individual responses will be made available or shared directly with The Froebel Trust.

Investigator contact details:

Caroline Guard
Education Department
University of Roehampton
Froebel College
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of the project or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies, Dr. Fengling Tang, Department of Education, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. F.tang@roehampton.ac.uk 0202 3892 3686

However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Research Lead in the School of Education.

Research Lead, Professor Vini Lander, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. vini.lander@roehampton.ac.uk 0208 392 3865

This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethic Committee.

Appendix 8 - Participant Debrief form (Early Childhood Educators)



DEBRIEF FORM

Title of Research Project: Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.

Thank you for participating in this research project. The time and commitment you dedicated is appreciated. It is hoped that you found the experience enjoyable and beneficial. If you would like to discuss any areas of the research or your contribution, please contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form. If you feel that you need additional support following your contributions, please contact the researcher using the details at the bottom of this form who can advise you further.

Brief description of research project and what participation involved:

This exploratory study titled 'Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision' investigated the interactions that took place between babies attending nursery provision and the adults who care for them.

As a staff member, you consented to participate in written and video recorded observations of you interacting with children throughout routine situations and day to day practices. The purpose of this was to explore the babies' experiences of nursery provision and how your role of practitioner is organised across the day.

The recordings taken of your interactions with the children were shared with you within reflective dialogue sessions where you discussed with the researcher your experiences of each scenario.

Your participation in the research was entirely voluntary. That means you continue to have the right to decline/withdraw yourself at any time throughout the research process, without risk of discrimination. This can be done by contacting the researcher directly on the email below. Please note, if you withdraw after the point of analysis, your data will not be erased but may still be used in an anonymised form as of an aggregated database. If you have any reservations about your participation throughout the research process, please do not hesitate to raise this with the researcher.

Results: Results from the study have been analysed and written up into the final thesis report. You are entitled to request a short summary of the research findings, and this can be done by contacting the researcher directly using the details below.

Please note: This study has been made possible in part through funding from The Froebel Trust. However, please be aware that no personal information or individual responses will be made available or shared directly with The Froebel Trust.

Investigator contact details:

Caroline Guard
Education Department
University of Roehampton
Froebel College
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of the project or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies, Dr. Fengling Tang, Department of Education, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. F.tang@roehampton.ac.uk 0202 3892 3686

However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Research Lead in the School of Education.

Research Lead, Professor Vini Lander, Department of Education, University of Roehampton, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London. SW15 5PJ. vini.lander@roehampton.ac.uk 0208 392 3865

This project has been approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethic Committee.

Appendix 9 – Additional participant consent form – use of images and recording



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent for distribution of images for use in final thesis, conferences, marketing materials

Title of Research Project: Hearing babies' voices within patterns of baby-practitioner interactions in nursery provision.

This consent form invites you to give you permission for stills of images and excerpts of video footage to be used in materials promoting the research project.

This may be (please indicate your choice here):

a) An identifiable image of your child e.g., their face (not accompanied with any names/other traceable features)

b) A blurred still of your child which is unidentifiable.

c) Either of the above

This may include use in the final thesis which will be submitted to The University of Roehampton and The Froebel Trust.

This may include publication of the images in journal articles or other publication of the final or abridged findings.

This may include inclusion of images in conference materials relating study.

This may include marketing materials, for example, leaflets, images on websites relating the findings of the study.



Investigator Contact Details:

Caroline Guard
Education Department
University of Roehampton
Froebel College
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
guardc1@roehampton.ac.uk

Consent Statement:

I agree to images to be taken as part of this research and used as part of conference and marketing materials. I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries, please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student, you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies Contact Details:

Dr Fengling Tang,
Education Department
Froebel College
Roehampton University
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
f.tang@roehampton.ac.uk

Research Lead for Education Dept Contact Details:

Professor Vini Lander
Education Department
Froebel College
Roehampton University
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PJ
Vini.lander@roehampton.ac.uk

Appendix 10 – Indicative structure for Semi Structured Interview with parents.

The following is an indicative guide to the semi structured interview that will take place with parents of baby participants. The information below is subject to alter and evolve following the successful recruitment of families. It is not an exhaustive list and is likely to change. Questions are likely to flow during the interview, therefore maybe combined or answered as the natural discussion emerges.

Initial context – things to remember.

Thank them for agreeing to take part. Review terms of participation and consent/right to withdraw.

Overview of family situation

Age of child

Overview of early months development

Anything notable regarding pregnancy/birth

Typical day in the life

Explore if the child has regular contact with any additional family members/close friends outside the direct family unit. Ask if parent has witnessed any notable reactions to this time with others.

Description of attachment to parents – any notable behaviours/reactions

Guiding questions relating to emerging communications in the home

Please provide an overview of their current emerging temperament and personality/Developing character.

Are there any behaviours you have noticed that appear/emerge at particular times in the day or as a reaction to a certain situation?

Anything notable about their current development?

Have you noticed any notable attention seeking behaviours they use as a catalyst to start an interaction? Do they differentiate this for different people in the family home?

Do they enjoy any elements of their day e.g., routine/playful experiences?

How do they like to be playful/what is their favourite thing to do at the moment?

How do they react to louder and busy environments? Do they seek any reassurance or comfort?

How do they react to quieter environments?

How do they respond to face-to-face communications? Do these reactions alter between caregivers e.g., Father/grandparent/sibling?

How does the baby respond/act when you interact with them?

How do they react to playtime/close one to one experience with others?

What is the baby's reaction when you are not nearby/leave the room/distracted? Has this altered/changed over time?

Guiding questions relating directly to nursery experience to date

At what age did your child start at the nursery setting?

Can you describe the process used to help you and your child settle into the nursery setting?

What features of the nursery attracted you and helped you to determine your choice?

What features of nursery provision were important to you when selected a setting?

How do you feel your child has settled into the setting?

Any notable situations between child/staff and you and staff occurred?

Appendix 11 – Proposed structure of field work

Field work plan

Little Birds Nursery 1

Beginning of August – Attended staff meeting to introduce team to the research aims and objectives. Answer any questions or queries from staff regarding the research/process/outcomes/expectations.

Mid-August – Mid-September – Ethnographic period of settling in. Researcher attends one day per week to familiarise self with setting routine/staff/culture. Opportunity for staff team, babies and parents to acquaint themselves with presence of the researcher and ask any other questions/share concerns about the research. Gradual introduction of instruments for field work, for example, small notebook in room with researcher. Camcorder to be introduced by week ¾ for babies to investigate and staff team to acknowledge presence. No data captured is planned to be used for analysis from the settling in period.

Mid-September – End September – Diarise Parent interviews. **Currently Three families have consented to join the research. All consent forms have been signed.** Work with the team to approach the consenting parents to arrange a suitable time to meet and for the interview to take place. The location for this to take place will be led by the parent, although it is likely to take place in a room within the setting, possibly the office or training room. The staff room would not be appropriate as it would interfere with staff social spaces away from children and families. If this is not possible then an alternative location will be sought. To safeguard the parent and researcher this will be agreed in advance and shared with the setting. It may be possible that the parents would prefer a questionnaire, bearing in mind they will be working parents. This can be arranged.

Interviews seek to learn more about the baby in the home context. Dialogue will involve, learning about the child's earliest days, evolving temperament, personality and communication experiences within the home. A focus on their social abilities, family context, culture and so on will be sought. There is an interview guide, but the interview will be semi structured, allowing for parents to lead the conversation where appropriate, but enable the researcher to redirect dialogue where necessary. It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately 1 hour and would be recorded using an audio recording system (Dictaphone) and the researcher will also make shorthand notes in a small notepad.

Schedule

Researcher to attend every **Monday** from **16th September – 16th December** to begin field work.

Three children attending the baby unit have permission from parents to participate and all attend on a Monday. There are tentative plans to increase researcher attendance by an additional half day if required. This is likely to be a Tuesday or Weds to coincide with children's attendance patterns.

Observations will record everyday occurrences across the room, concentrating on each focus child and any interactions that take place between child and practitioners. The child's body language, eye gaze and vocalisations will drive the observational data. Observations will continue if/as practitioners respond and interact with the children on a group or one to one basis. Observations will record the interactions that take place and note any circumstances in the vicinity that may influence the interactions that emerge. The child will remain the focus of the observation, even once the adult/child has moved away.

Breakdown of observational data.

Written observations will take place no more than two observations per week, lasting no more than 1 hour in total. Across a week this will equate to no than 2 hours per individual. In total across the research – up to 48 hours of written observation per participant. These will be recorded in a notebook within the room. There will be times when the researcher deems it in appropriate to write during interactions, therefore observations will be recorded afterwards, like that of Tavistock method.

Video recorded observations will take place for a maximum of twice weekly recordings of routine situations which would last up to 15 minutes per activity. A total of approximately – 30 minutes per participant per week for a duration of up to 6 months (24 weeks). Each participant may be filmed for an approximate total of up to 12 hours across data generation period.

Video recorded observations will record routine incidences including:

- Mealtimes,
- Bottle feeding
- nappy changing,
- sleep settling routines.
- transition times, e.g., moving into the garden.
- Focussed adult/child time such as a story time over the research period.

The camcorder will not be used throughout the day by the researcher but is likely to be in the room with her to ensure it can be used quickly and variably.

Central to these observational moments will be the child and their upper body and any one-to-one interaction that occur between the child and practitioners. Recording will cease when the

interactions end. The end will be determined when either the adult or the child break (physically moving) away from the dyad. The child may show disengagement cues, but this will still be recorded to document the response of the adult to these moments. It is possible that the interaction may progress to secondary intersubjective moments, where the child may take a break from the adult, but return to the moment with an object, for example a rattle/shaker which may act as a catalyst for further interactions, this would still be recorded.

The process of all observations will be informed by elements of the principles of attuned interactions guidance from VID, particularly the first four which are: being attentive, encouraging initiatives, receiving initiatives and developing attuned interactions. This will determine an attuned or discordant cycle of interaction.

- **Reflective dialogues** (VID) will take place with staff fortnightly, with no more than four taking place across the research period.

The aim of these is to show the practitioner the video footage recorded and encourage reflection and contemplation of the interactions shared. Staff will have an opportunity to view children's body language from a retrospect position and see the vital role they have in the encounters that take place. Staff will be able to view sections of the footage and will be guided by the researcher to keep an open mind and see the positive elements of interaction as well as sharing discussions in a safe space relating to the more challenging aspects of interactions with young children. Once again, these shared discussions will be informed by VIG principles of attuned dialogue.

Little Bird Nursery one, currently have **three staff members** who have consented to participate in the research. The room leader thus far, has declined. With this in mind, VID will be planned initially for the **second week of October** and diarised at regular periods for individual staff after this point.

A minimum of two and maximum of four reflective dialogues will take place with each participant following the recorded observations across the total research generation period.

Each dialogue will last no more than *one hour* in duration.

1 x practitioner x (max) 4 hours = 4 hours in total.

16 practitioners x (max of 4 hours) = 64 hours maximum reflective dialogue data

Dialogue that takes place during the reflective sessions will also be recorded and used as a point of analysis.

Analysis

Analysis is planned for every Tuesday initially. This will involve researcher going over observational notes generated and the video clips. Micro analysis of video clips will be carried out seeking indicators of children's voicing in form of facial movements, vocalisations, eye movements as per methodology. Serve and return behaviours will be noted as will be the responses of the adults.

Written observations will be typed up and examined for emerging themes or concepts. It is likely that this will take longer than one day, therefore a second full day of analysis is set aside each week.

VID clips will be reviewed and prepared for staff dialogues. There will be set footage used to initiate conversation as well as opportunity for staff to choose their own section to review.

Appendix 12 – Themes emerging from analysis.

1. Ritchie voice
2. Nina voice
3. Anna voice
4. Yolanda voice
5. Taylor voice
6. Frank voice
7. Feelings for Ritchie
8. Feelings for Nina
9. Feelings for Anna
10. Feelings for Yolanda
11. Feelings for Taylor
12. Feelings for Frank
13. Stress
14. Feeling overwhelmed
15. Time
16. Feelings/emotions about the children
17. Feelings/emotions about work
18. Conflict
19. Own background
20. Own history
21. Fast
22. Doing too much
23. Hurriedness
24. Love/deep feelings for the children
25. Emotion during dialogue
26. Paperwork
27. Manager expectations
28. Room leader expectations
29. Clashing personalities
30. Parent wishes
31. Feelings about parents/parent choices
32. Nursery opening times/feelings/opinions of
33. Not feeling good enough
34. Realisation of impact
35. Enjoyment
36. Physical touch with children
37. Embarrassment of practice
38. Change in perspective.
39. Am I doing, ok?
40. Routines
41. Demands from children.
42. Demands from team.
43. Demands from management/wider company.
44. Planning
45. Activities – scheduled.
46. Activities – spontaneous
47. Filling in books
48. Sleep time
49. Ratios/numbers
50. Training/lack of
51. Humour about children
52. Defence mechanisms
53. Concealing emotions
54. Lack of ability to change things.
55. Feeling out of control of situation
56. Knowledge/do I know what I am doing.
57. Frustration at other team members
58. Teamwork/ positive feelings about team
59. Snack time
60. Positive emotions
61. Unsettling emotions and feelings
62. Children's challenging behaviours
63. Unity in the nursery – helping one another.
64. New children/starters
65. Quality
66. Ofsted/internal QAA
67. Being a mother/grandmother
68. Playing with the children
69. Enjoying them
70. Identity – who am i?
71. Time to be 'still' with the children.
72. Interruptions from others (children)
73. Interruptions from others (staff)
74. Lack of respect
75. Salary
76. Inadequacy
77. Realisation of impact/empowerment
78. Change of practice
79. Impact of dialogue
80. Conflict of parent wishes
81. Mealtimes
82. Cover at mealtimes and sleep times
83. Drop off and pick up.
84. Talking in the team
85. Manager
86. Deputy management
87. Previous employment/previous management
88. Uncertainty of job/career

Appendix 13 – Example of Analysis of Parent Interview transcript

Frank, Parent interview excerpt	January 2020
<p>Key –</p> <p>Parent view of Frank's character</p> <p>Parent view of Frank's voicing motives</p> <p>Parent perspective</p> <p>Nursery provision</p>	
<p>Researcher: So, thinking about the early months, was there anything notable in his communication, anything you or he did together that was notable or a special time you looked forward to in the day? Those close moments for either of you that you particularly remember.</p> <p>Parent: Yes, so communication in the early months...</p> <p>Parent 2: He used to smile a lot; he's always been smiley.</p>	<p><i>'He used to smile a lot; he's always been smiley.'</i></p> <p><i>He is very happy he has always been smiley, and he used to kick his legs a lot and smile at the same time. He's very excitable, probably before he was 6 months, he would get very excited about things which is obviously very rewarding.</i></p> <p><i>He was really well known for moving his legs, people always used to comment about that, I always thought it was like he wanted to get moving! He had so much energy.'</i></p>

Parent: Yeh, he is very happy he has always been smiley...

Parent 2: He used to kick his legs a lot and smile at the same time.

Parent: Oh yes! He's very excitable, probably before he was 6 months, he would get very excited about things which is obviously very rewarding.

Researcher: Great, ok, you mentioned he smiled and kicked his legs a lot, would you say that this was his main form of communicating to you both in those earlier months, the use of his legs?

Parent: Yeh, he was really well known for moving his legs, people always used to comment about that didn't they?

Parent 2: Yes, I always thought it was like he wanted to get moving! He had so much energy

Researcher: How has that developed over recent months, as he has grown and developed as he is now walking. Does he have a particular way of calling you both?

Parent: He went to bed tonight whining. He just looks at us and we are just like 'uh, say our names!'

Parent 2: No, I think if he wants to get our attention then he will call our names and say 'Mamma' and Dadda, he does say it and grabs your hand.

Researcher: ~~How has that developed over recent months, as he has grown and developed as he is now walking.~~ Does he have a particular way of calling you both?

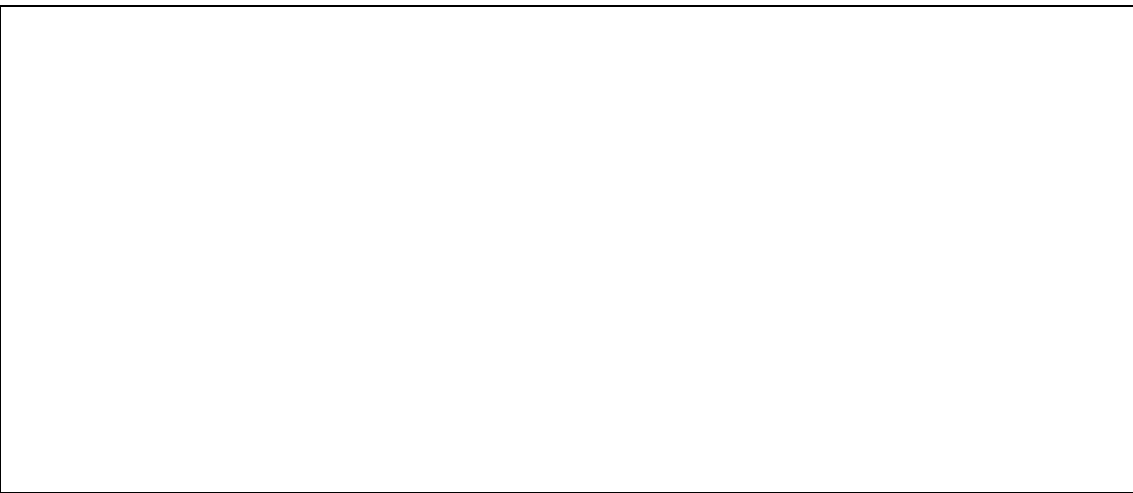
'He went to bed tonight whining. He just looks at us and we are just like 'uh, say our names!'

I think if he wants to get our attention then he will call our names and say 'Mamma' and Dadda, he does say it and grabs your hand. He comes to take your hand and leads you somewhere or push you! He pushes us somewhere, he's incredibly bossy! He has started to come and grab us by the hand and started to pretend to whistle! I don't know where he has got it from, but he goes 'hmmuhhmm' and tries to lead you away, I don't know where he got it from.'

Parent: Yeh, yeh he comes to take your hand and leads you somewhere

Parent 2: or push you!

Parent: Yeh, or push us somewhere, he's incredibly bossy! He has started to come and grab us by the hand and started to pretend to whistle! I don't know where he has got it from, but he goes 'hmmuhmm' and tries to lead you away, I don't know where he got it from.



Appendix 14 – Example of working research protocol analysis (Emergent themes)

Example of Common-Sense/Situated practice/Thematic Interpretation			
<p>Key</p> <p>Ritchie voice and motive orientation Interaction between Ritchie and adult</p> <p>Potential conflict for Ritchie Potential conflict for adult</p>			
<p>Observation – 11/11/19 9.30am</p>	<p>Common sense interpretation – first level interpretation (researcher understanding)</p>	<p>Situated Practice interpretation – examination of dominating practices and motives, patterns of interactions specific to baby and other.</p>	<p>Thematic interpretation – emerging patterns relating to research aims and theoretical notions.</p>
<p>Ritchie is playing with soft toys, alternating his left and right hand lifting them up and down. His eyes and head are looking upwards watching Joanne who is standing nearby, looking the other way. He stares at Joanne and lifts one of the soft toys to his face, rocks back and forth, continues to look at Joanne and then he throws the toys away in front of him</p>	<p>Ritchie is preoccupied with securing Joanne’s attention. He uses various external objects to draw her attention. His face is expressive indicating intention and anticipation of an adult response. He</p>	<p>Ritchie’s motive orientation appears to be directed at drawing the attention of Joanne. A constant thread of connection to Joanne</p>	<p>Ritchie takes a proactive role to negotiate his position with Joanne. He is occupied with remaining close to her and intentionally engages several actions to entice a response and to make her smile. Ritchie demonstrates an awareness that his proximity to Joanne and the use of objects will provoke a response and an</p>



<p>'ahhharrhhagghhh'. He looks down at the toys and picks up another with his left hand, throws it again and claps himself 'argh'. He looks up at Joanne who has now moved closer to him. He stands up and walks to the tray which is set up with paper and crayons. Joanne says, 'are you alright Ritchie?'. He holds her stare, picks up a crayon and walks over to her and hands her the crayon. She bends down to receive it. As it is passed to her, his eyebrows raise, and he turns to walk back to the table with his right hand out 'da' 'ah' he walks past the table, looks back at Joanne who has turned to a child behind her, so her gaze is not on Ritchie. He drops his hand and walks with purpose, (a march) swishing his hands back and forth 'rah, rah, rah' and nods his head whilst looking back at Joanne. He walks as far as the train track and manoeuvres himself, so he is laying in the middle of the track. Another child and Joanne are playing with the track. Oh Ritchie, what are you doing?' she says whilst smiling. He smiles with his eyebrows raised and lifts the track up whilst watching Joanne who turns their attention to another child nearby who is crying. His eyebrows lower as he watches this interaction, as if concerned for the child and keen to listen in.</p>	<p>combines expression, external objects and vocalisations as a method to engage and communicate with Joanne.</p> <p>Joanne is responsive and warm towards Ritchie. She responds verbally to him but could be distracted or preoccupied by other things going on in the room. She is playful with her responses to Ritchie laying in the middle of the track but then has to support an upset child nearby.</p>	<p>seems to preoccupy Ritchie's thoughts and intentions in their excerpt. He uses his voice physically, through the engagement of external objects close at hand. When Joanne responds to Ritchie's advances, Ritchie adapts his facial expression and seems to want Joanne to follow him to the table, which she is unable to do. This conflicts with Ritchie's intentions, so he accelerates his attempt to have her attention by laying in the play space she is occupying with another child.</p> <p>Joanne might see Ritchie's attempts for her attention in conflict with her own orientation toward another child. She reacts playfully to Ritchie's advances but</p>	<p>interaction with her. Ritchie seems unsettled but agentic in a bid to increase or prolong his connection with Joanne.</p> <p>In response to Joanne occupying her attention with another child, Ritchie advances to move his whole body into Joanne's view and obstruct the play between her and the other child, this move is purposeful as he responds with a smile when she speaks to him. He is 'teasing with obstruction' (Reddy, 2008: 172) to increase his visibility in her conscious mind.</p> <p>Ritchie shows interest and concern toward the child who is crying and appears sensitive to the change of the atmosphere.</p>
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		<p>remains in situ and responsive to the other child. Ritchie seems to want more from her and works hard to keep her attention and draw her into his activity.</p>	
<p>Another adult (P1 Carol) walks past, and Ritchie's concentration is broken, and he puts his right hand up in the air then drops it down as she continues to walk past. He returns his attention to the train track and moves his eyes between the track and the child and Joanne interacting. He stands himself up and walks toward Joanne who is comforting the other child, he hovers nearby, watching still. When Joanne looks at him, he does a half smile and then turns on his feet and walks away, pulling his arms in front of him, clasping his hands together and dropping them to his legs as he walks which seems to make him walk faster away from the situation. He walks past the table with crayons once again and picks one up and dangles this out of his mouth, he walks around with the crayon hanging out of his mouth and walks past another adult (RL Beth) who is at the nearby table. He watches her and marches past, holding his stare as he walks past her. As she looks up just as he passes her eyeline, she</p>	<p>Ritchie seems preoccupied with the movement of adults in the room. He indicates an interest in the train track activity but when Joanne breaks her interaction with another child to look at Ritchie, he retreats and speeds off.</p> <p>He uses external objects again to draw attention to himself and to seemingly 'provoke' a response from the room leader who is at a table doing paperwork. The interaction between the two of them is minimal and directive. Ritchie shows interest in her but</p>	<p>Ritchie engages a spirited presence and seeks to use provocative skills to draw attention to himself. Joanne interacting with another child seems to preoccupy Ritchie's attention, he orientates himself towards her and the other child. Yet, when she responds positively to Ritchie, he appears to become embarrassed or stimulated to move towards the crayon table which is in conflict with Joanne's intentions I that moment.</p>	<p>Ritchie's actions indicate a level of emotional attunement, an awareness of the other child's needs and Joanne's need to comfort them.</p> <p>Ritchie intentionally moves away but struggles to occupy himself, leading to provocative action of putting the crayon in his mouth and staring at the adults. This may be something he has done before which resulted attention, thus the desire the repeat this and draw attention away from the other child and onto him. Ritchie's action has a directedness about them, although he seems unable to settle, focussed solely on Joanne and drawing her into an interaction. Despite this, when she does respond to him, he runs off, perhaps this is a way of teasing, and wanting her to laugh, although it is unclear if he had planned to return to</p>


<p>intercepts and says 'No Ritchie, take that out of your mouth' she stands up, approaches him, and takes the crayon out of his mouth. She holds the side of his face with one hand and pulls the crayon out with the other. He watches her, eyebrows are lowered and as she turns to walk away with the crayon in her hand, he watches her go. He watches her for approximately 6-7 seconds as she resettles at the table, and he then turns and walks towards the wooden rocker boat on situated on the floor.</p>	<p>does not pursue this once she has addressed him.</p> <p>The room leader, Beth is settled at the table with piles of paper and books around her. She has been at the table for the entire time I have been in the room (I arrived at 8.25 today). She seems disconnected from the room but tuned into behaviour and situations that could bring harm to the children. She reacts to Ritchie briefly but does not stop to continue the interaction which leads to Ritchie moving himself to another space in the setting.</p>	<p>Beth responds immediately to Ritchie's provocations and her response is to end his teasing and prevent him from injuring himself. The crayon hanging out of his mouth creates a tension between her activity and the setting requirements to keep the children safe. Ritchie may be aware of this as he seems to combine the crayon with a prolonged stare at Beth. Her orientation and preoccupation with paperwork (a setting dominating practice?) acts as a test to see if Ritchie can attract her attention.</p> <p>Beth does not remain focussed on Ritchie and is directive in her nature towards him. Ritchie</p>	<p>Joanne with the crayon in his mouth as it was intercepted by Beth.</p>
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		moves himself on to another area in the room where there are no adults.	
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Appendix 15 – Example of protocol analysis – Video data (Themes categorised)

Example research protocol analysis for visual analysis				
Yolanda voice and motive orientation		Lucy Voice and motive orientation	Potential conflict for Lucy	Potential conflict for Yolanda
Interaction between Yolanda and Lucy		Interaction between Yolanda and other adult		
Video footage	Time	Common-sense interpretation	Situated practice interpretation	Thematic interpretation
	00.09	Yolanda was bouncing her legs up and down and is now looking at something on the floor. Lucy is attempting to get her eye gaze back. She is leaning down, trying to encourage Yolanda to look back up. Lucy wiggles her hands on Yolanda's tummy and says 'chuga, chuga, chug'. Lucy seems to want to get Yolanda's attention, whereas Yolanda appears preoccupied with studying her feet.	Yolanda seems preoccupied looking at her feet. Lucy orients her whole attention toward Yolanda and seems preoccupied with obtaining her attention engaging talk and touch.	Lucy is leading the interactions within this short clip. Lucy appears to be trying to draw Yolanda into interactions, possibly conscious of the camera being in the setting. Haptic communication, physical movements and vocalisations are used in unison to retain the two-way connection between Lucy and Yolanda. Yolanda is keen to explore and examine her body and the environment around her, although she remains familiar and responsive to Lucy's advances.
	00.11	Lucy lifts Yolanda up into the air quickly and smiles at her and says 'beebo'. Yolanda's hands fly out the side and her feet stretch out and tense, but she smiles as she is lowered. Lucy jiggles her again and repeats 'beebo'. The lift appears to break Yolanda's concentration and is led by Lucy who	The action of lifting her at speed seems to startle Yolanda initially, indicated by her body movements. The movement comes without warning but as she is lowered and meets the eye gaze of Lucy, Yolanda's face breaks into a smile. Lucy remains motivated to secure Yolanda's attention.	Language remains playful and familiar. Lucy demonstrates care and emotional warmth in her cues to Yolanda, perhaps reverting to a game or gestures they have enjoyed together previously.

		combines physical and vocal cues to obtain Yolanda's gaze.		
	00.14	<p>Yolanda smiles at Lucy. Lucy giggles. They seem connected and responsive to one another.</p> <p>Another staff member off camera says 'yeahhhhh' in a high-pitched voice and shakes a rattle.</p>	They mirror each other's facial expressions and have a moment of ease and connection.	
	00.15	<p>Yolanda looks at the other staff member and her smile widens. Lucy giggles once again and lifts Yolanda into the air for a second time. 'Beebo'.</p> <p>The other staff member's attention seems to draw Yolanda away from Lucy, who is quick to draw her back into their connection by repeating the lift.</p>	<p>Yolanda's gaze and connection to Lucy is broken when she is distracted by the other staff member, and she orientates her head toward the noise and other adult. Yolanda's face appears at ease.</p> <p>Does this raise a conflict for Lucy? She is quick to draw Yolanda back toward her by repeating the lift.</p>	
	00.15	As Lucy lowers Yolanda, she pulls her in towards her face. Lucy is giggling. Yolanda is smiling, first at Lucy and then moves her head to look at the other staff member again.	Yolanda is responsive to Lucy's contact, and it seems familiar to her, but she remains orientated towards the other adult.	

		<p>Lucy appears to be the one working for Yolanda's attention, engaging touch, movement and vocalisation.</p>	<p>Lucy interacts with commitment and engages her whole self to engage Yolanda.</p>	
	<p>00.16</p>	<p>Yolanda returns her head to look directly at Lucy. They seem at ease with one another and playful.</p>	<p>Yolanda orients herself back to Lucy who is immediately responsive and mirrors Yolanda's facial expressions. There is a moment of two-way connection.</p>	

Appendix 16 – Exemplar of VID interpretation (Taylor and Lucy)

<p>VID – Extract from Educator Lucy, Nursery 1.</p> <p>Child – Taylor</p>	<p>Reflection/interpretation of Taylor character</p> <p>Interpretation of Taylor voice</p> <p>Lucy Voice and motive orientation Potential conflict for Lucy</p> <p>Potential conflict for Taylor</p> <p>Interaction between Taylor and Lucy</p> <p>Reflection of practice/self</p>
<p>R: So, it is quite a familiar clip of how we have seen Yolanda behave when you are with other children. From this point, I would like you to keep an eye on Taylor now. Perhaps we can go back and have a look at who initiated the contact.</p> <p>P: Yeh, because I didn't even see, I was busy watching Yolanda..... oh, look yeh, she (Taylor) puts her arms out...</p>	<p>The narrative from Lucy seems to imply a level of irritation toward Taylor initially using words such as 'clingy', 'following me' and 'always hovering'. Could it be that Lucy sees Taylor as a conflict for her attention during her intimate interactions with Yolanda? This is the first time we have explored video focused on a child other than Yolanda, so it is striking to see Lucy's modification of thoughts as she watches Taylor's attempts to orient her attention. It seems to break down an opinion of Taylor and a realisation that she has yet to 'get to know' Taylor to the depth that she knows and is attached to Yolanda. The book indicates an object to cue for Lucy's attention, bringing together Taylor's love of books (as mother has recounted in interview) and a need to closeness or replication of Lucy's relationship with Yolanda.</p>

R: So, we are now looking at the three of you in a triad.
If you keep an eye on Taylor, specifically her hand when you go to move here.

P: Oh gosh, she is sort of holding on to me, isn't she?

She was really, really clingy that day, I remember.

R: Is she one of your key children? What are your impressions of her whilst she is in the room?

P: No, she's not. Well, she sort of just does her own thing really, erm, but recently, and even today she has been coming up to me and following me. Yeh, she doesn't really interact with the other children much. She just sort of goes and does her thing. (laughs) she is very quiet.

R: Okay, that's interesting, lets continue watching her.

P: She is hovering around me with that book. She does that a lot. She just hovers around.

Appendix 17 – Representation of Taylor’s ‘voice’ in text.

Taylor	Parent	Lucy	Joanne	Clare
<p>Character</p> <p>Needs/desires</p> <p>Common themes</p> <p>Dialogue</p>	<p>She is really confident.</p> <p>She was a really chilled out baby. She didn't really cry very often, only when she was very tired and hungry.</p> <p>She does not like being in the buggy too much and likes to be independent and pick things up.</p> <p>“ . she is quite confident and able. She is quite capable at home to tell us what she wants, by pointing and a whine. Well, she doesn't always whine, but she tells us what she wants.”</p>	<p>She is very serious.</p> <p>Taylor needs a lot of love and cuddles and a lot of one to one, she is very, I don't want to say the word sensitive, but I don't know the right word. She needs something else.</p>	<p>She makes a lot of noise, lots of whinges. She always follows me and looks up at me and stand up looking at me and makes a funny noise of some sort and she always has the muzz.</p> <p>... she is quite subdued. She doesn't make too much of a fuss. So, I know she knows what she wants, so I sort of give her the choice to help her be more independent in that way. She likes to be independent.</p> <p>It is like she needs that adult there before she gets properly engaged in something otherwise if I was to just sit there and not talk to her. She would also just sit there, looking at me and looking around. She wouldn't dive in and look around. She is very much an observer, isn't</p>	<p>I don't see her as much but when I do, I have been mindful and quite respectful of not overstaying my time with her. I am not her chosen person so, I have seen she is not as comfortable with me.</p>

			<p>she? She watches me, everyone, everything.</p> <p>With Taylor, she wants someone to play with her.</p>	
<p>Settling at nursery</p> <p>Common themes</p>	<p>At first it was really hard. The drop off was very hard, she was so upset when I would leave her. I found that when I dropped her off and people held their hands out to take her from me, she didn't like that at all. I realised that she liked to be sat down at the table for breakfast, so she was actually doing something rather than</p> <p>being actually handed to someone. So that was easier for her and me.</p> <p>R: Okay, that is interesting, so like a diversion tactic</p> <p>P: It is quite hard. I could hear her down the corridor and I found that hard. I wanted to go straight in there and give her a cuddle or something. I found that very, very hard and emotional.</p>	<p>She was quite unsettled, erm, she cried a lot and was always with Joanne, I think if I remember. And now she is walking she seems to be moving between everyone.</p>	<p>She cuddles it (muzzy).... It's familiar. She always comes in with one. She has one here, a nursery one as well as her one from home. She's not too fussed, as long as she has got one.</p>	

<p>Indicators of voice</p> <p>Common themes</p> <p>Needs</p> <p>Dialogue</p> <p>Use of external objects</p>	<p>“So, at home, it really is just me, Taylor and her dad. So that is why she quite likes to be around adults and stays around the girls. Also, I want her to get used to other children too. We went through some challenges before I went back to work, so I wanted her to get used to other people. I think she just seems to watch them. It is good for her to be around the others and copy them, which I quite like.”</p> <p>“I think also when she is reading on her own, she will turn the pages and babble along almost as if she is like, mimicking what we do and tries to mimic it herself.”</p>	<p>OH, look, Taylor has just thrown the block at me!</p> <p>She has done that and obviously come over for a cuddle. It's fascinating. She has been waiting for a while, hasn't she?</p> <p>Oh look, she is clinging and not letting me go, is she?</p> <p>Well, I have noticed that she hovers before but never like, that intensely. She obviously does it because she needs that love and she gets it, then she seems to go off to get something or to play, then comes back again. I had never noticed that she is always right there. Behind me.</p>	<p>Well, she is totally watching me, isn't she? When someone got to the door, she says either Mummy or Muzzy and she is hovering by the door for someone to notice her and respond. She is trying to remind me that I had already responded to her about the muzzy, that maybe she thought I was going to get up and come with her and get it.</p> <p>She came over because she could see I was sat down and I would stay there, and give her a cuddle, some attention.</p>	
<p>Motive and Voice Orientation</p> <p>Presence</p> <p>Development</p>	<p>“She knows where her books are kept and will go and get one and bring it to you and sit on your lap and when it is finished she will go and get another one and she will put that one away, so she does that a lot at home.”</p>	<p>“She's looking...(giggle) she does that a lot. I have noticed A LOT. She is always, like, THERE.”</p>	<p>She follows me right across the room. She's probably waiting for me to sit with her maybe. It's really odd, because you don't really realise in that moment when you walk away that she has been following me around that whole time and you don't</p>	

		<p>“But here she is just waiting and watching, the hover walk is there as well.”</p> <p>“J: She’s back again. She’s chucking the bricks now.</p> <p>R: Why could she be throwing them towards your arm and not the other way?</p> <p>J: I think it’s to get my attention.”</p> <p>“She does busy herself, with her books and things but not for long then she starts moving to find us again. It is so funny.”</p> <p>“It’s just that she obviously needs that love and attention and one on one.”</p>	<p>realise that she is desperate for my attention isn't she?</p> <p>P: I think it’s probably that she wants me to actually sit down and play with her. She is like 'hello, I am here. I might not be saying much, but I am here!</p> <p>R: yes, compared to others in the room who are more vocal, she doesn't 'say' much verbally yet.</p> <p>P: That’s funny because her language is very advanced, she is very chatty, but only when she is close to you. Especially when it is on a one on one. I mean, if more than one or two other children join, she is quite as if she has decided that she doesn't want to talk anymore.</p> <p>Yeh, she seems silent. She waits to be noticed; I think. Waiting for me to clock her, she doesn't come to me. She will</p>	
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		<p>"Mummy'she says that a lot. Yeh.... She is always by the door too.... she is really interesting to watch. Because I am always with Yolanda you just don't realise until you watch this back, what she is trying to tell us, you just don't see it."</p> <p>"I mean she is not just standing and hovering, is she? There is something that she is trying to say, to tell me about."</p>	<p>stand near me and maybe make a little noise or a bit of a fuss and then she will wait for me to go in. She definitely waits for someone to come in, pick her up and then play with her. Rather than coming to you. Although I have noticed that sometimes I am sitting down, and she will come up and just sit on me as if to say, 'I'm here'.</p>	
<p>Institutional issues</p>	<p>I think I have concerns about people doing paperwork in the room and that being people's main focus rather than playing with the children and good interaction with them is very important to me...I am worried.</p>	<p>So, it's really hard, because it is a big room, and we are all rushing round and she really seems to need that comfort, doesn't she? One of us actually sitting down and interacting with her. I guess that because we are all always walking around, maybe she doesn't quite know where to go.</p> <p>Yeh, well obviously, you are trying to be a one to one and they all just want</p>	<p>Yeh it just gets all a bit chaotic and noisy. We are actually missing a lot, like we are tidying or putting chairs out but often I have noticed that there is someone behind me, wanting me to play and be with them.</p> <p>Like, when I leave her, she doesn't know what to do with herself. Maybe if I have to get up, I could move her onto</p>	

		<p>your attention. You feel like there is not enough of us to give them enough attention, and they all just pile over. It is hard.</p>	<p>something else, so she's not just left.</p>	
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Appendix 18 - Example of drawing three strands of Cultural historical theory together (personal, institutional, societal and reflection on practice)

Educator	Policy/procedural	Institutional/cultural	Personal - Educator emotions	Reflection on practice
Lucy	It is just hard because it is just one to three so there are always people just rushing around and then yeh, it's a rush and busy.	<p>It depends (on) what staff are in the room too. That's changes how the room is run and if anyone spends any time with the children.</p> <p>Yeh, if some people are in the room, like the room leader is just always running around, I don't know what she is doing, but I don't think she ever just sits down with them, the children and interact with them. There are different people who do different things, like if Julie is in our room, she is great she really engages with them.</p> <p>Staff, I think staff is really important in babies, I think. When you don't have the</p>	Sometimes I don't get much one to one with her. Like on busy days, it's a bit hectic and she just sits on her own. It makes me sad. It's horrible. Like when they are just sitting there waiting and I'm just so busy and I can't go over. It's so hard, I hate it. I don't like it (giggles).	<p>I try to be very still with them. That's what I think she, and the others need. I try and sit, and stay for ages, well not ages because there are things to do, but I want them to come to me and to know that I am there. I am not moving around or being erratic, it makes them feel more comfortable and more relaxed.</p> <p>We don't realise what an impact we are having on them, until you watch it back</p>

		right staff I there, it is really hard. It is unpredictable. It is so different each day and hard. The children are confused, with part time staff. It changes in the afternoon.		
Clare	But I think the hard element comes when you still feel that you have to keep an eye on the whole room at the same time as being with the children. Like, for example, this morning, I was with him, but there were still two children laying on a table so, I think you always feel aware that you have to have an eye on something else as well. So, as well as that dynamic changing, from one to five children. You still also have to look up and supervise the room.	Yeh, I find it all a bit bizarre. We do it all so early. The food, the sleeping and again the reasoning they give is that so many of the children were falling asleep during their lunch. So, instead of doing two sittings for lunch, and feed them after a sleep, they moved food forward. Which I am still puzzled by that, how does that impact them at home, surely, they eat nearer to 12 at home, so how does that work when they are not here?	R: That is lovely, you are stroking his hair, it is very intimate. Why do you do this? C: I don't know, it may have been in his face. But I think it is something I do with my own children. Just taking that moment just to 'take them in' because every day is just so hectic, you don't have much time to have those slow, still moments. It is important.	Argh, it is just so easy to lose that. This is such a small segment in such a long day, not to realise the weight of it at the time. Its fleeting. I just think it's so powerful for us as educators to feel and see like, what we do really is worth THAT. Look what he got, right in that moment. That seems to be exactly what he needs right then. And so many of those moments do happen and you just don't realise, do you? I know, and I guess it is nice that those small moments do happen across the day and it's just a shame that they have to wait for it.

Joanne	Yeh it's like a pressure point. I am only one person. There are so many of them. I can't do it all.	The room leader gets annoyed because the children are 'mucking around with the toys' and I am trying to get her to see that they are just trying to get our attention because we are 'busy'. They are not being naughty or trying to be intentionally naughty. They are just trying to get us to see them because we are not paying them any attention or any attention to anything going on.	Spending some more time with him, I would love that. I have done it for such a long time now, you do just learn not to let it get to you because otherwise the children will start feeling what you're feeling, so it makes it ten times worse.	Time. Being with them, seeing them, playing with them, the touch and the smiles and not leaving them. Yeh, not having a blank face. I like to try and over exaggerate, so I am not just blankly saying 'oh yeh thanks' but I might say to the other girls something in a different way to how I would speak to the children otherwise they won't know what it is they are doing well.

Appendix 19 – Field diaries tabularised.

Date	Entry	Theme (in bold prominent)
09.10.19	<i>'My whole body is tense. The way they are rubbing the children's backs so hastily raises anxiety in me and I think back to settling Ava and Sammy and the moments of closeness and being snuggled up with them at home. This is not a calm, sleep environment, I can feel the children's emotions and see the desperation in the staff body language to get the children to sleep so they can go on lunch. I feel so uncomfortable that the babies are experiencing this. Would I be happy as a parent knowing this is how my child is settled to sleep?'</i>	Body, hurried practice, Being a mother, babies' needs,
20.08.19	<i>'I was spoilt for choice with children climbing on me and holding out items for me to instruct an interaction, automatically I shifted my mind to consider what are they not getting that I am offering? I was new, I was animated in my face and voice tone. That was it, animated interactions. The limited interactions witnessed were lacking in animation and appeared to be focussed on responding to other adults rather than the children...'</i>	Researcher paradox, uncertainty, interactions, Connection with the babies

16.10.19	<p><i>'I battle internally, but out comes 'do you want me to help?'. The staff member replies, 'Oh, would you? Yes please'. The relief on her face is palpable. I shimmy across the floor and begin to rub a child's back. He turns and grins at me, dummy clingy between his teeth. I try not to smile, and he rolls and starts to gurgle. I can see he thinks of this as a novel and playful opportunity. I am in two minds. Already penetrating through the researcher seal, but how can I just sit there and not help when she has been left with 7 children awake on her own? It makes me recall my earlier experiences as a preschool teacher when I was left alone with 27 and no cover ever came. It also makes me battle in my mind what I am and what I should be within this environment. I am performing quite an intimate moment for this child, and they don't know me, and I don't know them. But I feel I have to help, somehow'.</i></p>	<p>Professional judgement, emotions, Researcher paradox, stress and anxiety, practices,</p>
02.10.19	<p><i>The staff seem conscious of my presence in their space, possibly more than at the other nursery. They are apologetic about their practice and trying to justify what they are doing. There is a lot of looking over, giggling when interacting with children and apologetic at times, 'sorry it's not usually like this'. When moving around me, they say 'oh sorry'. It's as if they are feeling judged. They do seem highly anxious, and I wonder if that is attributed to my presence of the general culture of the setting.'</i></p>	<p>Visibility, hurried practice, anxiety, Management culture,</p>
05.09.19	<p><i>'Driving home, I suddenly realised that perhaps it is the lack of emotion in anything I saw today, although there were moments of passing playfulness, the emotion that we consider an integral aspect of ECEC was absent, the staff were 'there' but not emotionally. They knew the important aspects of routine and momentary care, but containment,</i></p>	<p>Emotions and uncertainty, babies' emotions, practices.</p>

	<p><i>holding and emotionality were not... everyone just seemed 'fine', but that is such a non-descript and inadequate word for the importance of the work they do... It is quite overwhelming to consider that this could be the reality of what I may see across my research, and I am beginning to have a sense of uneasiness about what else I may or may not witness. How do I begin to answer the research questions if there are so few moments of interaction?</i></p>	
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Appendix 20 - Little Birdies Child Profiles

Ritchie

At the start of the project, Ritchie was 11 months old. He attended Little Birdies Nursery for three and half days a week since he was *'a little over 7 months old'*. He lives at home with two parents and his four-year-old half-brother, Elijah stays every other weekend and during school holidays. His wider family, including grandparents do not live locally, but regular contact is maintained via video calls. His parents comment that Ritchie socialises with family friends frequently at weekends.

Ritchie was described by his father during the parent interview as a *'happy, little adventurer, he is a very happy little chap'* (Parent interview 09/09/2019). At home, Ritchie is vocal and eager to engage in playful encounters with his older brother, Elijah, often mimicking his 'roaring' like a dinosaur and joining in rough and tumble play and tickling games with his father and Elijah. Ritchie was very vocal at home, *'he will tell you by shouting if he wants something'* and reiterates this several times during the interview *'it's definitely all about the shouting!'* In addition to frequent vocalisation, Ritchie bangs objects in the home which both parents have wondered if this is Ritchie's way to communicate or present emotion to them. *'He bangs things a lot, I don't know if that is to attract our attention or not. But I don't know if that is associated with a frustration to get our attention I don't really know'*. While Ritchie was generally confident at home, his father shared that in louder, busier environments, Ritchie *'will certainly suss it all out before venturing off somewhere'* although he notes that Ritchie has never been *'a clingy kid or anything like that'* but he might *'remain close, but inquisitive'* until he gains confidence to explore somewhere new.

Ritchie's family shared the location of Little Birdies was a priority for their family to ensure ease of travel to work and home, highlighting the size of rooms and outdoor space as a definitive feature. In addition, they shared that a 'gut feeling' helped them to determine if Little Birdies was right for their child:

"...its more the feeling of the place, how we would think (he) would be able to settle in. Would we be happy rushing off in the morning and leaving him here for the day? How would we feel?"

Taylor

Taylor was born in September 2018 and was 11 months old when field work commenced in August 2019. She enrolled at Little Birdies in July 2019 for two half days per week whilst her mother worked in the preschool room at the same nursery. Taylor is an only child and lives at home with her mother and father. Taylor has little contact with wider family such as grandparents but does spend some time playing with older cousins where possible.

Taylor was described by her mother as '*really confident*' (Parent interview, 03/12/19). In the home, Taylor enjoys cuddles and one on one activities such as painting and reading with her parents. Taylor's mother reveals that her own childhood was erratic so, daily rituals such as sitting together at the meal table and reading stories together are important.

Her mother shares that Taylor has a lot of adult contact in the home, so she likes to stay near an adult, although her mother was conscious that she wants Taylor to get used to being around other children. Taylor does play with her cousins aged four and two years old, sharing she likes to '*cuddle and roll over on top of them*', her mother sharing that she is very confident and '*really plays*' with her older cousins. Taylor has begun to play with small world artefacts such as farms and her mother has noticed she '*bangs them on the floor and makes them roar.*' Her mother communicated that Taylor regularly shares books with her and will '*go and get one and bring it to you and sit on your lap and when it is finished, she will go and get another one*'. Taylor also imitates reading with her parents and '*babbles along*' when she looks at books independently, engaging her fingers to follow the text.

At home Taylor is '*capable and able*' to communicate to her parents what she needs or wants, her mother describing Taylor as '*pointing or whining*' to communicate her intentions. She uses a similar tone to communicate with both her mother and father and thrives when she is busy or engaged in conversation. Taylor gets involved with preparing the home for a meal and will '*sense*' it is dinner time, taking herself off to the kitchen to point to her bowl and spoon. Her mother proudly shares that Taylor is '*good at problems*' identifying that she will always have her hands full but will know when she needs to put something down to pick something else up. Outside of nursery, Taylor and her parents regularly visit the local park to feed the ducks and here, Taylor exhibits confidence and freedom, keen to get out the buggy and enjoy her surroundings.

Taylor's mother, employed by Little Birdies, insinuated that she had no choice but to enrol her baby on her return to work. Throughout the dialogue, she frequently returned to the sense that although she trusted her colleagues to care for her baby, there was always an acute sense of listening out for her Taylor down the corridor.

Yolanda

At the start of the project, Yolanda was six months old. She attended Little Birdies Nursery five full days a week and was enrolled at the setting from thirteen weeks of age. Yolanda lives at home with two parents and her four-year-sister, Nancy. Her family moved to England from France when Nancy was one year old, and consequently, much of Yolanda's extended family are based in Europe. Contact is maintained with wider family with frequent weekend trips to the continent or receiving family to stay at home. Yolanda's mother shared that they are busy most weekends and travel frequently. Lucy is Yolanda's key person at Little Birdies and according to her mother, Lucy has babysat in the family home regularly for several months and both Nancy and Yolanda are happy in her care.

Yolanda was described by her mother as 'animated' and 'happy and smiley' in the family home. Having enrolled at Little Birdies at 3 months old, Yolanda's mother felt that she was advanced compared to her friends' children, particularly with her eating habits and experiences at the nursery. She has a good sleep routine and will sleep for 12-13 hours a night without waking. During family days, she fits in with the family routine and will join her family for an evening meal, which is part of their family tradition.

Within the first days at Little Birdies, her mother reflected how Yolanda had joined in a painting activity which gave her new experiences, something that would not have been offered in a baby room in France. Yolanda is active and becomes 'grumpy' if she is unable to see or be in close proximity to her family, particularly her older sister. Yolanda is described as always wanting to be near her sister and works hard to 'talk' with her.

"When she talks with her sister, she really does talk. Baba, nahaha, you know? I can clearly see that she is trying to have her attention. She looks at her, she is not looking around, she just looks at her,

even if the TV is on. She says 'Nana', I can see is really trying to say words. She makes a huge effort to be with her sister. She calls her sister much more than us, for us she just shouts."

Yolanda's mother describes their tight family unit as a 'strong corral', always together and very close. Yolanda is unsettled if 'things are different' and is rarely alone, although she knows how to call her parents and her sister. Her mother describes Yolanda's preoccupation with her family's whereabouts and even though she has a toy area at home, she will only remain there if an adult or Nancy are nearby. Recently, Yolanda had stopped smiling at people outside the family and her mother attributes this to starting nursery too young and being around too many strangers. She shares that she feels that Yolanda has a very strong relationship with Lucy at Little Birdies, and this has developed because of Yolanda's unease in new environments. Lucy also babysits for the family, so she detaches from her mother with ease on arrival at nursery, often 'jumping' into Lucy's arms. Yolanda is described as seeking eye contact only with adults who she is comfortable, her mother citing Lucy and Beth as two staff members she seems contented at nursery arrival and pickups.

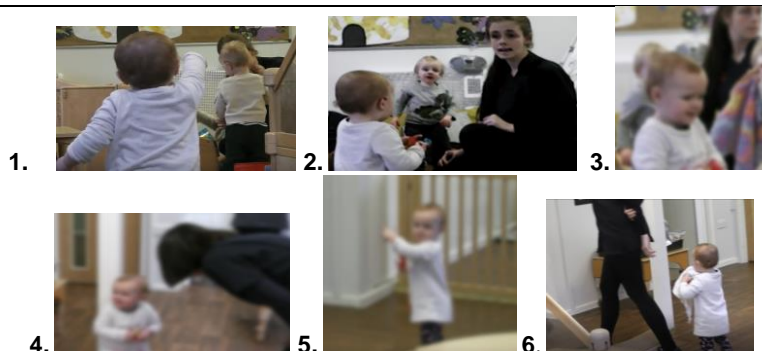
Yolanda's older sister had attended the nursery and her parents reflected they felt English nursery provision was not as high quality as their experiences in their home country. *"It is nothing compared to the standard we are used to in France. Here we don't have a choice. This is probably the best one."* The family had reservations about the vast baby room and diverse array of ages in one room, so opted to speak directly to Rhian about their concerns sharing that they felt reassured by her response, which determined their decision to enrol Yolanda.

Appendix 21 – Example of Taylor’s voice patterning

Date: 20/01/2020

Context of observational excerpt:

Taylor was exploring the plastic planes on the carpet alone. She turns her head to glance in the direction of Joanne and the other children who are behind her. It is unclear what triggered her reorientation.



Observation notes:

She stands up and holds her right hand out which contains a plastic plane and walks quickly towards Joanne. Another child approaches Joanne and says 'Baby', Joanne responds, 'where is the baby?'. Taylor looks at Joanne and then orients her gaze around the room and utters 'baby' and looks back at Joanne and says 'baby' again. Joanne responds and moves her gaze to Taylor, repeating 'Baby'. Noise increases in the room, including a staff member sneezing loudly. Joanne averts her gaze across the room and shouts, 'bless you' and laughs. Taylor looks back at Joanne and across the room, repeating the movement three times, whilst pulling herself into a standing position. Taylor looks at Joanne one final time whilst slowing moving forward and says 'Mayee' Joanne responds and say 'huh? Mummy?' Taylor turns her head and looks towards the door. There is a loud scream across the room which Joanne orients towards. Taylor turns away and creases her face and grizzles. Taylor walks towards the door and passes another staff member who greets her 'Hello!' Taylor stops and repeats 'baby' and then 'maee' and orients her eyes back to Joanne. The staff member responds, 'you can find another baby' and moves on. As she reaches the door, she turns her body and face towards the activity in the room and points her left finger. She utters, 'mamee, mayee, mayee, mamee' a total of 24 times, whilst walking backwards and forwards on the spot and alternating her gaze in the direction of the adults and then back to the door. Her final 'mayee' progresses into a 'maYEE MMERR', louder and couple with a point to the door. Joanne calls across, 'do you want your muzz?' Taylor walks towards Joanne, repeating 'mayee'. Taylor follows Joanne closely, looking up at her as she moves. Joanne briefly touches Taylor on the head and says, 'come on'. Joanne fetches a muzzy from a box and hands it to Taylor, who nuzzles into the muslin and rubs it over her face taking a deep breath in. Joanne moves past her, and Taylor tracks her across the room, holding her muzzy close to her face. As she walks past the cot room, she glances in at Clare and Cathy who are talking inside. A staff member is talking to Joanne from across the room and Joanne is orientated in this direction.

VID

Joanne: 'She follows me right across the room. She's probably waiting for me to sit with her maybe. It's really odd, because you don't really realise in that moment when you walk away that she has been following me around that whole time and you don't realise that she is desperate for my attention isn't she?'

Appendix 22 – Example of physical touch instigated by Yolanda.

Date: 04/11/2019

Context of observational excerpt: Yolanda and Clare are exploring a glue activity together. There are no other children nearby. Yolanda has been dipping her fingers in the glue and Clare has been supporting her to stick crepe paper onto card.



Observation notes:

Ritchie and another child come over and show an interest, so Clare moves Yolanda off her lap, placing the plastic box of paper in between all the babies. As Yolanda is placed on the floor, still within Clare legs, she reaches out to touch Clare's arm (1). Here it remains for 12 seconds until Clare turns her hands around, out towards Yolanda. Yolanda receives this as a cue to climb back onto Clare's lap. 'Oh! Laughs Clare, 'have you finished?' (2)

VID

Clare: *I remember feeling a little less in control here, it makes me feel conscious of it. It makes me feel the need to be aware of that contact and to make sure that I haven't lost that child I started with, but also that I haven't given a cue to the others that they can't be involved too.*

Appendix 23 – Example of Ritchie’s vocal and physical acceleration of voice patterning

Date: 13/01/2020

Context of observational excerpt:

Ritchie has been wandering around the room for several minutes, all the adults are occupied with 3 standing by the sleep room, one in the kitchenette and one settled in the book area with a younger baby who is crying.



Observation notes:

Ritchie had circled the table where some children are still sitting after lunch. He momentarily stops and touches the shoulder of one of the girls before he turns to look at the grouped adults. He runs back past them, watching them as he goes and runs up the ramp to the bridge, holding onto both sides with his hands. He swings himself backwards and forward with his head tipped backwards. He stops abruptly and picks up a plastic brick which is by his left foot, stands up, looks at the adults and throws the brick across the room with force. He looks at the adults who have not noticed and he shout ‘argh’ in their direction.

VID

Joanne: He will often do those behaviours whilst he is looking at someone. He will often go over to someone and run throw it and pick it back up because he wants to play with it. He will often stand next to someone, and lob it, wait for them to look over and he will run over and not do it again, he just wants someone to sit with him and be with him, I think. The room leader was literally tidying up the room and Ritchie had a puzzle she had just tidied away, and he picked it up and threw it and she shouted ‘Ritchie, stop throwing that’ and she went over to him, and he ran off.

Appendix 24 – Taylor and Lucy engaged dialogically.

Date: 27/01/2020

Context of observational excerpt:

Lucy has been singing 'row row your boat' to Yolanda who is located on her lap. Several children are playing around her, including Taylor who appears occupied with a tea pot and plastic banana although she intermittently looks up at Lucy and Yolanda.



Observation notes:

Lucy is singing 'Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream' rocking Yolanda back and forth and bouncing her up and down. There is lots of laughter and squeals from Yolanda and Lucy. Taylor puts the plastic banana in and out of the tea pot and moves her gaze between that and Lucy. As Lucy sings 'merrily, merrily' Taylor moves her body from side to side, giving Lucy a half smile, with her tongue hanging out (1). Lucy looks at her, continuing her singing and smiles. Taylor pulls herself to standing using Lucy's leg as a prop, Lucy helps her up. Taylor steps backwards and forwards and then points at the logo on Lucy's top saying 'bird' (2). She repeats the action 'bird' and Lucy responds (3) 'You alright Taylor? Bird? oh bird! You clever girl, Taylor' and she tickles her tummy. Lucy reverts her attention back to Yolanda and continues to sing and bounce her. Taylor looks one, moving backwards and forwards on her feet before she steps up (4) and onto Lucy's lap and leans in to embrace her (5)

VID

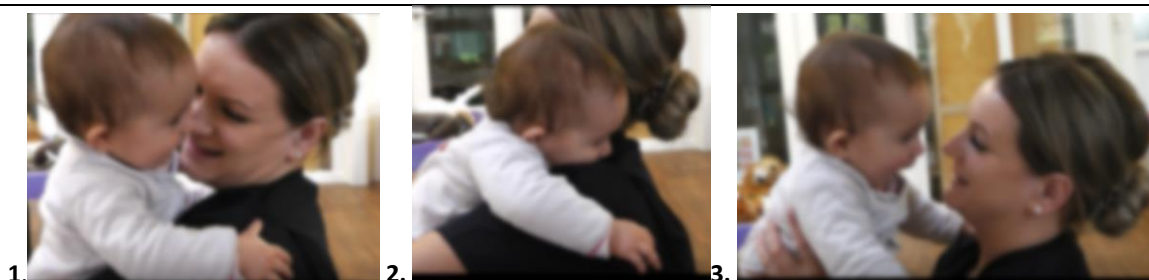
Lucy: She has done that and obviously come over for a cuddle. It's fascinating. She has been waiting for a while, hasn't she?

Appendix 25 – Dialogic encounter between Yolanda and Lucy

Date: 18/11/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Lucy and Yolanda have been playfully embraced for several minutes. Lucy puts Yolanda down facing outwards and backs away, triggered by Yolanda reaching forward for some toys on the floor. Yolanda notices Lucy has left her and rapidly turns and crawls back to Lucy who embraces her and picks her up.



Observation notes:

Lucy picks Yolanda up and they both smile at each other (1). Yolanda leans in for a cuddle and Lucy responds with a small squeeze and she begins to rock herself from side to side whilst patting and circling on Yolanda's back (2). Yolanda begins to hum into Lucy's shoulder, increasing in volume. Lucy repeats the noise, and Yolanda responds again. Lucy gives her a little kiss on the side of her head and lifts Yolanda upwards. Yolanda continues to verbalise 'arrghhhh' (3), Lucy throws her into the air and Yolanda laughs.

VID

Lucy: *She is just so clever! (laughter) I can't believe that she was able to do that, and she followed me over and she is very vocal and relaxed now isn't she?! I remember her doing it. She's very confident now.*

Appendix 26 – A playful episode between Clare and Ritchie

Date: 09/12/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Clare is situated on the carpet and has 4 children around her playing with toys. Ritchie climbs through the other children and hands her a telephone and which begins the dialogue.



Observation notes:

Ritchie has climbed over another child, Ezra, to stand himself in Clare's lap. He hands her the telephone which she takes and holds it to her ear 'Hello is that Ritchie's Daddy?' Ritchie smile and reaches for the phone, which Clare hands to him. They meet eye gaze and smile at one another (1). As Ritchie holds the phone to his ear, Ezra approaches and says 'Daddy' and Clare orients to him saying 'Is that your Daddy, Ezra'. Ritchie begins to push him body forward, shuffling into Clare forcefully (2). He snuggles into Clare, and she responds by squeezing him and says 'ahhh' (3).

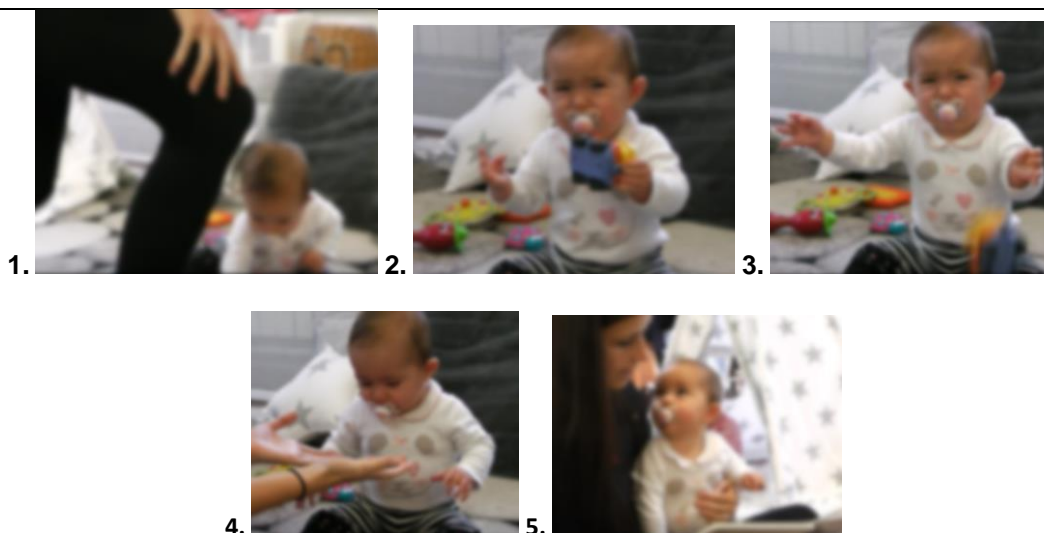
VID:

Clare: *Oh, he made that decision for those children didn't he (laughter), they approach and he's like 'er, Clare is mine at the moment!!' His face is relaxed. He is cueing again. Sometimes I can feel that these moments are hurried, but in these clips, I don't feel it today.*

Appendix 27 – Example of Distraction response.

Date: 07/10/2019

Context of observational excerpt: Yolanda has been on the carpet sitting opposite Joanne for a few minutes. She had been grizzling, so Joanne gave her a dummy which she sucks on quickly. Joanne supports Yolanda to access some toys, Yolanda explores these, picking up a soft book.



Observation notes: A child behind them starts to cry, Joanne reacts immediately and hands Yolanda a plastic truck before moving off to tend to the other baby. As she stands, Yolanda drops the truck and reaches forward to pick it up (1). As she averts her gaze to where Joanne was, she immediately begins to grizzle (2). Her arms move swiftly up and down and as a result she drops the truck (3). She moves her gaze between me and the other adults increasing to a loud cry (4). Joanne moves in and offers her hands to Yolanda who responds, and Joanne picks her up. She places her on her lap and begins to read a book, Yolanda briefly looks up at Joanne (5).

VID:

Joanne: *'Oh my gosh, she has barely looked up from the toy before she starts. (2)*

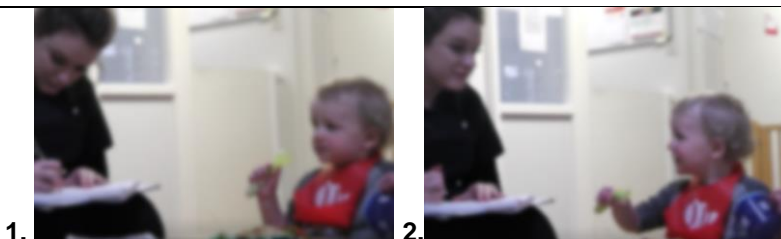
I could see in her face and hands she needed me. Her face screws up as if she is going to cry saying 'come and get me, come and get me' and if you do, then I won't cry!' (4)

That face is a typical Yolanda, 'are you still there' face?' (5)

Appendix 28- Example of misaligned activity patterns

Date: 27/01/2020

Context of observational excerpt: Ritchie had woken up from a prolonged nap and had slept through lunchtime. He and Lucy had spent time together cuddling after he woke up. She settles him down with his lunch at one of the tables and sits next to him. This observation footage moves over the course of 17 minutes.



Observation notes: Ritchie is settled at the table with his lunch, he intermittently looks between Lucy and his plate. He doesn't appear to want to eat, fiddling with the food, manipulating it around the plate. Lucy focuses on completing the books but every minute or so glances up and smiles at Ritchie. As he watches her, his eyebrows flicker between furrowed and raised in anticipation (1). At one point he manages to pick up some chicken with his fork and immediately orients his gaze to Lucy, who looks at him and smiles (2).

VID (N1 P1 RD3):

Lucy: *I feel sad, because I am just sat there doing paperwork and he is just there eating. I remember that all the other girls were busy so I just thought I should do them. The room leaders always say that we should have to do the books. I don't usually do them properly because I don't have time, but on that day, I thought he would be busy eating so I could do them.*

He is teasing me with the fork and looking at me. He wanted my attention; he is playing with it (the food).

Appendix 29 – Little Panda Child profiles

Frank

As the project commenced, Frank was 11 months old. He started at the nursery recently. He attended Little Pandas for four days per week and spent the other day each week with grandparents. He lives at home with his two parents. Frank had a complicated birth and was small birth weight. He also had some issues with feeding that required health intervention. While he eats happily now, he can be fussy and struggles to keep his weight up.

Frank's parents report he has regular contact with extended family and friends met through a parent group, including Nina and three other children in the baby room. Frank's parents describe him as '*very excitable*' which has always been the case, which they have found very '*rewarding*'. Frank has always been very physical and '*wants to get moving*'. His parents agree, '*he has so much energy*'. His parents have noted that he is '*not as vocal*' as his friends' and that he seems disinterested in talking, although they note they have heard him saying words sporadically and not in context. They refer to him as a '*classic boy*'. Following on from a bout of sickness, they have noticed that Frank continues to use coughing as a strategy to attract their attention, especially when eating. When they respond he laughs and '*he always grins afterwards*.' Frank has shown his caring nature to his friends outside of the nursery, helping them to navigate a high slide and steep hill by placing his hand on his friend's back. He loves hugging his friends.

Frank reportedly settled into Little Pandas well, '*only crying for a couple of days*' so the parents felt '*very lucky*' that he settled well. Although they noted in the first week, he was angry as if to say '*you have left me*' but that settled quite quickly. His parents report that he '*loved Josie*' and had a good bond with her. The parents chose the nursery following attending parent support groups there and the convenience of the location. They were impressed with the space, garden, and room size.

Anna

Anna started at the nursery just before the research project commenced at 4 months old. Her attendance pattern was for 1 day per week, gradually building to 5 days per week as her mother transitioned back to work. She lives at home with her mother and father. Anna has regular contact with wider family and a small group of friends. She attends parent groups and spends some of her time socialising with older children.

Anna was described by her parents during the interview to be very physical and advanced for her age. In recent weeks they have noticed Anna being more sensitive to change, and 'going into rage and anger quite quickly'. Anna's mother shares, *'She gets very, very angry. She doesn't like being restrained at all, she won't go in the buggy, she used to have a bouncer and won't go into that ... She was comfortable doing tummy time from an early age and now she wants to pull herself up'*. While she never used to use her dummy that often, they have noted that she has become very attached to it recently and waking in the night for it.

Anna started at the nursery very recently and her parents were pleasantly surprised that she settled *'unexpectedly beautifully'* when they had thought she might suffer from separation anxiety like their friends' children. Dropping Anna off at nursery is always very easy and she is familiar with the routine, sleeping and feeding well (*she really enjoys the nursery Weetabix*). Her parents note that when they *'can count on one hand'* the times she has been upset when they have collected her and believe her to be *'not that fussed'* that they have arrived. They comment they do not get *'much of a response'* and believe that initially she *'got very confused'*.

Anna's parents report that they chose Little Pandas due to its practicality and the nice feel when they first walked in. They feel that there is *'a lot of love in the nursery'* and the staff seem to *'genuinely care'* which they feel helps Anna to settle and feel happy there.

Nina

Nina is 9 ½ months old and started at Little Pandas a week before the project commenced. She attends the setting 3 ½ days per week. She is familiar with Frank and three other children attending the nursery through a parent group. She lives at home with her two parents. Nina has regular contact with her extended family, including older cousins who she interacts with '*beautifully*'. She is described by her parents to have gone from a '*calm soul*' to a '*terrorist*' interested in everything and keen to socialise. Nina's personality is '*cheeky*'. Her parents note how she '*finds humour in a lot of things*' and she has shown them to '*know what she is doing*' and if she is told off, she tends to smile.

Nina is very loving and loves to be close to her parents and grandparents, seeking out cuddles and 'bucking up' to read stories. Her parents share that she is very creative, already showing interest in drawing and holding a pen correctly. She likes to explore her toys independently, but always likes to show her parents what she is doing. With new activities or experiences, Nina '*she watches. In the garden, she stands back and watches*', though they note with other things she has no hesitations to 'dive in'.

Her parents found the nursery through their parent support group and felt that it was very well equipped compared to other local nurseries. They are happy that Nina gets to engage with child led play and the Forest school. The location is on the way to her mother's work which helps logistically. When Nina joined the nursery, she struggled and was also unwell which interrupted her settling in time. Little Pandas' staff did reassure her parents she was '*absolutely fine*', although she did cry a lot when they collected her initially. Now they report that she '*loves the nursery*' and is very settled and happy, reportedly having strong bonds with Alma and some of the other staff.

Appendix 30 – Playful dialogic encounter – Frank

Date: 27/11/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Frank has been crawling around the room with the lion in one hand. He has been laying on the floor, staring in Chloe's direction.



Observation notes:

As Chloe walks towards Frank, he scrunches his face into a grin. She responds by smiling at him and joining him on the floor.

Frank laughs 'aaaahhhh'. Chloe responds, 'arrrrghhhh', Frank continues to stare at her and responds 'aahhhhhh', Chloe joins in 'arrrrghhhh', they repeat this twice.

Frank lifts his head off the ground and Chloe copies. She says 'ohhhhhh', Frank responds, 'argh'. Another staff member walks in the room and Frank turns his body and the lion away from Chloe and starts to grizzle. Chloe calls his name 'Frank' and then mimics his grizzle noise. He wiggles his feet, whilst staring and partially smiling at Chloe. She reaches out and tickles his feet. Frank giggles and pulls his feet away, wiggling and kicking, whilst retaining eye contact with Chloe. She continues to make grizzle noises. Frank sits up and laughs, suspending and wiggling his foot out in Chloe's direction.

She says 'atchoo', Frank giggles and Chloe says, 'tickle, tickle, come on then' and holds her arms out to Frank. He utters 'arghhhaaaaa' and then crawls over to her, and she pulls him in for a cuddle saying 'ahhhh Frank, is that what you wanted? A cuddle?' Frank pulls away and crawls back to the Lion toy.

VID

Researcher: Can you talk about what sort of connection, relationship do you have with Frank in this clip?

Chloe; Eye connection. Yes, I get down to his level as well.

Researcher: And is that something you think is important to your practice?

Chloe: Yes.

Appendix 31 – Dialogic encounter, Josie, Frank and Anna

Date: 11/12/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Josie and Anna have been playing for several minutes. Frank has circled their dyad several times over the 19 minutes of video footage. As Josie's volume increases, Frank enters their space.



Observation notes: Frank crawls up to Josie and grins, she responds, 'Hello Frank', His smile widens, and he utters 'ehh' 'Hello Frank'.

Frank crawls behind Anna's bouncer chair and lays his head down in the floor, Josie responds 'Where's Frank?' Frank laughs and raises his head, meets Josie's eye gaze and repeats the action seven times.

Each time Josie says 'Whhhheere's Frank?' he moves his head up, laughs and returns to the floor. On the eight time, Josie says, 'Boo', Frank repeats the action once more before crawling closer and holding onto the bouncer chair. Josie asks Frank 'are you funny Frank?'.

He kneels up over Anna. 'Are you going to give Anna a cuddle, Frank? Look, ahhhh' She demonstrates how to stroke Anna gently.

Frank reaches over to take her 'Tigs'. 'No Frank, that is her Tigs, look, we go, tig, tig, tig.' Josie demonstrates what to do with the cuddly toy as she tickles Anna. Frank looks on, animated and laughing, reaching out for the toy. As Anna giggles, Frank increases his body movements, jiggling up and down and reaching towards Josie.

VID

Josie: *As soon as I am there, he takes his hand off, like a protector.*

Appendix 32 – Humorous dialogic encounter, Ritchie and Chloe

Date: 20/11/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Chloe and Frank are playing a game of peekaboo through the window of the tepee. Julian is watching close by. An adult in behind the camera is comforting a child who is crying.



Observation notes:

Chloe pokes her head through the tepee window 'oooh', Frank laughs, she says 'boo' and comes round the side of the tent. Frank laughs 'aaahhh'. Chloe repeats, 'boo' and then 'atchooooo'. Frank laughs and squeals. 'Where has Frankie gone?'

Frank crawls up to the window and peers through. Julian cruises behind them and tries to move closer to the window, Frank puts his left arm out in Julian's direction, looks at him then returns his attention to Chloe. Chloe says, 'Where is Frankie and Julian?' Frank squeals loudly. Chloe begins to talk to her colleague off camera. Frank lifts his hand and places it on Chloe's. Chloe reorients to Frank, and they continue peekaboo. This dialogue continues for several minutes. Julian moves closer into Chloe who responds, 'boo' and holds onto Julian as he is unsteady on his feet. Frank immediately scrunches up his face and squeals and begins to walk into Julian towards Chloe but falls into her lap, 'ohhh careful, Frank!' and she picks him up.

VID

Chloe: He's trying to get my attention because someone else is trying to play with me. Trying to move and block him out.

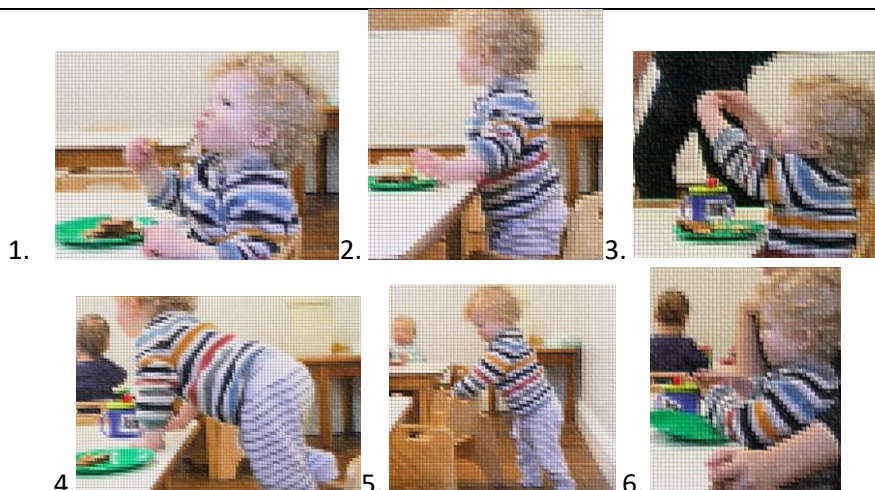
I think he's trying to keep me, as I am talking to Josie.

Appendix 33 – Misalignment of intentions – Snack time

Date: 29/01/2020

Context of observational excerpt:

It is snack time and Frank and four other children have been relocated into the snack room. This is Frank's second week in his new room. Alma and two other staff members are facilitating the snack time. Frank is one of the first children to be given snack.



Observation notes:

Frank is given his snack by Alma. *'Sorry Frank, it's a bit untidy today but it will have to do.'* Alma's attention moves to the child opposite, and Frank watches her movements, looking up at her and follows her as she moves back to the small kitchenette. As she leaves, she says *'I'm just going to find Alex, she needs her snack too.'* Frank wiggles his legs and moves his body, vocalising *'ah, ah, ra'* in Alma's direction. He continues to wiggle, alternating from side to side and forward and backwards as Alma and another colleague liaise about the snack. She returns saying loudly *'right drinks, my treasures.'* Frank follows her and raises his eyebrows and pushes his chair out, so he is partially standing. He holds his eye gaze in the Alma's direction who calls across the room *'Frank! Bottom please!'* She moves over and resettles him; Frank immediately sits down on his chair. He watches Alma as she continues to talk to her colleague. He eats a little snack and then stands up again, this time calling *'rah, ahh, rah'*, holding his hands upwards. Alma responds, *'Frank, bottom please, I am just sorting your drink now.'* She walks over to him saying *'there you go my babe. Let's move you round to sit at the table please, nicely. That will make Alma sing, nice table manners. There you go, Frank, are you eating your banana, because I know you like your banana, it will make you rock and roll.'* Frank jiggles his legs and answers *'ah, rah, rah'*. Alma moves away again and as she does, he raises his arms and shouts *'yah'*. Frank's focus remains in Alma's direction. He pushes his chair out and stands on it, leaning across the table, towards the adults. *'Frank, on your bottom please!'* Frank continues to stand up and respond to Alma as she calls each time to return to his

bottom, this repeats five times over 4 minutes. Eventually he puts one leg on the table and then falls on the floor, the adults do not notice. He gets himself back up and then begins to push the chair around the room. Alma calls to a staff member and asks them to sit with Frank.

VID

Alma: He seems very interested in what is going on and the other children coming in. He hasn't changed his eyes or face and is looking at me the whole time. He is obviously focussed on where the voices are coming from because I haven't moved too much. Oh look, now he is getting off his chair to get my attention. Every time he gets the response that he wants, or at least a response. Now he's probably thinking, well now you're not going to respond to me I am going to do something different. I didn't get the response from you I was hoping standing on my chair, so I am going to get off it. The noisier it is in the room, the more his vocalising has increased. It's like he is saying 'I am still here, don't forget me, I am still here'.

Appendix 34 – Sleep time – Seeking touch and comfort.

Date: 12/02/2020

Context of observational excerpt:

The babies are settling for sleep time. A group of children are still eating lunch in an adjoining room. Nina is lying down and vocalising loudly whilst she cuddles her giraffe.



Observation notes:

Nina utters a continuous ‘aaaahhhhhh’ which varies in tone and volume. Alma is rubbing her back in swift circles, ‘Yes Ninny’, she moves her hand up to stroke Nina on the head and says ‘shhhhh, I know, shhhhh’. Nina’s utterances change to ‘bub, bub, bub, ba’ and she repeats this loudly. Alma responds, ‘bub, bub, I know, shhhhhh’. Alma is then told by another staff member other children are coming in to settle so Alma slows her stroke, checks Nina and slowly crawls away. She relocates to the other side of Nina and continues to stroke but supports the other children walking through. Alma stretches to help another child get into bed and then break her physical contact with Nina. Nina’s head instantly raises, and she moves her wriggles her whole body over to Alma. Alma responds and places both her hands on Nina’s body and continues to stroke her slowly. She carefully lifts Nina back onto her bed, tucks her into the blanket and continues to stroke her head slowly until Nina quietens and falls asleep.

VID

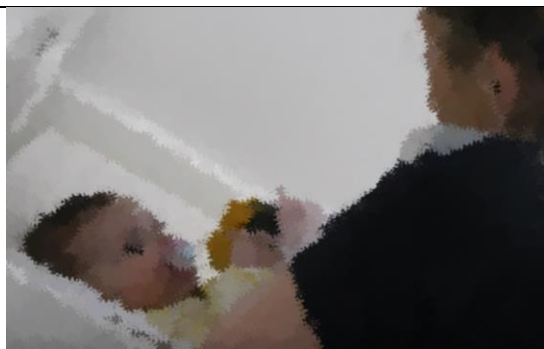
Alma: *She’s lost that contact with me; she’s come right up to me to turn round to see me. It’s that moment I take my hand off her, she’s moving towards me. She does get my attention, so she gets my two hands on her, so I reassure her that I am back, I here, I am back, I haven’t left you. She’s attached to me. It’s fascinating.*

Appendix 35 – Singing during nappy changing episode.

Date: 11/12/19

Context of observational excerpt:

Anna has been carried into the nappy changing room for a routine nappy change.



Observation notes:

Sally lays Anna down on the changer very gently. As she moves back, Anna retains her hand on Sally's arm. As she puts on an apron and her gloves, Sally says, '*Shall we do your nappy? Good girl!!!!. Good girl! Shall we get a nappy out for you?*'

Anna responds '*hmm*' and keeps her eyes on Sally as she bends down to retrieve the nappy from under the cabinet. Sally responds '*Yeahhhhsss. Are we going to do your nappy? Readdy? Ready, ready, ready. Shall we do, (starts to sing) Twinkle, twinkle...Anna responds 'uh'... little star, how I wonder what you are, up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky, twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are?*'

Anna begins to pat Sally's gloves and move her hands, up and down pulling at Sally's gloves. '*Good girl nearly finished. Shall we put the new nappy on? Yeh? Good girl, good girl. 1,2,3*'

Anna bangs her right arm onto Sally's arm four times. She continues to stare at Sally '*let's pull your leggings up. Ready?*', Anna places her right hand on Sally's arm and looks at her. Sally smiles and lifts Anna up '*All done! All done! Are you coming? All done.*'

VID

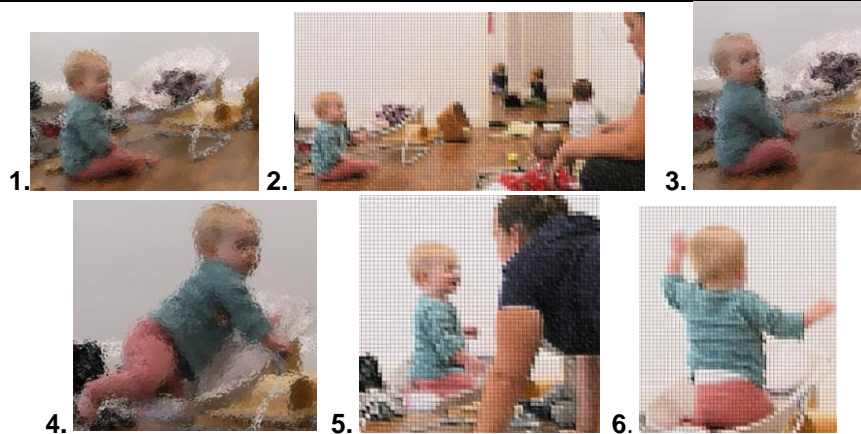
Sally: *I think she is responding to what I am doing. She's looking at me, and she's babbling at me. She's giving me eye contact, obviously she is grabbing onto my glove too. It must be quite a fun noise and sound, isn't it? I think I have always noticed that if you sing stuff, it just distracts them and it helps them...*

Appendix 36 – Creative strategic voice patterning

Date: 04/12/2019

Context of observational excerpt:

Nina is sat in fiddling with the baby bouncer chair, one adult is behind her. Anna is laying on the floor behind her, another baby is moving around the room and another child is banging the radiator cover with a ball.



Observation notes:

Nina is fiddling with the buttons on the bouncer chair and intermittently turns her head to look at Chloe. As she turns back, she flaps both arms and vocalises 'weh', accompanied with a smile. Chloe responds 'weh' and smiles back at her and Nina smiles then turns to fiddle with the buttons.

Anna begins to cry, and Chloe picks her up. Nina looks back and draws her feet into her body and raises her eyebrows, looking directly at Chloe and Anna. Her shoulders drop and she reaches back to the buttons. She kneels, reaches into the chair, and pulls out the toy and blanket.

Nina stands and lifts her leg in and out of the chair, as it wobbles, she uses her foot to steady her balance. After a few attempts, she manages to get both legs into the chair. Chloe calls across the room 'Nina...Nina. You're going to go bump'.

Nina takes one foot out of the chair and then crouches down in front of it. She briefly turns to look at Chloe and then climbs back into the chair again. Chloe repeats, 'you're going to go bump Nina'.

Nina holds Chloe's gaze and continues to climb into the chair. Chloe puts Anna down and begins to move towards Nina, which in response, Nina partially smiles and sits down in the seat and then begins to bounce up and down staring and smiling directly at Chloe. 'Get down, you'll go bump', get down please Nina.'

Chloe crawls across to Nina, who smiles at her. Chloe lifts her down and crawls immediately back to Anna who is crying. Nina looks and gets straight back into the chair increasing the bouncing. Chloe raises her voice 'Nina, no you will go bump', Nina continues to bounce.

VIDChloe: *Ha, she smiles when she's in it and looks at me... She's happy she's got me.*

Appendix 37 – Sharing attention, directive speech.

Date: 11/12/19

Context of observational excerpt:

Josie is settled on the floor and feeding Anna a bottle. The room is busy with 8 toddlers crawling around.



Observation notes:

Josie passes a toy to Frank, 'There you are Frank, what is it?' He and another child push it towards Anna and Josie says 'Careful'.

She then moves her attention to a colleague changing nappies and calls across, Jasmine has done one as well. She listens to the colleague, 'yes, this morning, it was a wet one', she looks at Frank, 'Frank, what are you doing?' 'Er, no thank you Jasmine, you are going to break it. Off you get please. Jasmine, off before someone hurts themselves. Er, Frank, no thank you'.

Anna pulls herself upwards and Josie takes the bottle away and gives her a dummy in return. Anna touches Josie's hand gently and looks up at her momentarily, they meet eye gaze and Josie looks away. Anna reaches out and waves her hand as Josie moves her hand away.

Anna turns her head towards the camera. Josie lifts Anna up and into the bouncer chair, immediately Anna begins to cry. 'It's alright' Franks reaches out to Anna 'ah ha ah, no thank you'. Josie straps Anna into the bouncer and the crying intensifies, her whole body is tense and open.

Josie puts a blanket on her and begins to bounce the chair saying, 'shhhhh, shhhh, where is Tigs (cuddly), oh dear, Anna, looks there's Tigs, beep beep (directed at the other children as she moves the bouncer chair nearer to her). 'Come on you're alright, you're alright, shhhhhhh, shhhhh, good girl'. Anna continues to stare directly at Josie, Josie looks down and around the room and then puts the blanket and tiger closer to Anna's face and reaches up and strokes her hair, 'Ssshhh, that's better, shhhh, you're alright, you're alright, you're alright'.

She turns Anna's dummy around which changes the cry, and Josie rubs Anna's chest gently, 'You're alright, good girl, where is Tigs? Tigs, Tigs? Anna turns her head away. 'Come on, you're alright, shhhhh, that's better'. Josie puts the bouncer chair on loud music and bounces the chair 'shhhhhh, you're alright, you're alright'. She turns away and Anna turns away and quietens her crying.

VID

Josie: *To me I feel like I am too involved with whatever is going on around and I am just feeding. I know it sounds harsh, but I feel like I am neglecting her...I feel like I want to give her more attention, just me and her. But because she is such an aware, she is a nosey baby, she's more involved in everything around her, she wants to know what is going on around her instead of it being just me and her. I think, like yesterday, we were quiet, she was more with me. The room was quieter, she wanted to be with me. Whereas today, it is louder, busier, there are more people around, so she is looking around and not focussing on me.*