Exploring autonomy and agency in the early years classroom using notions of figured worlds

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Exploring autonomy and agency in the early years classroom using notions of figured worlds

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Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
ELG	Early Learning Goal
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
DfE	Department for Education
GLD	Good Level of Development
ECEC	Early Childhood and Early Care
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
LA	Local Authority
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

Glossary

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	The curriculum enforced in September 2018 for Early Years practitioners to implement.
Early Learning Goal (ELG)	The expected outcome for children leaving Reception.
Good Level of Development (GLD)	The expected outcome for children leaving Reception.
Development Matters Framework	The curriculum enforced in September 2018 for Early Years practitioners to implement.
Learning Journey	Children's learning experiences and development records prepared by early years staff
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)	Inspectors of educational and childcare settings.
'Planning-in-the-moment'	A term coined by Anna Ephgrave, where planning is guided by the children's interests.
Pupil Premium	Funding for the improvement of educational outcomes for schools in England.

Preface

Abstract

This study explores the positioning of children in an early years setting and the constraining factors which might act to promote their autonomy and agency. It was motivated by concerns about the rise of the current neoliberalist climate and the way it constrains the autonomy of teachers and their students (Ball, 2016). Research in the early years demonstrates that children require high levels of engagement in activities for successful brain development (Laevers, 2003). To ensure children are developmentally ready for future learning, early years teachers need to provide practical experiences where children are fully engaged with activities of personal interest. Early years practitioners are trying to follow child-centred learning but are working within the performative pressures of maintaining good results and moving children along a timeline to achieve it.

This research uses figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) as a framework to investigate ways in which children can find a space to author the 'self' within their learning environment. It investigates the potential for an 'in-the-moment' collective approach to planning to offer autonomy and agency for the children in their learning environment. For this method to be implemented practitioners need to be flexible, innovative and highly reflexive in their approach in order to react and adapt to the challenges faced and ensure children are engaged in play which is of interest to them (Chesworth, 2018:7). This study explores three research questions:

1. What factors affect autonomy and agency for children within the early years?
2. Within the constraints of governmental regimes, how can teachers follow children's interests in order for children to gain autonomy and agency?
3. Can 'planning-in-the-moment' provide further space for authoring?

The research involved myself (as the class teacher) observing the children within my early years classroom whilst implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to follow the interests of the child. Observations were conducted from September 2018 until December 2019 and followed the same group of children as they moved from nursery into reception. It

employed a methodology based in action research using thematic analysis and a cross-case comparative method in order to analyse the 'planning-in-the-moment' method to see the extent to which there is space for children to author the 'self' and become autonomous individuals.

This study highlights the key impact of performativity and governmentality which has the potential to affect the authoring of 'self' within the learning environment. When practitioners plan in the moment they are able to promote a love of learning in an area which interests them as children interact with artifacts which offer limitless opportunities, enabling children to suggest what these artifacts might represent. Through these open-ended artifacts children are able to continually form and reform 'self' in their play worlds as well as develop both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The research findings have illuminated how subject knowledge is a powerful tool in the changing of positional identities through interactions within children's play worlds. The 'in-the-moment' approach also offers the children a transformational relationship between social and cultural capital as they collaborate within their play world (Huang, 2019). While a child-centred approach might potentially limit opportunities for the teacher to direct the child towards particular funds of knowledge, it generates open-ended opportunities for children to collaborate, celebrate and share a wealth of different ideas, lived experiences and personal histories have offered further opportunities of cultural and social capital.

This research supported a deeper understanding not just of the positioning of the children within their figured world, but also my own positioning – as the practitioner and researcher – of this study. I became aware that reflexivity is implicit in reflectivity. In order to move forward with the data using the practitioner-based action research cycle as discussed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), I needed to find my own space of authoring as well as the children's.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One introduces my study aims and motivations for conducting this particular research, including the professional challenges I faced in my previous practice. It explores historical and contemporary literature relating to early years pedagogy. A central purpose for this study foregrounds the importance of autonomy and agency in the early years for learning and development. It critically explores widely accepted tenets around the idea of 'play' and considers the potential of a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to early childhood education – as coined by Ephgrave (2018) – to promote the notion of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979) and 'deep learning' (Laevers (2003). The possible challenges which this approach might create are also considered. This study looks at the policy context in relation to a school-based early years environment. It explores the implications of current policies for promoting autonomy and agency within the early years and explores concerns that such policies might discipline (Foucault, 1998) the spaces used by children and their interactions with the artifacts, materials and objects within these spaces.

In Chapter Two, I outline the theoretical framework of figured worlds which underpins the research. This theoretical framework is introduced early on so that some of the key concepts may be drawn upon when discussing early years pedagogy within the following chapter.

Chapter Three of the study outlines the broad methodological approach for the study, providing a rationale for the use of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model. This chapter explores the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research, as well as ethical entanglements. It interrogates educational discourses and how this may affect practitioner decisions when creating and implementing learning for early years children. This chapter also outlines the context of the study and participants involved. It introduces the specific research methods used including the use of naturalistic observations and a reflective journal to document the research journey. A justification is provided for the use of a thematic approach to analysis and the use of a cross-case comparison method.

Chapter Four documents my analysis of vignettes (generated from observations of children within my class) and the themes emerging from them. The analysis is conducted across two

data sets – observations of the children and my own reflections within a research journal, allowing me to explore issues relating to both the agency of the children and myself as their teacher.

Within Chapter Five, the themes and subthemes which were highlighted in the previous chapter are reviewed in relation to the research questions and I explore how these key themes and findings have supported me in generating new insights in relation to children's agency and autonomy in the early years classroom.

The implications for practice and contributions to knowledge arising from the study are discussed in the Conclusions section within Chapter Six. Reflections on the limitations of the study with recommendations for potential future research are also discussed.

Research Aims

This study aimed to consider ways to foster children's autonomy and agency while working within the constraints of current policy. This is action research project (Kemmis and McTaggart's, 1988) will:

- examine the ways that children are positioned by current early years policy and practice
- explore the factors affecting children's autonomy and agency using the theoretical lens of figured worlds
- consider how 'planning-in-the-moment' might provide further space for authoring 'self' and opportunities for high levels of involvement

Professional experiences prior to the study

My professional experiences within the early years sector motivated my interest in the need for children to be engaged and actively enjoy the learning experience. The desire to question and attempt to bring about change came from the personal dilemmas I have faced when trying to create a stimulating learning environment for the children while also working within the constraints of the current neoliberal climate. My own practice was troubled in a moment prior to the beginning of this project when a child in a small group teacher-led activity asked 'Can I go and play now?" It occurred to me that this child was disengaged and distracted, conforming and abiding by rules, rather than taking part in learning which sparked their imagination and promoted a love of learning. This then led me to notice occasions where children were adapting my pre-planned activities and generating their own, rather than being immersed in what I had intended them to do. I realised that the children appeared much more enthused, 'on-task' and engaged when they had the opportunity to choose, design and implement their own ideas. Incited to act on this revelation, I referred to the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, developed by Anna Ephgrave and informed by Laever's work (2003), as an alternative to the more directed approach I was currently using.

'Planning-in-the-moment' (Ephgrave, 2018) is receiving increasing attention within many early years settings. This approach places significant importance on practitioner observations

in order to enhance the environment in accordance with the interests of the child. My research explores ways in which practitioners might support children in their learning environment by enhancing areas of the classroom to encourage their interests as a way to actively engage and stimulate their learning. I will explore the potential of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to provide space for authoring 'self' within the classroom environment, and promoting the development of autonomous individuals through 'deep engagement' with areas of interest (Ephgrave, 2018:15). 'Planning-in-the-moment' may include following children in their learning activity rather than asking them to complete a teacher activity or observing children in their play worlds and implementing these interests within other areas of their classroom.

Professional Context

I began my teaching career working at my current school as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), teaching in reception for two years before becoming the nursery leader and now early years leader (from September 2019). This research developed through a desire to further develop my own theoretical and pedagogical knowledge.

The research is set within an early years setting where I currently teach. This particular Early Years Foundation Stage setting works with children aged 2 – 5 and is based within a community primary school which has been rated 'good' with 'outstanding' features by OFTSED and is situated within a community of the North West of England with a high percentage of 'pupil premium' children. The children are largely of white British ethnicity. It is located within an urban residential area and is a one and a half form entry school. Within the setting I am the main class teacher supported by two apprentices who are learning the skills to become teaching assistants.

The nursery (aged 3 to 4 years) and reception classes (aged 4 to 5 years) each have their own dedicated space within the unit. Each room is arranged into different areas, in accordance to the English, non-statutory framework of the Development Matters Curriculum (2012). These areas include; sand, water, maths, construction, investigation, mark-making, paint and creative, fine motor, carpet area for circle time, a reading corner and a home corner that

replicates an *'everyday'* home. This set-up is typical of other EYFS settings within England (OFSTED, 2015:13). The classroom also consists of 'small learning spaces for quiet, focused time, free from the distractions elsewhere in the setting' (OFSTED, 2015:13).

The nursery timetable is operated daily, with two sessions each day (one morning and one afternoon). Some children stay for the full day, in which case, their afternoon session focuses on applying skills developed in the morning independently in their play. The children who attend for half a day are in nursery for a 3-hour period which includes: a topic or mathematics input, a phonics session, snack time and toothbrushing time. Once the carpet-time lesson has finished, the children engage in independent play and are asked to complete a focused activity with the teacher once during the week. The reception timetable includes a full day in school with free play opportunities occurring throughout the day, straight after a carpet-time input activity.

In the nursery and reception classrooms, the outdoor area is open for an hour and a half with a 'free flow' opportunity for children to choose to play inside or outside. The teaching assistants tend to spend time observing the children both indoors and outdoors in their natural play, whilst I complete small teacher-led group sessions. Practitioners are situated both inside and outside during play for the safety of the children and to further enhance the involvement of children in their play experiences. It gives practitioners opportunities to observe children in their play and assess whether there is a need for scaffolding of learning through further learning opportunities. Teaching assistants in the room supervise children in their independent play according to a planned daily rota with enhancements in all areas. Practitioners (including teaching assistants, teachers and apprenticeship students) make observations of children during their independent play and manage the documentation for their progress through an online learning journal app called Tapestry. This app allows practitioners to take photos, write notes of observations and links it directly to the Development Matters Curriculum (2012).

Chapter 1: Autonomy and agency in the early years – The current policy context

This thesis critically considers the possibilities and risks created by the increasing regulation and control on early years education practice. The study and this chapter uses Moss' (2014) publication on *Transformative Change and Real Utopias in Early Childhood Education* to consider these constraints with relation to the children's autonomy and agency within their learning environment and the possibilities of implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' (Ephgrave, 2018) approach. Its aim is to establish the policy context that gives emergence and motivation to the study. This chapter considers current learning perspectives inspired by Vygotskian theories and the importance of 'social bonds' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100) and interactions for learning development. It explores the connections between human development and the socio-political contexts of early childhood education to uncover the regimented practice which they may generate (Foucault, 1998), and which may potentially affect the autonomy and agency of children within their learning space. This chapter briefly discusses the move towards an alternative approach to learning with a 'pedagogy of listening' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:96). This approach requires a deep awareness of children's play experiences and a release from judgements (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100) about their choice in play, in order for children to potentially become autonomous and agentic learners who bring a wealth of different experiences to the early years classroom which can celebrate and value their cultural capital. This chapter will also explore more contemporary views of play, exploring the work of Karen Wohlwend, Helen Hedges and Alison Clark. The concepts of children's autonomy and agency within the early learning environment will be unpicked further in the next chapter.

The research has been influenced by the work of Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and their continued analysis of the neoliberalization of early childhood education along with their discussion of possible alternatives. Moss' (2014) analysis is important because it focuses on the United Kingdom, and it spans through the years of the Early Years Foundation Stage instauration, the growing privatization of services, and the implementation of international tables.

1.1 Governmentality, Regimes and Policies

The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework (DfE, 2021) was produced to create a coherent arrangement for early years education and initially won praise for its holistic and child-centred approach. This framework has become more narrowly focused on school readiness since the implementation of policies and regimes including the Development Matters (DfE, 2012/2021), Base Line Assessments and the focus on mathematics and reading as outlined in Bold Beginnings (Jones et al, 2017). Children's developmental process is increasingly governed by the 'national regulations covering standards, curriculum and learning goals' (Moss, 2014:69). Within the current culture of performativity - as described by Ball (2003) and characterised by 'increasing policy obsession with predefining and measuring outcomes' (Cameron and Moss, 2020:3) - teachers have been forced to adhere to governmental regimes and policies through means of control and change by comparisons and judgements. The performative culture of education sees efficiency as paramount, irrespective of the effect this might have on people and their loss of autonomy through 'monitoring and appraisal, limited participation in decision-making and lack of personal development' (Perryman and Calvert, 2020:6), thus allowing teaching and learning to be determined by learning outcomes and objectives. This is since the introduction of the educational reform in 1997 (Moss, 2014) in the Green Paper which reviewed the curriculum, as called for by Jim Callaghan, and where policy and accountability became the priority. This 'audit culture' (Shore and Wright, 2015:421) uses systems of 'measuring, ranking, and auditing performance' to reshape how schools, staff and organisations need to operate. This audit culture is subsequently encouraging teachers to leave the profession due to notions of performativity and accountability with its increased workload and targets which children are intended to meet by the end of Reception (Perryman and Calvert, 2020). The Early Learning Goals which children in the early years are expected to achieve by the end of Reception are reported upon both locally and nationally as a way to measure and rank schools (Bradbury. 2019) in this 'audit culture'. This framework is implemented as a technology to govern practitioners and children. The performative nature of education uses comparisons and judgements as a disciplinary technique as a means of control which 'leads to performances that measure efficiency' (Perryman and Calvert, 2020:6). As argued by Cameron and Moss (2020:170), neoliberalism attempts to reduce early years education into a 'school readiness' factory that prepares young children for success in primary school tests.

Through an assemblage of technologies including child observation techniques, child development concepts, the competencies and development of staff, inspection regimes, early learning goals and early years curricula, comes a powerful machine which works together effectively to produce 'predefined goals' (Moss, 2014:23) and 'guarantee the high returns that justify initial investment' (Moss, 2014:23). These technologies all work towards the governing of the child which 'seeks to transmit a body of knowledge and through so doing make the 'Other into the Same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100). Children are grouped according to ability with the goal of providing targeted support towards the ELGs; however, this goes against the principle of promoting social interaction for development and places a focus on schools getting children to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of Reception. Again, these ability groupings are in place in order to make the 'Other into the same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100). Ability groupings stifle social interaction as children are made to befriend children who are a similar level of ability in order to ensure class learning is pitched at the right level for each group, rather than giving credence for children to collectively learn together through sharing knowledge in play. Ability groupings segregate individuals rather than provide and promote collective learning with a range of abilities. Roberts-Holmes (2019:860) finds that schools need to 'prioritise flexible pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning activities' … to 'enable children to express and develop understanding beyond a level ascribed to them' through collective play with a range of individuals. This is difficult to achieve when schools are judged according to their performance data in national league tables, which 'form an important part of school's narratives of progress, or their 'Ofsted Stories'' (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017:952).

This thesis intends to consider how these technologies affect the child's experience within their learning environment and if children are able to become autonomous individuals with agency when regimes may encourage children to become 'the same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100). Observation of performance and making judgements of children's progress is a widely accepted assessment method within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) of Education in England and the Development Matters framework (DfE, 2012/2021). However, there are concerns in relation to the purpose of such assessments and the extent to which they support the agency of the learner. Some Early Years teachers 'accept the new

assessment policy if it is done in an 'early yearsy' fashion, namely involving observation rather than formal testing' (Bradbury. 2019:828). However, The International Play Association (2014) suggest there are concerns that play may be discouraged in education to place focus on standardized assessments and preperation for these assessments through rote learning (Palaiologou, 2017). Play seems to be being appropriated 'in the name of cognitive achievements for school readiness, particularly literacy and numeracy, to match the content of standardized testing and measurement-oriented assessment' (Palaiologou, 2017:1260). Moss (2014) has discussed how such knowledge standardisation has reduced the situatedness and openness of learning events if favour of standard programmes that only attend to pre-determined and universal outcomes:

> *Surprise and amazement, context and subjectivity, uncertainty and unexpected outcomes, experimentation and democracy find no place in the story of quality and high returns in its drive for evidence-based and 'tightly defined programmes', effective performance and predicted outcomes, investment and assured profit, with its attention focused on logging and measuring the expected, the already known, the norm (p. 41).*

By normalizing the early years into these predetermined goals to achieve, the learning space the children are working within is regulated and structured due to the monologic transmission of knowledge between teacher and child (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:101). The aims of these disciplinary techniques are the formation of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977:136) which are 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1977:136) to provide outcomes which can be quantified. Through surveillance and regulation, children's autonomy and agency is limited by 'setting normality as an outcome or purpose' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:17).

1.2 Developmental Stages and Age-Phases

The EYFS framework provides a standardised picture of where children ought to be at various stages in their development, reified through the 'mandated learning goals' or the 'norms of the child development' (Moss, 2014:41). Learning is measured to provide 'an abstract map of how children are supposed to be at a given age – 'developmental stages' – producing an image of the 'scientific child' (Moss, 2014:41) who are considered 'on track' in their development

when they meet the necessary requirements for each developmental stage. The 'scientific child' allows an outcome-based assessment method which suits a positivist paradigm which provides quantitative data rather than qualitative. The age-bands are implemented as part of a positivist framework which subscribes to the notion of a 'stable and coherent self' and ascribes great value to 'mastery linearity and predetermined outcomes' (Moss, 2014:44). This approach continues a positivist strand in the social sciences, which might be regarded as useful but arguably insufficient to capture complex realities of the social world.

The age-phase descriptors as outlined in Development Matters (DfE, 2012) were produced as a governing instrument for one coherent system using core skill standards (Fuhrman, 2001), which have been introduced as a part of the globalised educational reform agenda (O'Connor, 2014). The core standards transform education into a set of performance-based, measurable and achievable - in principle - competencies. These age-stage descriptors allow the child to be viewed as an object of normalization and how the child 'should be' at each stage in their life.

Interestingly, these age-phase descriptors have recently been removed with the implementation of the new Development Matters (DfE, 2021) and end of year targets have been introduced in its place. This change may potentially offer autonomy and agency for children as teachers are working within a less structured framework which considers the different rates of learning for each child. However, the expectation remains for children to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of reception as a normalized goal and assumed to be achievable by all children. Although the age bands have been removed from the new Development Matters (DfE, 2021), the expectations for the children are still the same, suggesting the 'quality and high returns' as outlined by Moss (2014) is still at the forefront of the early years educational agenda which may possibly not consider the wellbeing and development of the child for increased autonomy and agency.

The revised Development Matters (DfE, 2021) continues to provide a positivist framework for measuring and promoting child development, based on a linear, standardised picture of how children grow and learn. As argued by Moss (204), the dominance of this position leaves little space for other 'stories' such as the sociocultural exploration of early years education, which

I will pursue within this thesis. The persistent commitment to a positivist approach within the policy environment is apparent with the continuation of the requirement to report on the Good Level of Development (GLD) data (DfE, 2012) by the end of the reception year. This uses a concept, which embodies 'normativity' using a prescribed criterion for achieving the Early Learning Goals by the age of five, and acts as a powerful mechanism to empower the neoliberal culture and its standardised forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1995). Standardized forms of knowledge represent the 'norm' which 'is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education' (Foucault, 1995:184). Normalisation 'defines what is normal and desirable' (Dahlberg and Moss, 200517), which in-turn identifies the abnormal and undesirable. Such disciplinary techniques 'contribute to the formation of dominant discourses or regimes of truth' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:17). This creates pressure for practitioners to ensure that children achieve the early learning goals according to the timeline of 'normal development', rather than celebrating each child's developmental progress (Chesworth, 2018) through a combination of practitioners 'listening' to children during their play experiences (Moss, 2014) and fostering a child-centred learning approach as - supported by Vygotsky (1962) - as two possible options to counter the performativity model.

1.3 Towards an alternative approach to learning

Vygotsky and Bruner have informed an aspiration for early years pedagogy which is focused on social interactions. This places a focus on relationships and 'social bonds' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100), 'being open to the Other, recognising the Other as different and trying to listen to the Other from his or her own position and experience and not treating the Other as the same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100). Understanding the 'social bonds' which children have is important when considering constraints within their learning environment. Their 'social bonds' may relate to their integration within society, their position in their learning environment and within the whole school. Rogoff et al (2018) explains that researchers should consider paying more attention to children's lived experiences as these experiences build from a broad sociocultural and historical perspective, where learning is developed through participation in activities with other members of the community. The relationships each child forms is part of their social bond and their commitment to socially accepted norms, such as their attachment to their family and involvement in activities. These 'social bonds'

form personal relationships and are a part of socialisation which prevent acts of social deviance. Such perspectives suggests that education must precede the need for children to be governed and regulated by respecting them and their learning. Children's voice, ideas, thoughts and actions should be respected and listened to and this should be valued (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100).

Children's learning through play requires active involvement in their curriculum to increase their level of engagement and to be intensely engaged in activities for deep-level learning and development (Laevers, 2003). To do this, teachers could facilitate child-centred learning experiences and listen which requires a deep awareness and a release from judgements (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:100). However, due to cultures of attainment, practitioners are placed within a position to satisify the requirements of regimes and policies, rather than giving credence to the theoretical underpinnings of human development. Teaching is determined by curriculum and assessment policies and procedures (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). There is a call 'for neoliberalism's managerial accountability to be replaced with a participatory and democratic approach that trusts early years teachers' professional judgements' (Cameron and Moss, 2020:171) rather than placing pressure on the teachers and children to achieve specific goals by the end of reception. This research focusing on children's social interactions and active involvement with their learning using the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998), intends to uncover whether there would be a space for children to author the 'self' and gain autonomy and agency within their learning environment. I chose this research to use theoretical framework of figured worlds to uncover children's experiences, but it is possible for this study to explore other theoretical frameworks and it is not limited to this one.

The pressure to achieve the expected learning outcomes by the end of each year, may place practitioners into a position of narrowly focusing on areas such as literacy and mathematics (Cameron and Moss, 2020) without giving recognition to all areas of children's development including physical development, understanding the world and personal, social and emotional development (DfE, 2021). This could potentially jeopardise the amount of 'play' that children are allocated and could cause other important areas of the early learning and development to be neglected (Cameron and Moss, 2020). Ephgrave (2018) explains that children have

autonomy when they are deeply engaged with a task. If a child feels insecure, is not challenged by their environment or is being controlled by adults, they may not be engaged with their learning. Children are more likely to become involved in their learning when they have had the opportunity to choose their activity without interruptions and feel at ease and secure in their environment. When children are concentrated and focused, motivated and fascinated, with the opportuntity to push the limits of their capabilities, deep level learning (Ephgrave, 2018) is taking place. Children need this 'secure' state before their natural desire to develop and learn can be achieved and optimised (Ephgrave, 2018). Situations which occur to disrupt this 'secure' state can have detrimental effects on the chemical make-up in the brain and alter development (Ephgrave, 2018). Laevers (2005) argues that to achieve deep level learning, the curriculum needs to be open enough to encourage children to follow diverse routes in their learning, to achieve their full potential. Within this study, I will explore the potential of a 'planning in the moment' approach (described in detail in chapter 1.6 , 1.7 as well as chapter 3) to help promote engagement and agency, while working within the constraints of the policy context described above.

1.4 Cultural Capital

Another element of the current policy context which is particularly relevant to the development of pupil autonomy and agency is the notion of cultural capital. Alongside the requirement for a sharper focus on attainment in English and Mathematics, cultural capital has also become a key focus for OFSTED and recently appeared within the Early Years Handbook (2019) as a statutory requirement. The concept of cultural capital originated from Bourdieu's work, where capital is argued to take four forms: social capital, cultural capital economic capital and symbolic capital. Cultural capital is a set of attributes or dispositions considered to be of value within a society (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu considers cultural capital as a key facet which 'gives power to an individual to act and to join specific fields' (Beel and Wallace, 2020:699).

The use of "cultural capital" by the government and its agencies is a perversion of the analytical term created by Bourdieu (1986). Bourdieu (1986) uses the term 'cultural capital' to refer to the symbols, preferences, ideas and tastes which are used within social action and therefore, cultural capital must exist in three forms, which include; the embodied state, the

objectified state, and the institutionalised state. The phrase 'cultural capital' has recently been appropriated, or some might argue misappropriated, by OFSTED. Birkenshaw and Temple Clothier (2021:3-4) discuss how Michael Gove deduced that 'acquisition of knowledge' and 'accumulation of cultural capital' was the underpinning of 'intellectual enlightenment', however, Birkenshaw and Temple Clothier (2021:2) suggest that differing cultural awareness and linguistic acumen undermines the mythology of it being a meritocratic system.' Children are not restricted by social class, they have the 'ability to play the hand they are dealt' and 'apply linguistic and cultural capital successfully' (Birkenshaw and Temple Clothier, 2004:2) which allows them to gain the qualifications they desired, 'and subsequently secure a position in the 'life worlds' and 'systems worlds' that extend beyond formal education' (Birkenshaw and Temple Clothier, 2004:2). The implementation of Bourdieu's term – cultural capital – means 'schools are now to concentrate on the realisation of a knowledge-based curriculum, one that allows all students to 'acquire' cultural capital' (Nightingale, 2020:233). The focus on 'knowledge' provides an opportunity for a universal outcome for practitioners to get children to achieve by the end of their learning and not necessarily giving credence to the development of self through cultural communities and experiences.

OFSTED recognise that children come into school with a wealth of different backgrounds and knowledge and as Rogoff et al (2018) discusses, these lived experiences are essential in the figuring of 'self'. However, for a child to be 'successful' by the end of their reception learning, the knowledge needs to be universal and all children should essentially have the same knowledge. OFSTED see 'disadvantaged' children and their supposed diminished experiences within the world as a threat to the child's ability to become an 'educated citizen'. This supports a deficit model (Rogoff, 2017) where children from a lower-income family are considered 'disadvantaged' due to the assumption they have less money to have 'experiences'. This deficit model does not celebrate – as Rogoff et al (2018:6) describes – 'children's lived experiences' which they have formed through their cultural community. The national guidance for early years educators 'redefines the purpose of early years education as one of raising standards to reduce the attainment gap between socio-economic groups so that all young children are school-ready' (Cameron and Moss, 2020:171). For OFSTED, an important component of 'reducing the gap' involves ensuring that all children have the

opportunity to develop the knowledge that they need to be successful in society, through access to a broad and balanced curriculum with predefined outcomes and goals to achieve, rather than considering the lived experiences of children within their everyday worlds.

OFSTED's 1950 notion of cultural deprivation has been turned into a 'knowledge deficit' (Nightingale, 2020:233). OFSTED see children with experiences of the world which are not valued by the English educational system as a 'knowledge deficit' which hinders their learning as well as their development of becoming a citizen. OFSTED expect knowledge provided by the school's curriculum to 'be distinct from the everyday knowledge students bring to school with them' (Nightingale, 2020:234) placing a focus on teachers to provide experiences for all children which will allow them to become a citizen (Nightingale, 2020:234) and valued as part of the English educational system which 'purports to enhance social mobility, through knowledge acquisition, critical analysis, abstract conceptualisation and reflection' (Birkenshaw and Temple Clothier, 2021:2). OFSTED's understanding of cultural capital comes from the positivist framework where quantifiable outcomes are produced through knowledge-based learning which values the unethical practice of the Other becoming the Same as discussed by Dahlberg and Moss (2005).

The positivist paradigm which OFSTED 's approach uses, has enabled a standardized outcome for the child to achieve and does not celebrate the wealth of experiences which each child brings to their early childhood education. Children learning through their interests in a socio-culturalist approach – and as this thesis suggests – may find a transformational relationship between social and cultural capital. This study, considering children's 'households, family practices, and cultural resources' (Moll, 2019:137), may provide an understanding of the child on a '*cultural-historical basis',* providing an insight to their interests and pedagogical innovations to emerge. Cultural capital will be explored further within this study, in relation to the authoring of 'self' and the children's autonomy and agency within their educational setting.

1.5 Self-governance and Ethical practice

Early years education is bound by normalising frameworks required by government or 'expert' input, from 'standards, curricula, accreditation, guidelines on best practice,

inspection, audits' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:9) and regimes. Each governmental regime or policy is measured by quality in order to regulate practice within early years education. The normative framework provides performance indicators with outcomes which are quantified, permitting comparisons between countries through systems and structures (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:9). These systems and structures define the norm and desirable role of the teacher through normalisation. These measures regulate the norm and identify the abnormal (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:17). The norm leaves no place for children to become autonomous individuals, as teachers are governed by their role to impart knowledge on the child and for the child to receive and process the information. The normalising frameworks – such as the curriculum, regimes, guidelines and standards - outline the rules and expectations for teachers and children to follow. These frameworks allow the child to form their identity and shape themselves into governed individuals as well as construct themselves as 'subjects' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). The norm disciplines teachers towards the desired behaviour of self-governing individuals and is 'shaped by social forces produced in the functioning of major social institutions' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:20), including (pre)school, families and workplaces. The governing regimes promote self-governance and organise the experiences of the world, as well as influences our thoughts, ideas and actions. Self-governance occurs through surveillance of everyday existence which enables the continuous monitoring of conduct ensuring individuals are following the desired behaviour (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). The normalising frameworks in place allows governmentality to run 'like a thread from discipline into control' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:51). 'Truth' is formulated through this exercise of power and defines how the children construct the world and their actions within it. Early years educational settings are inscribed with discourses which exercise discipline and governmentality in order to shape subjectivities (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). These dominant discourses within which early years educators are working within, allow self-governance which acts upon themselves rather than being acted upon (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) echoing the Foucauldian notion of the 'panopticon' effect, where those convinced that they are constantly under surveillance will soon be disciplining themselves, whether or not they actually are being watched (Foucault, 1977). They reach our inner beliefs, desires and motivations, driving us to govern ourselves and conform to the governing regimes (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:19).

All of these governmental regimes which govern the child remove the possibility of each child having autonomy and agency as this exercise of power encourages each child to become the same as another child (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). For children to possibly gain autonomy they require this control to be replaced with practitioners listening to the child during their play and paying attention to their interests (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Guiding professional identity of teachers through ethical practice rather than technical practice could be important to work in relation and with attention to the situated social worlds of children. The 'pedagogy of listening' refers to the idea of listening to the stories of the children and respecting them. Allowing children to communicate and express themselves, their values and emotions foregrounds respectful ethical relationships 'and does not grasp the Other to make the Other into the Same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:12-13). This also supports Rogoff et a's (2018) notion of including children's lived experiences within learning, as it allows an opportunity to incorporate children's personal histories and wider context within the interactions in the classroom, allowing children to celebrate their differences. This ethical practice has no place for the application for universalistic rules which governmentality produces. Ethical practice requires reflection, listening, discussion and interpretation (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:13) in order for meaning making to occur (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). A co-construction of relationships with other people requires attentiveness and interactions with others, as moral identities are culturally formed and are diverse (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). In order to implement a 'pedagogy of listening' approach - as discussed by Dahlberg and Moss (2005:96) - Vygotsky's work on human development and his understandings on play and social interactions for learning development are an important aspect to consider. Children learning through play experiences which interest them, may provide practitioners with the opportunity to listen to these stories and respect them.

1.6 Human Development, Play and 'Planning-in-the-Moment'

This research, using a sociocultural paradigm, intends to consider children's emotional wellbeing with a focus on learning through play. This approach to play emphasizes the child's developmental needs and views them as a whole by targeting their emotional, social, physical and language development' (Palaiologou, 2017). This presents the child as an active learner who has opportunities to interact with the physical and social environment (Palaiologou, 2017) and who demonstrates agency by using 'modes to alter the meanings of classroom

materials' (Wohlwend, 2011:4). Modes include facial expressions, gaze, proximity, layout and gestures which make play performances more credible. Wohlwend's (2011:4) example refers to Colin using the physical layout of furniture 'in the housekeeping corner to signal the "door" by knocking on the air while standing in the gap between the wooden refridgerator and the sink cabinet.' Play has also been suggested to be an important vehicle for allowing children to lead their own learning. Giving children the freedom to make choices within their play, as discussed by Tovey (2017), affords children the opportunity to be seen as powerful leaders of their own learning, which is then supported by adults and other children as play partners in order to develop the self (Vygostky, 1981:161). Play enables children a certain autonomy and freedom from adult direction. The opportunity to engage in free play allows children the chance to explore, choose, create, transition and challenge themselves appropriately and is a vital part of their development (Woods, 2017). As argued by Vygotsky:

> *'In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development'* (1978:102)

Vygotsky's metaphor of children being a "head taller" relates to 'the human capacity to do things without knowing either how or that we are doing them (Holzman, 2018:47). Children are continually participating in play which is extending their development without realising they are doing it and are often imitating others. They do not know that they know (Vygotsky, 1978:99) and are performing within play 'without any awareness that they are performing' (Holzman, 2018:47). Holzman (2018:47) explains how Vygotsky regarded play as the leading activity of development during early childhood, eventually being replaced by other learning activities, namely, learning/instruction during schooling'.

Children's interactions through play are implicated in the global discourses that govern ways of working within the early years (Wohlwend, 2011), relating to children's agency and creative expression, school accountability and notions of developmentally appropriate teaching. Early years practitioners, like myself, face a tension between on the one hand needing to align with the positivist approach to early years education, which focuses on linear trajectories and

measurable predetermined outcomes, and on the other, wanting to encourage children to learn through social play as per Vygotsky's understandings (1962). The necessary requirement for children to learn through play becomes contested within the political landscape of policies and regimes within which early years practitioners are working. Hedges (2010) highlights an uncomfortable relationship between learning through play and teaching through play. Play 'can just as easily constrain children by reinforcing existing social identities and power relations in classroom cultures' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). This brings into question whose goals and interests are met: the teacher's or the child's. Teachers are struggling to continue following a child-centred approach which values learning through personal interests due to government centralised curriculum principles and pedagogies which 'perform to the datafication requirements of the school readiness assessment regime' (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2016:17). In schools – such as the school within this study – 'an all-work-no-play approach to early learning' (Wohlwend, 2017:64) is enforced and making time for play is a risky demand for 'watch-list schools under state scrutiny where teachers are assessed on their implementation of scripted curricula' (Wohlwend, 2017:64). Play can be distinguished between formal play (which is mainly for educational purposes and suggests a more adult-led focus) and informal play activities (which promotes a child-initiated learning opportunity) (Palaiologou, 2017). Play becomes contentious when adult involvement asserts control as they guide play to meet curriculum objectives as required by school agendas, limiting the autonomy and agency of children in the classroom. Play is being mis-used by standardized testing-driven curricula as it adopts a form of action that does not contribute to the child's 'driven developmental functions, but to achievements of goals and expectations that can be assessed as part of standardized measurements of children's development and learning' (Palaiologou, 2017:1260). Mis-using play means children are unable to make sense of the world through interactions within the environment for intrinsic motivation and where development occurs. This study seeks to understand how children can work within this constraints to use 'play as a space-making tactic that' can manipulate 'school power relations by producing alternative contexts and importing otherwise unavailable identities and discourses' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). Conceptualising play as a tactic acknowledges the diverse learning to empower different identities, 'allowing them to experience – and perhaps invent ways out of – the constraints of dominant discourses in school' (Wohlwend, 2011:15).

Vygotsky (1962) conceptualised the importance of social play as real experiences within the material world and other people as feeding the mind to be later used as abstract thinking. Children having the opportunity to play 'produces *signs*, material objects or actions that represent and communicate ideas' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). Through play, children become flexible, resourceful and creative individuals using more materials in their environment to make meaning. It is through these design decisions where children follow their interests 'or the social purposes they want to accomplish' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). In Vygotsky's words, 'The path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person' (Vygotsky, 1978:30). Vygotsky's (1981) assertions about the 'other' suggest a development of signs which are mediating through meanings. Meanings are attributed by the actions of the 'other' – another person who is part of the interaction - forming the individual: 'It is through others that we develop ourselves' (Vygostky, 1981:161). These relationships develop the emergence of the 'I' and the 'other' as distinct individualities which cannot exist without the other (Wertsch et al, 1995). Vygotsky's work emphasises how intellectual development must be mediated by language and social interchange: 'Thought development is determined by language, i.e. by the linguistic tools of thought and by the sociocultural experience of the child' (Vygotsky, 1962:51).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as conceived by Vygotsky, refers to the space of potential learning and the importance of social mediation. Bruce (2015) understands the ZPD concept as what the child can do with or without an adult, however, Holzman (2018) challenges this understanding with a more complex and radical suggestion. Holzman (2018:53) explains the ZPD to be 'what people create together rather than a characteristic of individuals'. Vygotsky explains that the ZPD is "between people" and not just a child to one other adult. Holzman (2018) explores Vygotsky's understandings of the ZPD and notices the emphasis on the socialness of learning-leading-development as collective. The ZPD places focus on people doing things together for collective agency. Children are *becoming* socio-cultural creators and actors of their lives through their mediation within their social experiences and not as self-contained, isolated individuals, suggesting development is a collective accomplishment – a "collective form of working together" (Holzman, 2018:44). Vygotsky's work focuses on the need for play for development of self as imaginary situations are formed through play (Holzman, 2018:47). When children are playing and interacting with

their environment, 'the dialectical "otherness" and "becomingness" of the ZPD' (Holzman, 2018:47) are created through their interactions with others in collective agency. Children in play do not realise they did not *know*; it is through this social mediation that they begin to *know* and are unaware that they are begin to *know* through their play. Children begin to form their identity and autonomy through assimilating and incorporating the words of others. These words create the stories spoken by the child, which weaves into their reality through meaning making and making sense of their experiences to form their identity (Moss, 2014). Children begin to *know* through these interactions with others in a collective activity. They may imitate human characteristics – for example, bathing a baby and keeping the water from going into its eyes – that develop the child, without being aware that they did not know this. They have learnt this through observation and imitation, which form part of their *becoming.* Children do not imitate everything they have observed, but rather, 'children *creatively imitate* others in their daily interactions – saying what someone else says, moving to music, picking up a book and "reading,"'(Holzman, 2018:48). These examples emphasise children's limitless capabilitites in their collective activity.

Through these interactions with others, children begin to author and reauthor the 'self'. Funds of identity, as discussed by Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014) are culturally mediated as social phenomena, and use peoples personal and significant life experiences as a way of defining 'self'. Children are becoming through interactions with other individuals who have their own sets of beliefs, understandings and personal funds of knowledge. Mediation of the child's identity is then formed through practicing the roles in which they see the adults fulfilling (Hedges, 2021), which may or may not be of interest to them. Hedges (2021:112) explains mediation as

> 'viewed as three-fold in context, it is: human (in interactions with self and others), institutional (in the organization, composition, and priorities of settings of human participation), and symbolic (in the cultural tools such as language, and … the resources used in play interactions).'

Individuals belong to a range of communities and develop knowledge, skills and interests through social-mediation within these differing contexts. It is from these experiences where

individuals find their interests and explore them further to create their identity. For children to have the opportunity to explore these interests, teachers need to expose children to multiple sources of learning and funds of knowledge in order for them to choose those which interest them (Hedges, 2021). Teachers need to become familiar with the children and their families to 'gain an appreciation of family experiences and funds of knowledge' (Hedges, 2021:114) in order to recognise a fleeting interest or a lasting and purposeful interest which supports the 'self' in identity development. Children's interests involve more than an intended meaning or a social purpose, children's interests 'also reflects the knowledges, identities, social practices, and dispositions learned at home and school' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). Children's work, designs and drawings 'are layered with *sedimented identities* deposited through a child's choices of materials and modes' (Wohlwend, 2011:13) and 'practices valued by families, schools, or communities, and identities' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). The use of artifacts such as objects, videos, maps, photos and drawings have a particularly important role to play in order for teachers to understand and recognise these interests in order to further enhance these ideas within their learning environment. When children have funds of identity they are developing agency. Children resisting adult instructions, norms and structures or ascribing new meaning to adult expectations are acting with agency and mediating their sense of 'self'. This will be explored further in the next chapter; which introduces this study's theoretical framework of figured worlds.

1.7 'Planning-in-the-moment' approach

In order to consider children's autonomy and agency within their learning environment, this research uses the 'planning-in-the-moment' (Ephgrave, 2018) method in a pedagogical-inquiry attempt to develop the autonomy and agency of children, whilst still being responsive to the policy framework in which teachers are bound to operate and be accountable. 'Planning-in-the-moment' is becoming increasingly popular in early years settings in England and has gained much attention recently within the early years community (Ephrave, 2018). This approach is guided by children's interests, where established structure and routines - as favoured by OFSTED (2015) - are replaced with a more flexible approach to the curriculum and learning environment. An 'in-the-moment' approach uses 'constant improvisation within ever-changing social and material conditions' (Holland et al, 1998:17) in order to implement learning which is of interest to the child. These improvisations are 'impromptu actions that

occur when our past, brought to the present as *habitus*, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response' (Holland et al, 1998:17-18). 'Planning-in-the-moment' intends teachers to observe children's interests and further support these interests within the learning environment – as improvisations – requiring teachers to be alert and aware of these "sediments" of the next generation (Holland et al, 1998:18). A permeable curriculum – as discussed by Dyson (1993, cited in Wohlwend, 2017:67) – 'describes pedagogy that is open to children's cultures, interests and desires, where curriculum is negotiated with children, rather than done to them'. Within this approach, a child deeply engaged with an activity should be allowed to continue without interruption to fully internalise their learning. Ephgrave (2018) explains that children have autonomy when they are deeply engaged with a task. High levels of involvement only occur when the activity is achievable by the capabilities of the person (within their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1962:51) as previously discussed). Children are more likely to become involved in their learning when they have had the opportunity to choose their activity without interruptions and feel at ease and secure in their environment. When children are concentrated and focused, motivated and fascinated with the opportuntity to push the limits of their capabilities, deep level learning is taking place. Children need this 'secure' state before their natural desire to develop and learn can be achieved and optimised (Ephgrave, 2018). As a teacher currently working within the early years, I have noticed a pressure to implement routines such as snack time and carpet time as part of the child's structure of the school day. This research will seek to explore the possibilities to working within the constraints of performativity, to implement an 'in-the-moment' approach that allows practitioners to follow children's interests.

My professional experiences within the early years sector motivated my interest in the need for children to be engaged and actively enjoy the learning experience. Creating a stimulating learning environment whilst working within the constraints of the current neoliberal climate was a personal dilemma I have faced whilst working within the early years. This created the desire to question and attempt to bring change. I questioned my own practice when I was working with a child in a small group teacher-led activity who said 'Can I go and play now?'. It came to my attention that this child was distracted and disengaged with the learning activity and was conforming to the requests of the teacher when working within this group activity.

From listening to the child's request and respecting their learning (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), I noticed occasions where children were adapting pre-planned activities to better suit their interests and generating their own ideas. This led me to realise children were engaged, 'on task' and enthused when they had the opportunity to implement their own ideas into their learning. Incited to act on this revelation, I referred to the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, developed by Anna Ephgrave and informed by Laever's (2003) work, as an alternative to the more directed approach I was currently using in order for children to develop a sense of identity, autonomy and agency. Children require a learning environment which provides opportunitites for curiosity and excitement in order for deep levels of engagement to occur (Laevers, 2003). Ephgrave (2018) explains that children have autonomy when they are deeply engaged with a task. When the environment provides these opportunities for deep level learning, children are able to access the state of *flow*, where children are so immersed with an activity that nothing else seems to matter. These 'optimal experiences' (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1992) allow children to exercise a sense of control over their actions with deep but effortless involvement (Laevers and Moon, 1997).

When adopting a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach practitioners are asked to provide an environment which does not solely rely on predetermined themes or topics, as learning experiences may appear contrived in order to fit the theme rather than the child. Children taking part in a more formalised, adult-led learning approach, which forms a significant proportion of children's time within early years settings in England, may be hindered in the developmental process that these practices are aiming to achieve (Ephgrave, 2018). However, by developing a deeper understanding of children's interests, practitioners can develop a co-constructed curriculum which is less structured and begins with the child (Birbili, 2018). If practitioners observe children and reveal interests that inspire and promote learning, 'mini themes' can emerge for meaningful learning, which foster and promote high involvement (Woods, 2016). Practitioners are therefore a crucial asset to the early years environment. The 'mini themes' which children are interested in can then be implemented within their learning space.

Building a curriculum around interests allows children and teachers 'to spontaneously inquire into and explore intuitive ideas, and the content relating to these, in highly participative and

interpretive ways' (Hedges & Cooper, 2016:303) utilizing children's intrinsic motivation to learn. However, as Hedges and Cooper (2016:304) discuss, without a conceptual framing of interests and taking into account 'children's own indications of what they regard as important in their lives, there is a risk of recognizing and responding to children's interests in narrow and unsystematic ways'. Early childhood environments are set out for the children by the teachers and their perception of what the child is interested in. This may not accurately reflect the children's choices in relation to their wider experiences including their community and family experiences, activities and practices (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Building a curriculum around children's interests requires children – and their choices – to be placed at the heart of the curricular decision-making by using analytical framings to understand children's interests, to encourage deeper interpretations and genuine conversations to understand their funds of knowledge (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). González et al (2005b:ix) explain:

> The concept of *funds of knowledge*… is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge.

'Funds of knowledge are embedded in everyday cultural practices and are implicit; therefore, they can be hard to recognize and articulate' (Hedges & Cooper, 2016:310) without asking more probing questions, engaging in follow-up conversations and observing children carefully to reveal the influences on their funds of knowledge. Teachers need to understand the child's funds of knowledge in order to ascertain whether the activity is of interest to them and whether this is something they wish to pursue in their own play.

Although teachers need to consider the influences on the child's *funds of knowledge*, it is also important to consider their own personal and professional *funds of knowledge* which may affect the curricular decision-making process. Teachers may unconsciously draw upon their own personal, experience-based *funds of knowledge* in their daily teaching practice as they bring their own set of beliefs, understandings and knowledge in to this environment, which are 'shaped by the contexts of their personal and professional experiences' (Hedges, 2012:9). Experiences 'like being a parent, being a teacher, sharing ethnic and religious backgrounds and being part of the local community influence the teacher knowledge drawn on in daily

practice' (Hedges (2016:11). Using a less-structured 'in-the-moment' approach to learning makes teachers important decision-makers in ensuring they have accurately interpreted the children's *funds of knowledge* whilst considering their own authoring within this space.

Hammersley (2005) explains that the teaching practice can not be directly research-evidenced based because teachers' experiences and understandings of the world need to be filtered through it. There is less research-evidence discussing 'the personal, informal knowledge that teachers gain from their everyday experiences and the impact this has on their own practices' (Hedges, 2012:20). This is an important factor to consider when carrying out this research and deconstructing the data through the discussion section. It is, therefore, important to consider the personal and professional *funds of knowledge* (Hedges, 2012) of the teacher/researcher within these socially mediatied play experiences and how these may affect the child's experiences with the world. This study needs to consider the *funds of knowledge* which I bring to the early childhood environment and questions ways in which my own influences, knowledge and understandings may have encouraged the findings and outcomes. This research – using an 'in-the-moment' approach - seeks to explore the potential of following a more informal child-initiated approach to learning, whilst considering the the constraints teachers are working within and the *funds of knowledge* which they bring to it.

1.8 The Study

This research evolved in response to my own experiences as an early years teacher and the constraints between the need to satisfy the perceptions of perfomativity with that of the need to follow research within human development. It intends to examine and discover whether it is possible for children to gain autonomy and agency through a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach (Ephgrave, 2018). By adopting a sociocultural lens, and exploring the figured worlds which children create/participate in, I will explore the potential for this pedagogocial approach to allow learning to become a creative, collective process, which respects otherness, rather than transmission of knowledge from teacher to child making the 'Other into the Same' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:101). It hopes to uncover whether children can find a space to author the 'self' within the early childhood education environment by allowing a construction of knowledge and meaning making to become a 'relational activity, in a continous process of formulation and reformulation, testing and negotiation' (Dahlberg and

Moss, 2005:102). At the same time, the research will consider both the children's and my own (as the teacher/researcher) *funds of knowledge* and the ways in which they help to shape the figure world of my classoom.

The thesis explores the methodological approach to this study and provides a rationale for using Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model. It explores the theoretical framework of Figured worlds with relation to the observations within the vignettes and uses thematic analysis and a cross-case comparison method to uncover themes which have presented from this data. These themes are then reviewed in relation to the research question and contributions to knowledge are outlined.

Chapter 2: Figured Worlds – a framework for exploring autonomy and agency

Within this chapter, I will present the rationale for using a figured worlds framework to examine the ways in which children are positioned by current early years policies (including the Early Years Statutory Framework (2021) and Development Matters (DfE, 2012/2021)), and practices to consider whether there is potential for 'planning-in-the-moment' to foster autonomy and agency within the early years setting. It looks at the relationship between sociocultural theory (Wertsch et al, 1995) and the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998). It considers some of the concepts of figured worlds such as identity, agency, voice, mediation of artifacts and other environmental stimuli, in relation to the figuring of children's identity and authoring of self. Before I explore social cultural theory, I will begin by briefly introducing the notion of figured worlds, the broader framework which figured worlds is situated within.

The theoretical framework of figured worlds has been used in other studies in education. This chapter looks closely at three other studies using this framework. These include Lüis Urrieta Jr's (2007a/2007b) understanding of identity being a cultural production, Karen Wohlwend's (2011, 2012 and 2017) ideas of funds of knowledge and identity, and Yvette Solomon's (2020:171) consideration of 'the relationship between guided reinvention, appropriation and student agency'. These studies exemplify how these constructs may be put to work in order to better understand processes of identity formation and the development of agency within education settings.

The current study uses figured worlds as a theoretical framework to develop understandings around identity production within the early years educational context and how children come to know knowledge through the worlds in which they are making. This framework is also useful as a way of considering how social constructs mediate the emegrence of identities within the educational context. Figured worlds also provided the tools for me to consider my own 'authoring of self', 'positionality' and 'making worlds' within this study, to observe how I may (or may not) have affected the children's figured worlds through learning being created through teacher orchestration (Solomon et al, 2020). The below table introduces the concepts which the figured worlds study operationalizes.

Theoretical tool/concept	Description of how each concept is framed within figured worlds
Internally Persuasive Discourse	The 'internally persuasive discourse' (Bakhtin's, 1981:345-346) is the engagement in differing viewpoints and perspectives, taking account of multiple ideas as well as negotiating meanings (Worthy et al, 2018).
Authoritative Discourse	The 'authoritative discourse' incorporates, modifies and/or rejects elements of that dominant discourse, where it does not persuade or 'stack up'. The 'authoritative discourse' limits the possibilities of viewpoints and perspectives and is not open to change or questioning (Worthy et al, 2018).
Heteroglossia	Heteroglossia is a diversity of voices or viewpoints which influence the individual's speech.
Utterances	Utterances are the 'system of signs understandable to everybody' as a 'language'. (Bakhtin, 1979:283-284).
Cultural tool kit'	'Cultural tool kit' (Holland et al, 2001:65), which has formed over time and through personal experience. This enables the individual to choose the most suitable behaviour or understanding in response to a situation.
Mediating devices	Mediating devices are the artifacts which children use within their as tools for authoring of the 'self'
Pivoting	Through play, 'children pretend together, they mediate their social histories and shared norms for belonging, using commercial media toys and child-made artifacts to pivot (Vygotsky, 1978) between play worlds and classroom cultures to access more powerful identities and practices' (Wohlwend, [2011] 2017:63).
Habitus (Bourdieu) History-in-person	Bourdieu's concept of 'Habitus' refers to a person's deeply ingrained habits given their social class and cultural experiences (both professional and cultural). Holland et al.'s (1998) understanding of 'habitus' is described by the term 'History-in-person', which represents an individual's past experience. 'History-in-person' extends Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' by suggesting an individuals' past experiences are the sediments in which they improvise 'using

	the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded' within the present (Holland et al, 1998:18).
Cultural Field (Bourdieu) Figured Worlds	Bourdieu's term 'cultural field' (1989) is a person's social status 'derived from… one's cultural trajectory' (Huang, 2019:46). Holland et al (1998) refer to the 'field' as the figured world in which a person is 'figuring' who they are through social relationships and the activities performed within these worlds.
Symbolic Capital Cultural Capital (Bourdieu)	'Localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth, their own "symbolic capital". Bourdieu proposes that capital can take a range of forms: economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. This thesis considers the children's cultural capital and how personal experiences and cultures bring a wealth of differing information and knowledge to these play experiences.

2.1 Figured Worlds

The theory of figured worlds emerged in 1998 in the work of Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain and is mostly associated with the work of Vygotsky, Bourdieu and Bakhtin. Figured worlds is 'not an isolated concept, but is part of Holland et al's (1998) larger theory of self and identity' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:107). Holland et al's (1998) book – Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds' – considers identity and how people 'figure' who they are through social relationships and the activities performed within these worlds. Holland et al (1998) 'suggest cultural production and heuristic development are important processes for identity' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:107) and highlight the importance of improvisation and innovation (agency) for identities forming in an activity or practice. According to Holland et al (1998:63), the 'conceptual and material aspects of figured worlds, and of the artifacts through which they are evinced, are constantly changing through the improvisations of actors'. Figured worlds, therefore, suggests individuals being part of multiple identities within multiple worlds, forming figuratively and positionally.

Broadly, figured worlds is associated with sociocultural theory because it draws from the theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky (1962), Bakhtin (1934/1981) and Bourdieu (1985). This research is set within the early years primary school where I teach and uses figured worlds as

a framework to shine light on the sense of self as a socially and culturally constructed arena within the early years classroom. Figured worlds can be useful for developing understandings' around the 'complexity of social/cultural life itself and the people who participate in it' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:112) and how they author the self. This is important for this study in order to uncover the identity and agency of children within their early learning environment.

The following section outlines four constructs of identity proposed by Holland et al. (1998): figured worlds, positionality, space of authoring and making worlds. These constructs are central to the "Practiced identities" – according to Holland et al (1998:271) – and are constructs of identity in several contexts.

2.1.1 Figured worlds

The first construct of identity is figured worlds. Holland et al (1998:52) describe their notion of figured worlds as a;

> 'socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others'.

Within this framework, the sense of self is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon, where individuals are actors within these worlds, and this is made possible through certain acts which they carry out and those outcomes being valued (Holland et al, 1998). Identities are not only formed through the individual creating their own sense of 'self', but also through the construction of others' perceptions of them which are developed through interactions of *becoming* (Holzman, 2018:45). The historically constituted everyday world is constructed through people's participation in it, alongside the person being shaped by the world in which they are a part of and those interpretations of human action (Holland et al, 1998). A figured world is socially identified and organised by "cultural means" (Holland et al ,1998:53), storylines and narratives which are the backdrop for interpretation through cultural resources which are socially reproduced and happen as social processes in historical time (Urrieta Jr, 2007a). Identities are formed through figured worlds which are the process of individuals participating in activities through improvisations and responses in the social and cultural

openings (Urrieta Jr, 2007b). Identities are worked and reworked through the social landscape and interactions in which children participate in (Holland et al (1998). When individuals participate in these different worlds – through speaking, gesturing and thinking – they send messages to themselves and others, which places them in social fields that are relational to others. This is recognised, as Holland et al (1998) draw on Bakhtin's term, as the space of "authoring" (which will be discussed in chapter 2.1.2 and 2.1.3) and relates to the understanding of '*identity in practice'* (Holland et al, 1998:271).

This figured worlds framework also emphasises the importance of the physical environment (the classroom in the case of this study) and the artifacts within it which. Children's early learning environments consist of emergent play-based, learner-led opportunities, which are informed by teacher observations of children's interests. Teachers begin to add materials, artifacts and objects to encourage 'exploratory and playful activities in open-ended learning' (Wohlwend, 2017:68) environments. Early years classrooms often consist of 'a house with wooden kitchen furniture, dress-up costumes and baby dolls; large and small blocks; reading corners with books; pillows and sofas; sensory tables for water, sand, etc; an art table for painting, printing and playdough sculptures; a science table with insect specimens; a wooden dollshouse; and other minature playsets. Baskets of trains and cars' (Wohlwend, 2017:68). Individuals 'learn to ascribe meaning to artifacts such as objects, events, discourses, and to people as understood in relation to the figure world' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:110). These 'mini' figured worlds are therefore, created in the representation of the real world within which children are *becoming* (Holzman 2018:45). These 'mini' worlds provoke personal and past histories which children bring to their play from their own experiences from their home life. This relates to Holland et al's (1998) understanding of 'history-in-person'. Vygotsky suggests that through artifacts, there is a possibility to expand on children's knowledge and understanding, through the possibility of *becoming* (Urrieta Jr, 2007a). It is within these 'real' worlds that children are learning to *know* and applying this *knowing* to their play, by following interests, interacting with others and developing this sense of 'self' through meaning-making (another key concept explored in chapter 2.1.4). Through artifacts, individuals are able to mediate the thoughts and feelings of others, enabling them to position themselves for themselves (Urrieta Jr, 2007a). Artifacts 'provide the means to "evoke" figured worlds' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:110) and provoke past histories to ascribe meaning as a collective memory

(Urrieta Jr, 2007a). Collective remembering is informed by family stories, histories, and conversations from the past which inform the natural functioning of the present.

2.1.2 Positionality

The second context of identity is "positionality" which is accompanied by the closely related concept of "configuration" (Holland et al, 1998). Holland et al (1998) consider positionality as another key aspect of the production of social identities. 'Positionality refers to the positions "offered" to people in different worlds' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:111), for example, 'the bad child' or 'the shy child'. Positionality – according to Holland et al (1998) – is the process of 'authoring the self' by rejecting, accepting or negotiating the identity which is being offered to them within that figured world alongside the distribution of rank, power and prestige (Urrieta Jr, 2007a). Voloishinov (1986) explains that through interactions, the utterances spoken are formed within the social situation' and have positionality. Drawing upon Bakhtin's earlier work, Holland et al (1998:188) explain that utterances 'are constructed between socially-related and thus positioned persons'. Through language, children may find a space within the constraints of dominant discourses of schools in order to empower a different identity which may not have been otherwise available (Wohlwend, 2011). Through utterances, positionality may be shaped in relation to others working within that space, suggesting subject positions may be strengthened or weakened in relation to others (Törrönen, 2001). Social positions are reliant on others being present within the social world for the production of 'authoritative voices' (Holland et al, 1998:128).) Authoritative discourse merges power and authority (Cohen, 2009). This study considers the position children are situated within in their play and how this may affect or enhance their construction of identity and agency.

2.1.3 Space of authoring

The third context then, is space of authoring. Drawing upon the work of Bakhtin the theoretical framework of figured worlds considers the 'authoring of self' through orchestration of differing perspectives in the social world. This means that figurative identities exist alongside social positions and divisions - such as class, gender, race and matter – which emerge through the dialogic self (Barron, 2013). As 'figured worlds are peopled by characters from'… these collective imaginings, 'people's identity and agency is formed dialectically and dialogically' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:109) making figured worlds a useful theoretical framework for

this study, as it intends to consider 'identity and agency in education' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:109). The notion of the self as 'dialogic' was developed in Bakhtin's work and relates to the way in which individuals author the self and develop their language in communication with others, as well as their internal language, in response to the experiences which they encounter. In Bakhtin's terms, the meaning that we make of ourselves is, "authoring the self," and the space 'in which this authoring occurs is a space defined by the interrelationship of differentiated "vocal" perspectives on the social world' (Holland et al, 1998:173). The 'self' and the 'I' work in pivotal positions and in which meanings are made. It is "addressed" and "answered" by others and the "world" (Holland at al, 1998:173). Holland et al (1998) present an example of 'authoring the self' when referring to Tika Dami, a young fifteen-year-old girl from Nepal. When Tika Dami was asked by Skinner to tell her about herself, she responded by singing a series of folksongs in response as a way to identify herself through improvisation. Dami uses her cultural background to "answer" the question in which she is being "addressed" using a method which she is culturally appropriated within. This "answer" would not be considered the 'norm' when asking a young fifteen-year-old child from the United Kingdom. As figured worlds 'focuses on activity and emphasises the importance of power' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:109), this study will not only consider the children's positioning within the classroom environment, but my own positioning – as the researcher and teacher – and the way in which I figure my professional identity and author myself within these roles.

2.1.4 Making worlds

The final context for the production of identities is making worlds. Making worlds relates to the experiences children are engaging and interacting with within their early years environment. This could include the interactions they have within the 'kitchen area' in the classroom and how their own personal experiences of the kitchen in their home may come into their play worlds. Making worlds is not an 'individual authorship' with 'independent or autonomous creativity' (Holland et al, 1998:272) but combines 'personal authorship with social efficacy' (Holland et al, 1998:272). Individuals' "signatures" (Holland et al, 1998:272) – the personal activities of particular individuals' within groups feeds into the play world and interactions through social play. Through social play, new imagined worlds are formed through '"free expression," the arts and rituals created on the margins of regulated space and time' (Holland et al, 1998:272) and children imbue their cultural legacy as a means of

expression. Children following interests and '*making worlds*: through "serious play,"' allows new figured worlds to come about' (Holland et al, 1998:272). For children to *make worlds* (Holland et al, 1998:272), they need to be a part of "serious play" (Holland et al, 1998:272), which provides new figured worlds, opening up cultural genres and developing new social competencies. Urrieta Jr (2007a:111) explains that in these new figured worlds 'lies the possibility for making/creating new ways, artifacts, discourses, acts, perhaps even more liberatory worlds'. This study considers the worlds in which children make within the early years classroom and how their identity is constructed in relation to it.

2.2 Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is broadly conceived as a school of thought which emphasises the construction of knowledge between the internal and the external. Societal, historical, institutional and cultural factors influence these constructions of knowledge (Wertsch, 1995). Sociocultural theory focuses on the contributions of the social environment to an individual's development and the figured worlds framework explains how individuals figure their identities in relation to it.

Sociocultural theory is derived from Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the social world and the relationship between human development and the construction of language. Vygotsky's work emerged during the late 1920's and 'elaborated progressively until his death in 1934' (Shabani, 2010:238). His work led to the development of theory in the social and educational sciences that attended and studied the importance of sociocultural factors and social interactions in human development. Sociocultural theory within this study seeks to understand how children interpret themselves and who they are in relation to others around them (Pérez and McCarty, 2004). It also intends to understand how children begin to interpret, process and encode their world (Pérez and McCarty, 2004), focusing specifically on their interactions with their early years learning environment and their process of *becoming* with relation to others (Holzman, 2018:45). Although this research looks specifically at the interactions within the educational setting, it also recognises the wider context of children's lived experiences within the everyday world (Rogoff et al, 2018). These experiences – which are built from a broad sociocultural and historical perspective – are part of children's learning

and development in the process of participation in the everyday activities within their cultural community (Rogoff et al, 2018).

A central tenet of sociocultural theory is the role of the cultural context in which these children are a part of. Vygotsky's approach suggests development occurs as individuals learn through interactions with others and the environment, and as they create their own understanding of the world through their cultural community (Mooney, 2013), developing their individuality in the context of social practice (Wertsch et al, 1995). Vygotsky interprets human development as a mutual process in which children are immersed in culture with others who participate in social mediation in order to bring others into these cultural practices (Pérez and McCarty, 2004). The cultural community which children are interacting within provides them with a way of thinking and orienting which builds the expectations of the 'norm' within their community as they begin to imitate, re-interpret and re-imagine these roles (Hedges, 2021:113). Through these interactions children develop, grow and transform their being (Rogoff et al, 2018:6) through the daily practices which are part of their daily life, by playing with each other and performing in new roles, 'creating new kinds of relationships' (Holzman, 2018:51). Children do not just simply participate in some activities, but rather they participate IN some activities and events (Rogoff et al, 2018). While the children are participating in that activity, 'they are IN that process, along with their companions, building on ways of life of prior generations of their cultural communities, in the particular context in which they engage' (Rogoff et al, 2018:7). Children's participation in their communities' ways of life (Rogoff, 2016) contributes to their decisions and endeavours with their ideas as well as their actions (Rogoff et al, 2018:6). Governments, policymakers and some well-meaning researchers have suggested that practices within highly schooled communities define norms for all children's development and learning (Rogoff, 2017). This assumes a deficit model when suggesting some children's limited experiences with the world and knowledge outside the dominant culture assumes they have something wrong with them (Rogoff, 2017), when it could be that their knowledge and experiences are not valued by the English education system (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that the child's cultural development appears twice – once between people and once inside the individual where it is internalised, therefore, human 'action may

be external as well as internal' (Wertsch et al, 1995:10). Human development therefore becomes a mediated process in which language and actions enable children to acquire personal beliefs, cultural values and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogical interactions with others in the classroom. However, Rogoff (2003) challenges this understanding as she suggests that we should not treat development as a process of internalization, but rather 'as a process of *growth* in ways of participating in the endeavours of their communities, in a process of *transformation of participation'* (Rogoff et al, 2018:7). Rogoff et al highlight the importance of children's lived experiences within their cultural communities which contributes to the child's development. Holzman's (2018) explanation of Vygotsky's ZPD emphasises that coming to *know* something is a process of not knowing we didn't *know*. Children are continually learning, imitating and re-imagining roles which they have watched others fulfil and therefore, have never not known. Wertsch (1998) further explores this process of *becoming* as he suggests coming to know something cannot necessarily be separated from the cultural tools which mediate the act of knowing. As Bruner (1996) explains, the cultural tools, text, symbols and thinking which children go through, are part of the construction of reality through "meaning making", highlighting the need to incorporate children's cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, as explained by Rogoff et al (2018).

Knowledge is mediated by the social environment and cultural literacies. Ferdman (1991:348) suggests a child's cultural identity is formed dependent 'on the behaviours, beliefs, values, and norms' which they have been surrounded by whilst growing up. Cultural values have derived from the symbolic significance of literacies in which the children are accustomed to. This suggests the multiple members of children with differing cultural identities (Pérez and McCarty, 2005) situated within the early years setting, will all be learning through the function of literacy as it is filtered through their culture. Individuals begin to interpret these cultural understandings through 'talk' (Pérez and McCarty, 2005). This suggests cultural literacies are socially and culturally constructed as we learn, develop and grow through the interactions with others (Pérez and McCarty, 2005). These worlds are formed for children to begin to construct meaning with the objects and to understand the behaviours and practices which they will experience in everyday life (Pérez and McCarty, 2005:5). This highlights how culture, tools and the environment which children come to occupy is significant in learning,

emphasising the importance for children to interact, play and discover with other children for development.

Sociocultural theory places focus on the interactions children are a part of, as well as the interests they have, as it is through these interactions and interests that children begin to figure their identity and author themselves (Holland et al, 1998). This suggests that adopting an 'in-the-moment' approach in the learning environment would potentially maximise opportunities for children to interact in meaningful ways with their surroundings as well as with other children which inhabit the space, as the teacher adapts the environment and their interactions in order to respond to their interests. Using this approach, children are more likely to be engaged with learning which is of interest to them (Ephgrave, 2018). This means children are figuring their identity in accordance to their own wants and needs. This study adopting a sociocultural framework intends to explore figured worlds in order to consider the authoring of 'self' within the early years classroom.

2.3 Sociocultural Theory as an Epistemology

For sociocultural theory, learning takes place within a social context, which for this study is a community primary school in a community of the North West of England where I teach children. Sociocultural theory relates to the social interactions which are co-constructed between individuals of which one individual may be more knowledgeable than the other (Shabani, 2016). It not only requires an understanding of how children are figuring themselves within this learning space, but also, how I – as the researcher and practitioner – begin to figure myself. As Dahlberg et al (2007) state, our knowledge of the world is socially constructed and as human beings, we are all active participants in this social process. We find ourselves engaged in relationships for meaning making rather than truth-finding. Reflecting on actions makes use of different cultural tools such as complex semiotic resources and language which influence how we interpret actions within a specific cultural context (Hilppö et al, 2016). The use of cultural tools is an active process and, while the mediation of artifacts and cultural tools are important within play and shape action, 'they do not *determine* or *cause* action in some kind of static, mechanistic way' (Wertsch, 1995:22) but they also include psychological tools and behaviour in order for 'meaning making' to take place, for example, a pen is just a pen until interaction with others would inform them that the pen could be used for writing.

As Bakhtin (1979:283-284) discusses, the production of a text or utterance is the 'system of signs understandable to everybody' as a 'language'. Each utterance represents 'something individual, unique…and therein lies all its meaning' (Bakhtin, 1979:283-284). This study uses written notes and photographs to observe and reflect on children's learning experiences. It also implements an 'in-the-moment' approach for myself – as the teacher and researcher – to gain valuable information on children's interests, values and motivations. Crucially, I am trying to understand each child's figured world to attempt to interpret their actions and utterances from their point of view which becomes an epistemological challenge and requires direct speech and photographs to capture the exact words spoken by the children. To allow for interpretations of actions and utterances – which are separate from the direct observation - a personal journal is kept to reflect my own viewpoints and perspectives of these observations.

The use of a personal journal will also give possible reasons to interpretations and offer a wider understanding. In order for me to understand the 'language' in children's play, the figured worlds framework has also highlighted the necessary requirement to reflect on my personal journey through recording daily in a research journal. This will explore my own views and interpretations and reflect on how I am 'authoring myself' as their teacher.

2.4 Sociocultural theory, Figured Worlds and Disciplinary Powers

Socio-cultural theory connects to Foucault's concept of power and is crucial when considering the agency and autonomy of children within the early years setting. Holland et al (1998) use Vygotsky's understandings of imaginative play to see how we can accept becoming institutionalised. Foucauldian discourse see's the concept of self as socially constructed, with Bourdieu's understanding that social positions are constructed in relation to others within these play interactions (Holland et al, 1998). These socially constructed positions are 'answered' through language and utterances - as per Bakhtin's addressivity - and 'are negotiated, resisted, institutionalized, and internalized' (Holland et al, 1998:26). Addressivity is an attempt to redirect linguistics and is an essential feature of language that oriented to a listener. It is what turns a sentence into an actual utterance. Listeners do not just respond to an utterance but rather they shape the utterance whilst it is being made (Morson, 2006). It refers to what the world and people present us as they address us and

how we answer them, thus our positions are negotiated. Vygotsky's understandings places focus on interactions with adults being an important vehicle in the construction of knowledge for children in the early years. This suggests children construct their knowledge and identity through others who are already part of the governed system of disciplinary power as presented by Foucault. Whilst figured worlds critique's Foucault's seeming 'overemphasis on the determinants of the subject,' (Holland et al, 1998:32) nevertheless the evidence of the system of disciplinary power is clear in school and early years educational settings. Indeed, Holland et al (1998) draw upon Foucault's notions of the knowledge/ nexus, as well as upon his notion of the mediating power of artifacts in developing their figured world philosophy. Teachers are part of 'the meticulous control of the operations of the body' (Foucault, 1977: 137) within their profession. Individuals within a position of power 'have a hold over others', not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes' (Foucault, 1977: 138). Teachers are a part of the 'political anatomy' – as described by Foucault (1977:138) – where the formation of a more obedient self is created through 'policy coercions that act upon the body' as 'a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviours' (Foucault, 1977:138).

With this understanding, it would suggest that teachers are possibly instilling the regime of self-governance upon the children in the early years as teachers are already part of this self-governed system. As Foucault discusses, power enters all human relationships in a way where an individual attempts to direct the behaviour of others. By modelling expected behaviours, teachers – with a positional identity and authorial stance – provide children with a view of 'normalised' and 'expected' behaviour within society as "it is through others that we develop ourselves" (Vygostky, 1981:161). According to Foucault, power is not static or located within the individual, but a dynamic mechanism for survival (Bowdridge et al, 2011). Practitioners infer their knowledge on to the child and this is assessed on whether this has been received (Brown et al, 2015). This teacher-child interaction implicates the child in the disciplinary powers imposed.

According to Vygotskian theory, children construct knowledge through their explanations from adults. This suggests children construct their identity through others who are already inflicted within the governed system of disciplinary power as Foucault discusses. This implies

we are essentially teaching children to become associated within this regime by instilling the system of self-governance within the early years as teachers interact with the child as per Vygotsky's analogy (Ball, 2016). This questions Vygotsky's theoretical approach to sociocultural development as it would suggest that children's social interactions with adults (who are already inflicted with the disciplinary powers) as the latter may impose their own knowledge (and truths) of the world upon them, encouraging children to become self-governed citizens. Giving consideration to Foucault's theory in relation to children's construction of knowledge, it suggests practitioners are inflicting their own understanding of the world and encouraging children to adhere to their 'realities' and what they believe is 'true' through this product of power (Ball, 2016). Ball (2016) identifies the impact of neoliberal notions of 'performativity' underlying current government education policies as possibly the key driver of these powerful external forces and resulting power differentials at play. Foucault (1977:28) describes these powerful forces as the 'political anatomy'.

When considering the 'political anatomy' (Foucault, 1977:28) and disciplinary powers that teachers are working within, as well as their time served within the educational setting, it is possible that the disciplinary powers exerted through measures of the curriculum, performance management and assessment methods for example – over a period of time – may produce 'subjected and practised bodies' (Foucault, 1977:138). Educational policies are used to discipline and control teachers within the educational setting. Figured worlds are said to be 'manifestations of the exercise of power which impose discipline' (Barron, 2013:6). As Brown (2015) suggests, through disciplinary techniques, teachers pass their knowledge on to the child; the transmission of this knowledge to the child is then assessed through governmental regimes and systems. Nevertheless, Foucault's notion of disciplinary power is not a totalising one. His notions of power also entail the necessity of the existence of resistance, without which the notion of discipline has no meaning, in the same way, the idea in figured worlds of a 'space' of authoring is that space in which some autonomy and agency can be forged, which one might argue, entails an element of resistance. This authoring of self is explored in the next section.

This study using a theoretical framework of figured worlds, highlights the power relationship between the role of children's interactions with artifacts and the environment. The socio-

cultural environment shapes the experiences and understandings of the world, suggesting the environment and the adults within it, can detrimentally affect (or enhance) their social development (Ball, 2016). Theories of identity construction presume identity to be produced and changed according to situational, interactional, socio-historic and cultural contexts. Multiple identities can be formed and are fluid in accordance with a variety of contexts (Taylor, 2015) including institutional, technological and legal frameworks through which power operates in society, corresponding to 'discursive formations' (Foucault, 1971:26). It is possible children figuring their identity within the early years classroom are becoming part of the societal structure and are conforming to the requirements of human behaviour as modelled by the practitioner. Power differentials and social structure may constrain a child's response and they may become silenced suggesting positional power may lead to resistance (Holland et al, 1998). Teachers who abide by governmental regimes and policies may create a classroom which allow children to conform to the societal structures in place questioning the extent of children's autonomy and agency within the classroom. This study will use the notion of figured worlds as a sociocultural lens to discover the experiences of the child within their early years environment and whether they have autonomy and agency.

2.5 'Authoring the self' and Orchestration

Within this study the theoretical sociocultural approach of figured worlds was used to develop new understandings around the positioning of children within their educational setting and how they begin to author 'self' in relation to the historical, institutional and cultural situations (Wertsch et al, 1995) which they are a part of. Holland et al (1998:182) deploy Bakhtin's (1981:345-346) notion of the 'internally persuasive discourse' when discussing the authoring of self. The 'internally persuasive discourse' (Bakhtin's, 1981:345-346) is the engagement in differing viewpoints and perspectives, taking account of multiple ideas as well as negotiating meanings (Worthy et al, 2018). The 'internally persuasive discourse' involves engaging critically with what Bakhtin calls the 'authoritative discourse' which - where necessary - incorporates, modifies and/or rejects elements of that dominant discourse, where it does not persuade or 'stack up'. The 'authoritative discourse' limits the possibilities of viewpoints and perspectives and is not open to change or questioning (Worthy et al, 2018).

To ‘author the self’, individuals must orchestrate many different perspectives of the social world, using the words of others and imbuing them with their own intentions. They seek to orchestrate these voices and respond in a consistent manner to develop an ‘authorial stance’ representing the formation of more durable aspects of identity (Holland et al, 1998). The ‘authorial stance’ refers to the way in which the individual communicates and presents themself and their authority over their judgements, concerns and feelings. The person with a ‘voice of authority’ (e.g. the teacher) may develop this ‘authorial stance’ though having ‘greater experience’ and through their ‘history-in-person’ (Holland et al, 1998:183). ‘History-in-person’ relates to the histories in which reflect an individual’s unique experiences. They may also gain their ‘authorial stance’ through their ‘internally persuasive discourses’ (Holland et al 1998:82) which have been married to their own beliefs, gaining their positional identity during their play experiences. When children play with others, they build their own understandings and viewpoints through these interactions to author the self. This allows children to acquire ideas which they may include within their own ‘internally persuasive discourse’. The person who may not be in the position of power within their play, may figure their identity in accordance to this particular figured world and take on a new position within this role, such as the chef becoming the cleaner for example. Through assimilating the words of others and orchestrating the voices, an individual forms their identity dialogically, using their ‘cultural tool kit’ (Holland et al, 2001:65), which has formed over time and through personal experience. This enables the individual to choose the most suitable behaviour or understanding in response to a situation.

This ‘cultural tool kit’ (Holland et al, 1998:64) allows the individual to select different behaviours and understandings, enabling a choice in action rather than being constrained to one course of action. Although the philosophy of figured worlds supports the assumption of the existence of unequal power relationships, these identities are never static and continue to form and reform depending on the situation in which individuals or groups find themselves. This suggests that individuals may find opportunities to gain an ‘authorial stance’ at some point in their play experiences. Different identities can emerge depending on a number of factors within a specific social situation. The participation and responses in social activities for both children and teachers, provide a voice (or voices), as they author the world – both of self and of others – creating space for agency, to which others respond (Barron, 2013).

This framework will be used to develop understandings around the potential for children aged 3 to 5 within the classroom where I work as a teacher to gain autonomy and agency within their educational setting as they use their 'cultural tool kit' (Holland et al, 1998:64) in order to formulate their identity. In this way, children are authoring the 'self' within the context of their figured world and the wider figured world of early years education.

2.6 Environment, Agency, Voice and Identity

Figured worlds conceptualises agency as not residing solely within the individual but as a collective participation in understanding, organising and imagining the self where the space of authoring is a contested space of struggle. Within this framework, the 'self' is formed and re-formed dependent on everyday events and activities. The 'self' is made knowable in the words of others (Barron, 2013). What Holland et al (1998) mean by this is the author creates 'self' by orchestration, working within (or against) a set of constraints that may become possibilities. When voices are in conflict, the orchestration of such voices require putting together in some way. These utterances, according to Bakhtin (1981), are subject to two sets of forces; centripetal forces, which are 'embodied in a "unitary language"' that seeks conformity' (Bakhtin, 1981:271) and centrifugal forces: the meanings made in certain situations by particular persons in resistance to the centripetal. When these forces interact it represents the presence of heterglossia. Heteroglossia is a diversity of voices or viewpoints which influence the individual's speech. Holland et al (1998) draw upon Bakhtin's (1981) notion of 'heteroglossia' to describe how language is produced through others;

> *As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other... The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's "own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own (Holland et al, 1998:171-172).*

One can see that, in philosophising about language, Bakhtin (1981) saw that the key to understanding language was its social/dialogical dimension. Voices within differing groups may carry more authority or prestige, suppressing the voices of other groups or be in power. Bakhtin (1981) – also his incarnation as Volosinov in the book 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language' (1929/1973) – observed tensions between certain groups within society that threaten to strengthen or weaken authoritative discourses, highlighting how language operates as a cultural artifact that has the power to dominate discourses or to disrupt social norms. If the author does not like the particular version of themselves created as an object in the social world, they may try to use their figured worlds to recreate versions of themselves in relation to others and therefore, develop a sense of agency. This is what figured worlds sets out as the process of using the 'space of authoring' to author the self.

2.7 Talk and Identity

Talk is an expression of identity and – although not always consistent or logical – shapes the formation of 'self' (Holland et al, 1998). Bakhtin (1981) discusses that words and forms do not belong to anyone. All 'words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour' (Bakhtin, 1981:293). Language is influenced and cultivated by an individual's life and experiences. Bakhtin (1981:294) explains;

> *Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated –overpopulated– with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.*

The self is formed through interactions with others and the context in which it takes place. As touched upon earlier in section 2.5, identities are dialogically formulated through the context in which words and forms have lived their life through these social experiences (Bakhtin, 1981). The shifting positions of power and relationships within interactions draw attention to the multiple nature of social identities (Taylor, 2015).

It might be argued that talk in the early years classroom is needed for autonomy and understanding of 'self' for the children. The repertoire of teacher talk as defined by Alexander (2010) represents how language and context can affect the nature of child interaction with the teacher. Alexander highlights the requirement to challenge children's thinking to provoke difference of opinions and explanations to support children in making sense of their world. Alexander (2000) discusses how teacher 'talk' in classrooms involves 'rote', 'recitation' and 'exposition' during the introduction of new learning rather than the inviting flow of dialogue and discussion. These types of 'teacher talk' are evident in preschools through the use of 'story time', 'carpet time' and 'circle time'. Teachers may find themselves steering conversations towards predefined learning targets which enable progress towards evidencing the targets (Alexander, 2000).

Dahlberg et al (2007) explain this as a 'game' of 'Guess what I am thinking of?' where teachers provide clues and the child tries to figure out the answer. Preschools use 'carpet time' as a place to practice phonics, recite nursery rhymes, 'work out' the days of the week, review the weather through the use of visuals as prompts to conventional language as per Alexander's (2000) explanation of habitual talk. Bakhtin's dialogic process would suggest that children are authoring themselves using dialogue which they are appropriating and assimilating from the words of others (Cohen, 2009). Cohen's (2000) study of young children's talk and identity emphasises how children may be figuring their identity through the institutionalised expectations of the educational setting, where a teacher 'talks' and the child 'listens'. However, 'words gain their true meaning through the interaction between a speaker, a listener/respondent, and a relation between the two' (Cohen, 2009:333).

Although there is a place for some 'habitual talk' in the early years, the meaning of words are understood through dialogue in an interactional relationship and especially in participation in play, where children are 'developing their ideological selves' (Cohen, 2009:331-332). The meaning of words requires negotiating, constructing and discovering through dialogue within a living world (Cohen, 2009). Bakhtin (1981) characterises these phenomena as "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces. Centripetal forces relate to monologic language which 'operates according to one unified language' (Cohen, 2009:333) and centrifugal forces relate to heteroglossia and the 'multiple ways of speaking in a social environment' (Cohen, 2009:333).

This research study explores 'talk' within interactions and the struggles between the centripetal and centrifugal forces. Using this framework alongside the pedagogical approach of 'planning-in-the-moment', this study hopes to offer children a space to become more autonomous individuals within their learning environment.

2.8 Environment, Artifacts and Agency

Alongside the dialogical factors which influence the child's 'authoring of self', figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) also places focus on the importance of the physical environment and the artifacts within it which form part of the figured world. Consideration of the environment's contribution to the development of identity and agency is likely to be especially important within early years settings. As children play, everyday objects can be assigned new meanings, as humans have the ability to manipulate their worlds by means of what Vygotsky's terms as "higher mental processes" which 'are mediated by psychological tools such as language, signs and symbols' (Kozulin et al, 2003:65). Children develop the ability to become a part of an imaginary world by mediating a particular response, to shift into the frame of a different world using the 'cultural tool kit' available to them (Holland et al, 1998:64). Vygotsky recognises this as "pivoting" (Holland, et al, 1998:50). Through play, Wohlwend, ([2011] 2017:63) explains how 'children pretend together, they mediate their social histories and shared norms for belonging, using commercial media toys and child-made artifacts to pivot (Vygotsky, 1978) among play worlds and classroom cultures to access more powerful identities and practices'. As pointed out by Barron (2013), the western world of early years education has a pre-existing figured world relevant to this study in order for children to have the opportunity to "pivot" into different worlds in the hope this will broaden their learning experiences. Early years classrooms consist of 'environmental stimuli' (Holland et al, 1998:63) such as story time, creative and messy play, sand and water play, construction materials, role play and child-sized furniture to represent 'the home'. These imagined worlds of 'play' potentially offer children the ability to use such objects to gain some control over their own physical environment, which in the early years classroom is already structured in terms of the adults' ideology of what a 'classroom' should consist of.

Vygotsky (cited in Clarkes, 2008) referred to these objects as 'mediating devices'. Mediating devices are the artifacts in which children play with in the authoring of the 'self' and their

identity. According to Holland et al (1998) these devices become part of the child's figuring within the social world to recognise 'self' and can be used in order to mediate their positional identity. As the children develop, these objects may no longer be played with, but skills derived from playing with them may figure them in the real world. The individual is forming in practice, using the cultural resources that they have adapted to author themselves 'in-the-moment' (Holland and Lave, 2009). In this study I aim to explore whether and how the use of figured worlds has the potential to generate new understandings around the 'in-the-moment' method in developing children as directors of their own learning. Materials within this space become the mediators which 'accrue shared meanings through their histories of use so that a doll or toy anchors a set of meanings that authorise an expected character, media narrative and a role for its players' (Wohlwend, 2017:66). The mediating objects and artifacts which children come in to contact with when learning 'in-the-moment', are objects of personal choice and therefore, children are figuring their identity in areas which they choose. It is through 'figured worlds, people learn new perspectives of the world and through them learn to ascribe artifacts and actions with new meaning, new passion or emotion' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:110). Exploring open-ended objects can 'enable children to explore…leading to new discoveries, proliferating the pathways into literacy by providing a risk-free learning environment and encouraging a broader range of participation' (Wohlwend, 2017:66). Teachers need to be involved in playwatching to seek opportunities to extend and respond to children's understandings 'by ensuring children have access to material mediators that emerge during explorations' (Wohlwend, 2017:66). This can potentially promote the autonomy and agency of the children in their early years classroom.

Holland et al (1998) highlight the children's ability to move from the world of reality into a world of play, through the manipulation of everyday objects and transforming them into something else. This study seeks to explore how interaction with artifacts and the environment enhances the sense of agency, as the individual experiences an element of control over their positional identity. As Holland et al (1998) elaborate, the sense of agency, created through the cultural forms, which can then be practised through social life are always forming and reforming. Once the individual has developed their history-in-person through experiences, it guides behaviour in cultural activities, as well as avoids behaviours that are not suitable for the self-assigned identity. History-in-person is an individual's past experience

in which they also improvise, 'using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded' within the present (Holland et al, 1998:18). When children are playing, they are making sense of these objects that interest them and consciously acquire a new power which at first they did not perceive.

2.9 Cultural Capital, 'Field' and Identity

Bourdieu's term 'cultural field' (1989) is also an important notion to consider within the study as a person's social status is 'derived from… one's cultural trajectory' (Huang, 2019:46). The field refers to the production and appropriation of knowledge or status, and the competitive positions held by the children within this field. Holland et al (1998) refer to the 'field' as the multiple figured worlds children are working within and how these cross over and intertwine. Children's social class may influence differing understandings of the world as Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'habitus' suggests. 'Habitus' is a person's deeply ingrained habits given their social class and cultural experiences (both professional and cultural) are what creates the person's 'habitus'. Bourdieu (1990) explains that through 'symbolic capital' knowledge derives from the culture in which the child lives and therefore, 'two persons, or two minds, are never the same; they cannot occupy the same place with the same point of view' (Holland and Lave, 2009:2) as Bakhtin discusses as unique individual dialogical relation to the world. This reinforces the uniqueness of each individual and the differences associated with each individual's cultural and social capital. This brings another element to the understanding of figured worlds when 'localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth (Holland et al, 1998:129). This study explores the importance of cultural capital as a factor in children's development of their identities and figuring of worlds within the early years classroom.

Using the theoretical framework of figured worlds highlights the importance of considering the child's social and cultural capital in the early years learning environment. It also gives credence to the wealth of differing experiences and knowledge which children from varying backgrounds will bring to the interactions with each other and their environment. The class conditions which characterizes the social space children are working within, may imprint certain dispositions upon the individual forming relationships which correspond to the child's life-style position (Weininger, 2004). Social and economic backgrounds are being introduced,

understood and applied in 'an acquired system of generative schemes' (Bourdieu, 1990a:55) which are made possible through actions, perceptions and thoughts. This position is noticed 'when the habitus is constructed as the generative formula' which classifies the practice 'into a system of distinctive signs' (Bourdieu, 2010:166). The distinctive signs which have been established with the 'generative formula' – the individuals' existing schemata which is integrated – distinguish social identity and may (or may not) affect the authoring of the child within their learning space. Some actions may be the result of rationalised decisions or adherence to the norms in order to follow expected rules and routines within the classroom (Weininger, 2004).

The interplay of social and cultural 'norms' that children have already learned with that of the expectations of the institutionalised learning environment which children are subjected to, play an important role in the development of their identity. The spaces in which children are learning influences their ideas of how humans should behave both inside the classroom and the outside world (Bonaiuto, 2016) forming their cultural identity (Ferdman, 1991:348). As Wohlwend (2011) explains, consideration needs to be given to the space and the use of artifacts which children come in to contact with. Children's design intentions create meaning through their choice of materials, producing cultural capital. Children are figuring their identities in relation to the 'teachers' psychological functions, skills, competence, knowledge, and their attitudes toward students' (Shabani, 2016:8) emphasising the importance of continuous professional development and opportunities for training for teachers enhancing these learning spaces. Like children, teachers are also developing their profession and learning through the mediated process of signs and tools, making teachers' decisions on the classroom environment an important aspect to consider when reflecting on the autonomy and agency of children working within these spaces. The study explores how children might find space within these organised environments to become autonomous individuals with a sense of their own identity and agency, as well as how I – as their teacher and researcher – might work within the constraints to support their independence by following their lead. I hoped for this action research project to make my teaching become less about planning and more about 'in-the-moment' happenings where children are involved in purposeful interactions in play which is of importance to them. This would allow space for children to author the 'self' and figure their own identities.

2.10 Summary

In summary, the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) in relation to an early years education setting offers the potential to highlight the centripetal and centrifugal forces which children are working within in order to author the 'self'. Children are orchestrating identities and building 'self-concept' through the political, cultural, social and situational context of which they are a part, as well as through words which are part of a concrete heteroglossic conception of the world (Bakhtin, 1981, 293). Using the sociocultural theory to analyse children's experiences within the early years classroom will allow me to consider children's autonomy and agency within their learning environment.

Chapter 3: Methodology **and** Methods

3.0 Methodology

This section outlines and justifies the choice of design within the research. The study aims to consider ways to work with the tensions between the need for high levels of involvement (Leuven, 2003) for pupil engagement and the constraints of current policy, which might act to limit opportunities for children to become fully immersed in their play. A figured worlds framework is considered alongside the possibility of a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to explore ways for children to find a space to author 'self' within this environment. This approach requires practitioners to 'listen' and have a 'deep awareness' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:96) of children's play experiences in order to provide opportunities which offer higher levels of involvement in their play. This approach could potentially offer autonomy and agency for children within their classroom environment. I sought to meet the aims of this study through exploration of the research questions below.

3.1 Main research questions

1. What factors affect autonomy and agency for the child?
2. Within the constraints of governmental regimes, how can teachers follow children's interests in order for children to gain autonomy and agency?
3. Can 'planning-in-the-moment' provide further space for authoring?

3.2 Practitioner-based research

Action research is an appropriate methodological approach for this study as the research aims to address a problem I am experiencing within my own practice. By exploring the potential for a 'planning-in-the moment' approach to promote children's autonomy and agency, I aimed to achieve 'a realignment of existing values, practices and outcomes' (Morrison, 1998:13). The research through 'action' method – often described as practitioner-based action research (Anderson and Herr, 2012) - aims for the ultimate goal of either an improvement of practice, a situation or an understanding of both (Grundy, 1995). In this study I aimed to improve my practice by observing children in their learning environment, notice their interests and implement these interests further within this learning space with the goal

to improve children's learning experiences so they have autonomy and agency within their classroom.

Practitioner-based research is an emergent approach that assumes a change that is continuous, unpredictable, open-ended and ultimately a driver for professional change (Naughton and Hughes, 2009). As a practitioner and researcher within this research meant I could make changes to my own practice and study the effects of these actions (Anderson et al, 1948). By observing children in their learning environment, considering their level of involvement and implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to teaching, I intended to notice the effects of these actions in order to better understand the potential for a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to give children a greater space of authoring (Wilson, 2017). This would offer a possible insight into how children in the early years are positioned by the current neoliberal climate and consider new ways of working within these constraints.

Using practitioner-based research offered a transformative process which allowed me to better understand my practice as well as my own actions within it. This process made me consider my relation to others within this space, changing how I think, say and do (Kemmis, 2009) within my practice. By using figured worlds to support reflections on my own practice I was able to acknowledge my own positioning within this space as I began to figure my own identity within the early years classroom. Applying this process continually changed my understandings of early childhood education as new knowledge presented itself. This knowledge – or new understandings – would change the conditions which I practiced within (Kemmis, 2009) as I began to follow children's interests further. The implementation of the 'planning-in-the-moment' method is explained in more detail within the next section.

'Planning-in-the-moment' (Ephgrave, 2018)

'Planning-in-the-moment' – as coined by Ephgrave (2018) – places children at the centre of their learning through practitioners listening, taking notice, valuing children's interests and implementing these ideas further within their early years environment. Children accessing opportunities which interests them will more likely allow them to become involved in their learning and feel at ease and secure in their environment. This has been discussed in further

detail in chapter 1.7.

'Planning-in-the- moment' (Ephgrave, 2018) requires practitioners to observe children within their play experiences and enhance their learning further through placing objects of interest in their learning environment. Planning needs to be fluid and reactive to the children's interests informed by the process of observation. Practitioners attentive to children's interests can provide opportunities for further learning in their environment. A challenge practitioners face with this particular method – although it is based on key ideas from the developmental literature – is that fluid and reactive methods do not allow for structure and routines, which are enforced within institutions through school-based management systems (discussed in further detail in the following chapter). Although practitioners wish to provide child-led play opportunities, routines and systems provide implicit control to encourage practitioners to adopt positions of power to restrict choices within play (Chesworth, 2016). The structured approach to learning, as advocated in the Bold Beginnings document (Jones et al, 2017:5), requires early years classrooms to include 'direct whole-class teaching, small-group teaching, partner work and play'. This requires pre-determined planning with a focus on full curriculum coverage. Children's play activities are being designed to align with predetermined curricula requirements creating challenges for teachers to recognise and respond to children's interests (Chesworth, 2018:4). If practitioners rely on predetermined themes or topics, learning experiences for children may appear contrived as the experience is formed to fit the theme rather than the child.

3.2.1 Not 'a search for one right answer' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010:xiii)

Researching my own classroom practice involved the search for new information 'and in the process creating new knowledge about particular teaching situations' (Wilson, 2017:4). However, practitioner-based research focuses on improving practice by creating change rather than solely producing new knowledge (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). By observing children in their learning space, implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach and using Leuven's Scale to explore children's levels of Involvement, I intended to explore the potential impact on children's autonomy and agency. This practitioner-based research project is not 'a search for the one right answer' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010:xiii) but uses 'change' as a vehicle that gives 'hope that another world is possible, a world that is more equal, democratic and

sustainable, a world where surprise and wonder, diversity and complexity find their rightful place in early childhood education' (Moss, 2014:2). The story of quality and high returns appears to forget that this is just one story, 'one way of making sense of the world, one of many narratives that can be told' (Moss, 2014:3). Education is not about predefined learning and developmental outcomes which provide a universal best practice but rather 'a continuous process involving border crossings, the introduction of new perspectives and the creation of new understandings' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010:xiii). This learning - without learning outcomes and expectations - would offer a deeper understanding of the children's experiences and to see whether children have autonomy and agency within their early years classroom. This study uses Moss' (2014:2) idea of 'change' by implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach as a vehicle not 'to search for one right answer' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010:xiii) and find one perfect way of teaching and learning, but to observe children in their learning environment, listen and notice ways in which practitioners can extend and support their learning. This research uses this 'in-the-moment' approach to observe whether this 'change' allows children space to author the 'self' and figure their identity in relation to this educational environment, in order to gain autonomy and agency.

3.2.2 'Bottom up' approach (Morrison, 1998:154)

This study is informed by Kemmis and McTaggart's action research model (1988), which adopts a 'bottom up' (Morrison, 1998:154) approach. The 'bottom-up' approach uses continual data from the environment to interpret and inform perceptions. Using this model allows for children's interests to be considered, valued and integrated within their future learning in order to inspire and transform their educational experiences. In practitioner-based action research, it is a self-directed 'project' 'but in this case the others involved also have a voice' (Kemmis, 2009:470). This practitioner-based research allows teachers to be informed of children's interests through observation of 'in-the-moment' happenings, allowing practitioners to implement these interests further in their environment, giving children power over their learning to foster autonomy and engagement.

3.2.3 Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Model

Using the model of plan-do-review as advocated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), practitioner-based research is a cyclical process which leads to different research actions

being implemented, depending on the feedback from the previous cycle, informing the next stage of enquiry (Baumfield et al, 2008). The study intends to use this cycle with the aim of informing practice and potential for improving the autonomy and agency of children in the early years classroom.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral/Cycle Model.

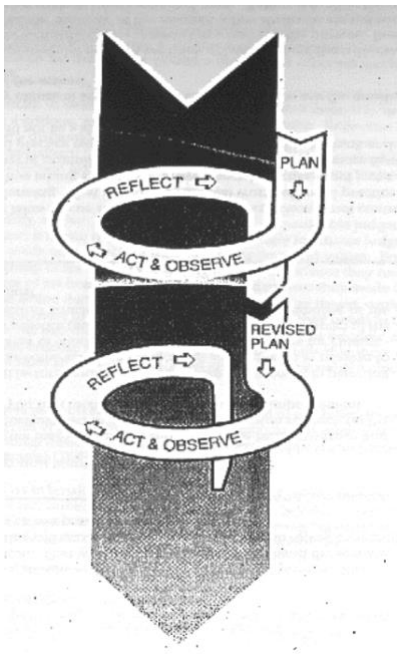

Figure 1: A diagram of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) Action Research Spiral/Cycle.

The initial stage of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model, involves planning the method which will be implemented in order to drive professional change. The plan would continually change within each vignette, however every vignette implemented a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach within my own practice. As discussed in chapter 1.7, this approach implements children's interests within their learning and allows a more flexible approach to the curriculum. 'Planning-in-the-moment' was selected because a child deeply engaged with an activity should be allowed to continue their activity without interruption, in order for them to fully internalise their learning and gain autonomy and agency within their learning environment.

The next stage of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model cycle involved observing children within their learning environment. This required myself - as the researcher and practitioner – to pay attention to children's levels of involvement using the Leuven scale

as a guide (see chapter 3.5.2.5 where full details of the methods used will be provided). This required taking time to observe children during their 'free play' and notice when children are engaged and involved with their learning. This would allow me to extend their learning further in an area which they are interested in. It was important for me to be opened-minded during observations, 'reflecting-in-action' (Schon, 1983:323) and being careful not to assume children are interested in a topic, which may have just been a short activity which they were interacting with. When using Kemmis and McTaggart's Action Research model (1988:11) within my own study, it was important to change the label of 'act/observe' to just 'observe' as I was observing the children's actions rather than my own.

Alongside the observations I kept a research journal to record these reflections. During this stage of the cycle, I made reflections on the observations (which were later written up as vignettes, see chapter 4). My research journal provided a space to draw on the data and make judgements and reflections on the observation in order to implement further areas of interest in their learning environment. It provided a space to uncover any challenges or successes with implementing the 'planning-in-the-moment' method within the classroom. Reflecting on observations provided a more tacit form of 'knowledge-in-action' (Schon, 1983:323) documenting 'a *repertoire* of examples, images, understandings, and actions' (Schon, 1983:136). Reflecting on my practice in my personal journal provided a space for me to reflect on what I had learned through these observations – such as an interest a child may wish to pursue further in their learning – and apply this within the classroom.

With the theoretical framework of this study focusing on the figuring of worlds and finding a 'space of authoring', it became clear that 'reflexivity' was implicit in 'reflectivity'. Reflectivity within this study reflects on the observations and forms the vignettes of children figuring their world. Reflexivity within this study considers my own figuring of the world as a researcher and practitioner based on my own 'history-in-person' in relation to the wider concepts that I bring to the situation. Practitioner research is an on-going process that requires reflection during data collection (Somekh and Lewin, 2011) as well as reflexion in order to consider my own 'history-in-person' which I bring to the situation. Reflectivity is necessary for this research study, to unpick the children's observations using the theoretical framework of figured world and considering the possible implications of their learning which may have

impacted the broader context within which they are working. Reflexivity was also necessary in order to consider the 'space for authoring' within which I am figuring myself in this context. My personal experiences, practices, judgements, beliefs and feelings were important to consider in the research process in order to understand my dual perspectives as a practitioner and researcher, how these may have influenced the research, as well as revealing the ways of thinking I bring to my practice as a tool for 'reflexion-in-action'. This meant it was necessary to adapt Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988:11) Action Research Model by looking back 'critically' at my 'own practice' (Pierson and Thomas, 2002:396) and drawing attention to myself as the researcher, in order to consider my position in relation to this research, as I begin to understand my own world and consider my 'next move' as I figure my 'space of authoring' for the next cycle to begin again (see Figure 2). By using this adapted version of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical practitioner research model, the intention was to empower children to follow their own learning and interests through the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, observe their interests and reflect on how this may provide further space for authoring 'self' in their early learning environment.

This research conducts the implementation of 'planning-in-the-moment' opportunities over several observations. It conducts micro action research studies in order to gather multiple vignettes which were then unpicked using the theoretical framework of figured worlds. In order to view this observation in the cyclical action research process, I entered each stage (plan, observe, reflect, reflex) into a table (see Appendix E). This helped me further understand this cyclical process and monitored how the observation progressed. Once several vignettes were gathered, I looked for themes which occurred over one or more vignette in order to explore these ideas further in the findings and discussions section.

Adapted Version of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral/Cycle Model.

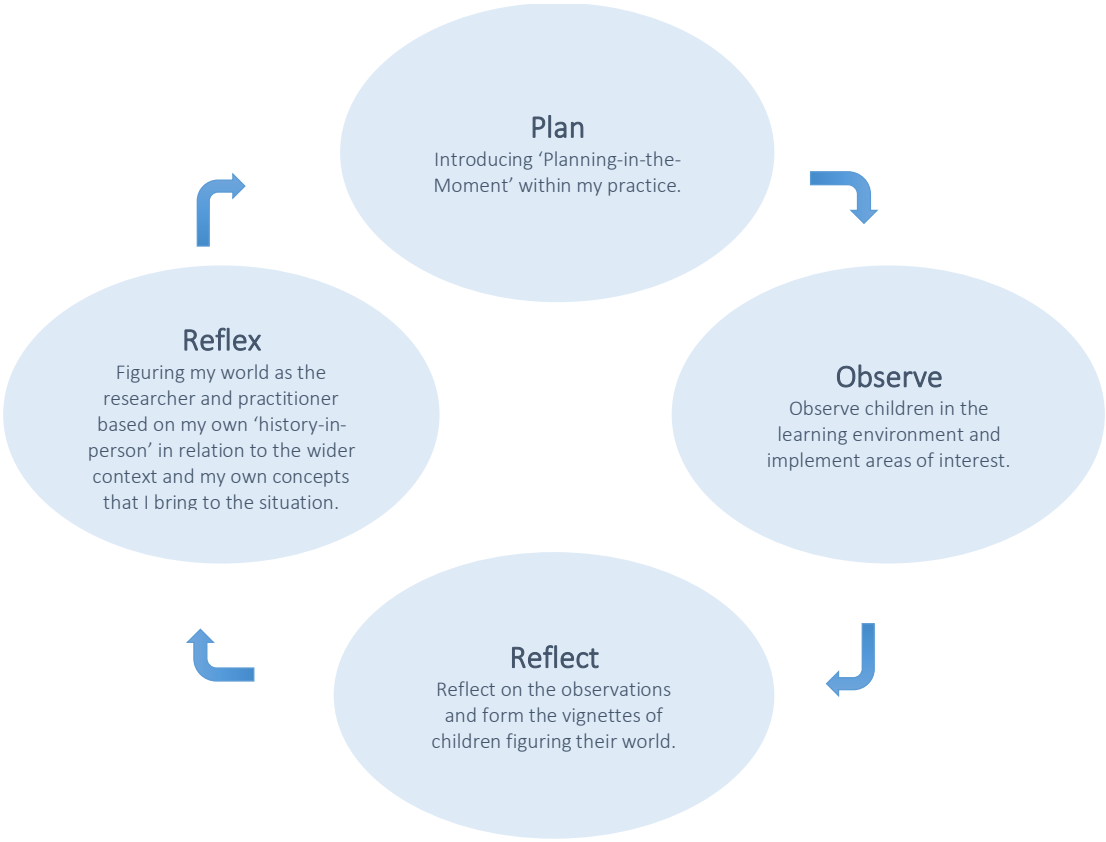

Figure 2: The Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral/Cycle with relation to this research study.

3.3 Researching as an 'Insider'

It is important for me to acknowledge the benefits of my insider status as a practitioner researcher, as well as the potential biases and ethical implications that come with it. Situating the research within my own early years setting was a deliberate decision, as being part of the setting afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in a detailed, rich and in-depth study enabling me to develop my own practice rather than a broad study over a number of early years settings. The ability for 'open access' to the setting was an appealing factor when considering the location of the study. This removed the access difficulties associated with studying the practice of others, where the researcher may be perceived as an irritant in a pressurised institutional setting (Somekh and Lewin, 2012).

Researching my own practice provided the benefit of existing relationships and access to the setting. By conducting my research in my own setting alongside practitioners, parents, leaders

and children, where existing relationships had already formed, I was able to have direct conversations with parents about the nature of the research and discuss whether they would consent to their child being part of the study as well as the use of the data after collection (Somekh and Lewin, 2012). This gave space for more time and energy to be implemented into the study.

Conducting observations can 'involve invading other people's space and constructing meanings from the experience of participating in their activities' (Somekh and Lewin, 2012:134), however, already being the teacher within this classroom allowed for a comfortable environment where relationships had already been formed, reducing the invasive observation experience which may have taken place if I was not already the class teacher.

I am positioned within this study as a practitioner-researcher with insider knowledge. As an 'insider', as well as having privileged access to the research setting, I also brought with me my own set of beliefs, assumptions and professional experiences in relation to the early years sector, the setting and the participants involved with the study. Therefore, my own 'history-in-person' (Holland et al, 1998:183) is shaping ideas which arose from the study as I brought my own thoughts, feelings and values to the observations. In order to acknowledge and appreciate these personal histories and understandings from my own personal experiences, 'reflexions' on my 'reflections' around children's experiences are discussed in chapter 4 and 5 as this is central to the theoretical frameworks of figured worlds (Holland, 1998) and authoring the 'self".

Being the teacher and researcher within my classroom has the potential for bias, where some observations may appear more beneficial than others. As well as this potential issue, there is also the issue of diverting from my other duties in my role as a teacher. Ethical considerations around the complexities of researching my own practice are discussed in more detail within the next section (3.4.1).

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were discussed and approved by the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee before commencement of the study.

3.4.1 Dual Role as Researcher and Teacher

A key tension arose within the study relating to my dual roles as teacher and researcher. I needed to balance my duty as class teacher to carry out this role to the best of my abilities while simultaneously enacting change through implementing an intervention (Pine, 2009) as a researcher. Conducting research in my own classroom whilst carrying out my 'teacher' role has the potential for me to follow observations which may have more relevance to my research rather than supporting all of the children in the class. Some children's work/activities may be deemed more favourable – for the research in the study – than others. Alongside this, there is also the issue of diverting from my other duties in my role as a teacher. However, the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach which this study implements, allows my practitioner and researcher role to 'intertwine as a matter of course' (Schon, 1983:325). Therefore, my commitment to conduct the 'in-the-moment' research is manageable with my own work as a teacher as observing children in their play is already part of my role as a teacher. This meant that all children were observed within this space and – at times- included more children within an observation when the activity was more engaging.

The 'in-the-moment' method also benefits the students and their access to learning, as well as being authentic and owned by me as the researcher (Pine, 2009). The study design is 'sufficiently open-ended to facilitate meaningful and deep exploration of teaching and learning' (Pine, 2009:262). My position as both practitioner and researcher became a struggle to manage when some children's interests may have been considered more favourable than others. This was apparent when I allowed a child to continue with a puzzle whilst the other children were asked to tidy up. Therefore, the collection of action field notes and my reflective journal became an imperative and a necessary addition to this research study, as it allowed me to reflect on these situations and ensure this would not occur again. The personal journal was also useful for observations where I was part of the child's play as I was able to reflect on the observations at another time. This meant I would only take notes and photos during the observations rather than spending time writing down what each child was saying in the

moment.

Another workload issue which I had to carefully consider was that of the teaching assistants. Whilst I was continuing my role as teacher as well as the researcher, it meant that routines and structures for teaching assistants also changed slightly. An example of this occurred when the teaching assistant had to tidy the classroom with the children inside as I waited outside for Corey to come in from the mud kitchen he was playing in. This was because I had afforded him the extra time in his play, as per the 'in-the-moment' approach. To ensure that I was not creating more work for other teachers and teaching assistants, I had to ensure that teaching assistants were aware of the 'in-the-moment' approach and that – for example – we would be able to tidy up the classroom once the children had gone home.

3.4.2 Reflexivity

Power as an ethical consideration should also be a focus when analysing the data. This research has highlighted how I am not completely separate from the observations which take place and, in some cases, I am likely to influence them with my own funds of knowledge. Bakhtin's understanding of heteroglossia (as discussed in chapter 2) situated within socio-cultural theory suggests 'subjects' have many identities and use language dependent on their figured worlds. This associates power constraints within other areas of a child's life (Baxter, 2015). Vygotsky believed that children's worlds are shaped by their families, culture, communities, education and socio-economic status. In order to expand on their construction of knowledge, children are required to learn from both adults and their peers (Mooney, 2013). On reflection of Vygotsky's understandings with that of disciplinary power as previously discussed, it could imply that children may have acted or behaved in a way in which they think others are expecting to see. Behaviours include conforming to others' requests, adhering to a particular set of rules, following a curriculum presented by the government or being part of a regimented system of learning which they are being told to do. Children begin to learn that deviating from this regimented system can lead to the image of the 'bad' child and so conformity is imperative (MacClure et al, 2012). Children's autonomy is overruled, negotiated and reconstructed by the constraints of power within each of their figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998). When making meanings using the data findings, it was important to acknowledge the position of the child and whether any possible constructs of power were at

play within the space. Power struggles could come from a number of positions including practitioners, myself – as the researcher – or even other children in the room. As the researcher, I needed to remain aware of my own positioning and how this may have impacted the child. It was possible that my presence may have influenced and affected their decision-making process and personal choices in order for them to 'please' their teacher (Cohen et al, 2011). This process assumed my role to observe the children within their early years environment, reflect on these observations, evaluate the findings and act on these results whilst considering the presence of myself as the teacher/researcher within this space (Robertson, 2000). This placed an important focus on reflexively considering my own positioning within the study in order to move forward. Using a figured worlds framework, it became apparent that I needed to understand my own positioning within the observation to be able to act on the reflections of children and reflexions on myself figuring my identity within this space. I had to be self-aware in order to situate myself within this research process and figure my identity within this context before I was able to repeat the action research cycle to be clear on what the action was which I needed to undertake. When Michael - in The Doctors observation discussed in chapter 4.1 – began fixing the broken leg of the skeleton, this presented a space for me to ponder various possibilities and reflect on past actions by considering whether their play was of particular interest to them and whether this was something to implement further in their learning (Robertson, 2000). This observation also highlighted the possibilities beyond my own thinking, as the broken skeleton leg had initially caused me upset that our resource had been damaged, yet the children viewed this as a learning opportunity and thrived through this activity. Therefore, as Patnaik (2013:98) explains, reflexivity - and 'its role in meaning making and knowledge claims'– became a mode of research which had to be included within the action research process as it was 'central to contributing to the richness of the research and contributing to its credibility' (Patnaik, 2013:98). As Stevens (1986) explains, action research is a collaborative, interactive method which aims to generate insight into the professional's practice and therefore, it was important that the 'in-the-moment' approach supported and benefited the children, as well as the wider society and that the rights of the children were being respected throughout the research process. This action research process offered a space for 'theory building' (Robertson, 2000:314) through its cyclical process of reflective observations of the children in their environment, leading to my position being reflexively analysed in relation to the bigger issues

in education. This facilitated my critical decisions on key issues which can develop education theory (Robertson, 2000).

3.5 Methods

This section outlines the context of the study and the participants involved. It introduces the specific research methods used including the use of naturalistic observations and a reflective journal to document the research journey. A justification is provided for the use of a thematic approach to analysis and the use of a cross-case comparison method.

3.5.1 Participants

The children within the study are aged between 3 and 5 years old. The nursery class has a total of 48 children, with 15 of these children staying all day. The nursery day is broken up into sessions with 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon. The local authority (LA) offers funding for 15 hours per week for children aged three to four years. Families can also apply for 30 hours free funding, however, they must be eligible and meet the criteria for this benefit. There are 23 boys and 25 girls including one child with special educational needs (a diagnosis of autism) and 15 children with English as an additional language. There is a mix of recent immigrants with little (or no) English and more 'established' families who have siblings within the school and therefore have some knowledge of the English language. There is currently a range of 6 different spoken languages within the setting. Nursery attendance is typically 5 sessions a week, however some children complete 10 sessions if they are in all day. Reception attendance is 5 full day sessions per week. In this study, 34 children from the setting's nursery moved up to our reception provision. I moved up with the nursery cohort and became their reception class teacher. This enabled data collection over a longer period of time. I collected data from children when they were in the nursery class between September 2018 and July 2019. I then continued to collect data from some of the same children between September 2019 and December 2019 when I became their reception teacher, plus some additional children who joined the class in reception.

While the key focus of the study is on observing how children interact with the learning environment and how I (as the class teacher) might use 'planning-in-the-moment' to enhance

their autonomy and agency, other staff within the setting were sometimes indirectly included within the data collection if they had helped set up an area involving children's interests or noticed areas of interest for particular children, therefore, staff were given a staff participant sheet (appendix B) outlining the study, along with a consent form if they agreed to participate. This meant that I only made notes on observations of a child who was working with another member of staff if the member of staff had granted their consent to be part of the project. All children and staff within the environment were invited to take part in the study and had agreed to participate from the beginning and throughout the research collecting process. The recruitment process involved parents receiving a parents' participant information sheet (appendix B) with details of the study and a consent form to complete, indicating whether they would like to participate. Assent from children was also sought by reading them a social story (appendix C) explaining why it was necessary to conduct such research as well as tuning in to children's consent during activities. This is discussed in further detail within the ethical considerations section later in this chapter. Only interactions with children who had given consent and assent were observed and used for the data of this study. In this study, all staff and children opted to take part, providing a total number of child participants of 48 and participating adults (members of staff) of 3. The number of participants increased in the study as only 34 children moved up from the school's nursery and the additional 14 children were new to the school in reception. The 14 children new to the school only had data collected from their reception experience.

3.5.2 Methods for Data Collection

The study used a dynamic assessment method (Lidz and Elliott, 2000) in order to collect data. The study involved repeating cycles through the steps of observing children, 'planning-in-the-moment' and measuring engagement using the Leuven Scale. This then provided information for the practitioner to implement further learning within the environment (Thorne, 2005:399) and interests and ideas into existing routines.

3.5.2.1 Observations

Observations of children in their learning environment were conducted to explore the children's interests and their existing lines of inquiry (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). This was necessary in order to inform and plan opportunities within the learning environment which

further develop and explore these personal interests, to allow for a deeper learning through engagement (Hilppö et al, 2016). Observations are a core part of the practitioner role as it is from these observations that we make decisions about how best to support children's learning (Hutchin, 2013). As a practitioner and researcher, I needed to 'tune in' to the child through observations, see something happen and then intervene appropriately to support them (Hutchin, 2010). Within this study, observations were used to support the implementation and evaluation of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach using an adaptation of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model (as discussed in chapter 3.2.3). The observations supported me in gaining information about the children's interests, making decisions about how to respond to them 'in the moment' and helped me to reflect on the impact of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach on children's autonomy and agency.

Due to the nature of practitioner research, I was aware of the power issues that may be in play when carrying out such research. Although the research intended to primarily observe children in their play, there was the potential for children feeling my 'gaze' and acting differently due to a perceived need to behave in a particular way (Foucault, 1977:154). The 'normalizing gaze' becomes a form of surveillance within the classroom, that can classify, qualify and punish (Foucault, 1977:184). In my own practice, if I asked to take part in their play, they may have behaved differently to how they would if they were playing independently. Having already established my role as the class teacher with direct access to the children's classroom experiences, I was able to gather direct observational data 'rather than through the filter of their accounts about their activities' (Somekh and Lewin, 2012:134) which was beneficial for the research study. However, my presence and 'gaze' within the classroom could affect the play experiences and cause children to behave in a way in which they thought was required. With this limitation to the research in mind, observations where I actively joined in with the child's play experiences in order to further their knowledge, I became thoroughly involved with their play. Observations where I was not part of the activity, I tried to remain 'out-of-view' in order for children to feel comfortable and 'at-ease'. This was to ensure a more relaxed atmosphere was formed so the children felt comfortable with my presence. In some situations – when the need arose – I stood back and moved out of view for the children in order for them to not feel the 'gaze' of the teacher.

Carrying out the observations as children engaged in free play provided naturalistic observations (Cohen et al, 2007) of how children author themselves and develop agency within the early years setting, a learning space that they are familiar with and are likely to feel comfortable in (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Observations occurred ad hoc, when children were showing high levels of involvement and interest with a topic. This approach required me to become part of the child's world in order to recognise their interests, concerns and dilemmas and to stimulate conversation that would extend their thinking (Dowling, 2005). In this way, I was positioned within a 'participant-as-observer' role as I became 'part of the social life of participants' while at the same time documenting what was happening for research purposes (Cohen at al, 2007:404). Observations were recorded on Tapestry in the form of comments, direct speech, impressions, behaviours and conversations as they unfolded (Cohen et al, 2007). Tapestry is an online learning journey app which allow pictures, written notes and children's targets to be recorded. Prior to this study, the setting already recorded observations using this app but only used notes, pictures and the Development Matters (2012) targets for assessment. The Tapestry application provides a blank space to write down field notes from the observation, as well as the opportunity to upload images of the activity if necessary (appendix A). While this formed a central basis of the data collection for the research, it is also a regular part of the assessment practices which practitioners in the Foundation Stage at my school use on a day-to-day basis, however, this study extends observations to include the Leuven Scale for 'Levels of Involvement' (appendix A) on the online application (introduced in chapter 3.5.2.5).

Due to the study occurring over a longer period of time and following the same group of children from their nursery experience into their reception learning, it allowed me to observe children engaging in a range of activities over the study period. By observing the same group of children from their nursery environment – as well as including additional children starting school in reception – over a sustained period of time, I was able to see how situations and events changed and evolved over time. This enabled me to capture the dynamics of these events, the context, the children and their personalities, resources used and the roles which formed (Cohen et al, 2007).

When observing the children playing, I made notes about what they were doing and saying. I also took photos of the children playing. These naturalistic observations and photographs (Mukherji and Albon, 2015) allowed me to create a series of vignettes (see chapter 4), which were later analysed to consider the autonomy and agency of children in the classroom. Using photographs to capture moments in time providing additional context when analysing the written notes that were made at the time of the observation. The data collected were all incorporated into the children's 'learning journeys' – a record of their progress, which is kept as part of our everyday practice within school.

3.5.2.2 Teacher-led group interactions

As well as conducting observations of children's free play, I also recorded observations of small group interactions led by myself and activities directed by me as the teacher. Analysing both free play and teacher directed play is important in order to understand the position of children within both learning experiences, to understand the extent to which they have autonomy and agency. I was aware of the ethical tensions of supporting all individual voices within the group context as I was concerned that I might focus on children whose responses were of more interest from a research perspective. Therefore, every child's 'direct speech' throughout the observation was noted on the Tapestry app with short notes taken where speech occurred quickly. All children were encouraged to answer and ask questions to allow for further thinking (Nutbrown, 2002). The activities were also conducted in friendship groups to help the children to felt comfortable and at-ease during their activity. Friendship groups were formed based on my everyday observations of who children interact with on a regular basis, and conversations with children about their friendships. Teacher-led activities would only last a short period of time (2-3 minutes) and were integral to my day-to-day teaching. That is, these activities were designed to support children in meeting the aims set out within the Development Matters Curriculum. These activities were part of my everyday teaching and included activities such as making puzzles, finding sounds or painting pictures. These teacher-led group interactions were predetermined and organised by myself and were recorded on the Tapestry app (as discussed in chapter 3.5.2.1), again, using written notes to record children's direct speech, a description of what happened, photos of the activities, and the student's level of involvement (using the Leuven Scale as discussed in chapter 3.5.2.5) to analyse the children's engagement with teacher-led activities.

3.5.2.3 Children's Work

Due to the adoption of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) as a theoretical framework for this study I was particularly interested in the role of artifacts in children's learning as discussed within chapter 11 Holland et al's (1998) book, *Play Worlds, Liberatory Worlds, and Fantasy Resources*. It was therefore important for me to include any artifacts created by the children (such as pieces of writing, pictures and paintings) within the data. I also recognised the importance of observing how children interacted with the existing materials and artifacts in the environment, e.g. jigsaws, blocks, tubes, etc as per Holland et al's (1998) understanding of artifacts being an important part of the figuring of identity. This was particularly noticeable in the Doctor's Observation (vignette 3, chapter 4.3) where the boys became 'doctors' within their play experiences through their interactions with the broken skeleton which had been placed within their room as it related to their current class topic. Children's work, including creative constructions using existing artifacts within the classroom environment were photographed to capture the work that children had created, offering further insight into the personal interests of the child. While talking to children about their play is a normal part of my role as a teacher, as a researcher, I paid particular attention to avoid misinterpretation and to offer means to communicate their interests and feelings more freely (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). For some children, having these artifacts which they had explored and created (such as the completion of a jigsaw), encouraged them to talk about their experiences and prior knowledge, allowing them to visually explain their thoughts and feelings. Barron's (2013) work supports the idea in his 'Finding a Voice' research where the artifact of the calendar became important for mediation of language and understanding.

3.5.2.4 Reflective Journal

A reflective journal was used as an aide memoire of events and thoughts and was used daily to capture my daily thoughts and feelings about my career. This aligned with the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998) as it provided a space for my own 'authoring of self' in my dual roles as class teacher and researcher. It was used as a method to gather my own emotions, feelings, reflections and thoughts from the earliest point in the research process as the values, beliefs and principles of the practitioner inform the decisions and choices regarding the process and conduct of the investigation (Callan and Tyler, 2011). The reflective journal was initially for my own understanding and development of the research

process during the planning stage; however, as the research progressed, the research diary became an important part of the data collection process and was 'subjected to procedures of qualitative analysis' (Somekh and Lewin, 2006:27). This journal became increasingly significant throughout the study as it offered a space to engage in reflections, situations, interrogations, investigations and perspectives. It offered 'possible insights into phenomena that were not obvious or predictable when the research journey began' (Somekh and Lewin, 2006:27) and which guided this practitioner research study. The research journal offered a space to capture interpretations, as well as to document the actions as they occurred (Somekh and Lewin, 2006:27). It allowed me to keep track of my own thinking during the collection of data and the analysis of research (Somekh and Lewin, 2006). Insights and challenges that I had experienced and captured in contextual detail, guided the continual analysis of the data throughout the study through reflexing on my own position during the observations. A challenge with implementing the research journal as a method of data collection relates to the difficulties in spectating my own interpretations and observations (Somekh and Lewin, 2006). Critically analysing my own interpretations and observations became difficult when my own emotional experiences – my own 'history-in-person' - may have affected these assumptions and findings (Sodano, 2017:2). However, it was key to include my own figuring within this space – as the practitioner and researcher – in order to clarify my thinking and know how to move forward. Therefore, this challenge was a key component to the analysis of the data collection in order to understand myself as the researcher and teacher within this study.

My journal reflections were made on an ad-hoc basis when I took the opportunity to reflect on my thoughts. They acted as an aide-memoire for further points to consider in the future and generated additional data within a 'reflective practitioner' approach (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). The thoughts used within the reflective journal were used to analyse and reflect on the data findings, offering a reflective approach to the methodological framework. By reflecting on what I have learnt from these activities and observations, I hoped for a clearer understanding of what I was doing and why I was doing it.

As the study progressed, reflection on previous journal entries became an important part in the data analysis process, as I considered my earlier perceptions with my current views and

understandings. The data collection within this study acknowledged that 'reflexivity' was implicit of 'reflectivity' and I was required to not only reflect on how the children were figuring within their worlds and finding space for authoring 'self', but to also consider my own positioning. On becoming aware of the significance of this journal for meaning-making, the journal became a deliberately-used resource for the further development of this study (Cohen, 2007). This pedagogical apparatus became an essential influence in how I understood the observations. The research journal captured my ever-changing thoughts, emotions and lived experiences within my role as class teacher. In the data analysis and findings section - within chapter 5 – I will explore in detail how the journal contributed to the analysis process and informed pedagogical actions.

3.5.2.5 The Leuven Scale in this research study

The Leuven Scale for Involvement is a method of analysis influenced by 'Piaget's learning theory and Gendlin's notion of 'felt sense'' (MacRae and Jones, 2020:2) which offers a framework for the observer to 'be attuned to the significance of experience as a capacity of learning' (MacRae and Jones, 2020:2). As MacRae and Jones (2020) explain, the Leuven Scale offers a framework to resist educational cultures of testing which is forming the practices and policies of early education, but equally, has the potential to leak into policy discourses as a 'readiness' technology. Despite these limitations, the Leuven scale can be a useful 'tool' for practitioners when evaluating quality in their settings (MacRae and Jones, 2020:1). This scale is a practitioner tool and is not underpinned by an academic theoretical position with a research history. MacRae and Jones (2020:1) describe the Leuven Scale as;

> 'an observational scale from 1-5, that allows early years practitioners to quantify the degree to which a child is involved in a self-chosen activity. The scale gives descriptors for each level; level 5 denoting the most involvement and level 1 the least. The scale is based on the premise that higher levels of involvement can be used as a measure of higher quality provision.'

Using the Leuven Scale as a method of assessment offers 'an alternative to outcomes-based and future-oriented visions of early childhood education' (MacRae and Jones, 2020:2) as 'the scale attunes the early years practitioner to a child's involvement as a measure of quality: the

more engaged and absorbed the child is, the deeper and richer their experience will be, and the more complex their thinking' (MacRae and Jones, 2020:3). This places children in a state of 'flow' as discussed by Csikszentmihalyi (1979). The levels of involvement in which children were showing in their activity was considered against the Leuven Scale for measures of involvement to assess whether children were engaged with their learning. This provided a less structured assessment method and advocated children engaging in active learning.

The Leuven Scale is primarily used by early years teachers and is an important point of reference for the characteristics of 'involvement'. Observational and interpretive competence is required as the observer reconstructs the child's perspective during an activity, as well as assessing whether the child is exploring, engaged or challenged. The Leuven scale provides a structure of assessment and each point of the scale requires another dimension of the child's learning. The scale ranges from Level One Involvement (where a child is not taking part in their learning) to Level Five Involvement (where total involvement of energy, persistence and concentration is evident) which would suggest that children are achieving autonomy and agency within their learning environment. When using the Leuven Scale for measuring Involvement it has to be noted that the level at which a child may be graded (between 1 – 5) is a personal opinion as a practitioner and a researcher. It is possible that using a grading measurement such as this I would suggest children were lacking if they fell towards the lower end of the scale (MacRae and Jones, 2020:12). This could also mean I may be more generous in my responses when considering children's learning through play (MacRae and Jones, 2020). It is important that these reflections of children's experiences are explored against a reflexive discussion of my own authoring of 'self' as I try and figure my own world.

In this study, I was able to assess children's involvement with their learning through naturalist observations during their play and 'in-the-moment' planning opportunities. This was also used to assess children during teacher-led activities, to uncover whether the teacher-pupil interaction changes the level of involvement on the Leuven scale. Observations occurred ad hoc when the situation arose. When children were recorded showing level 3 for engagement with their activity, this suggested that they were following activities which brought interest for a short while, however, they were not completely immersed in the activity. The Leuven

Scale was a useful tool when analysing children's responses to particular activities and whether there would be potential to further explore these activities in the future. The Leuven Scale, however, gave a numerical grading scale in-between 1 to 5 and did rely on the subjective view from myself as the observer/teacher. I, therefore, did not base judgements about how to intervene solely on the Leuven scale, but this was just an additional tool to support the careful noticing of signs of involvement when 'reflecting in action'.

The Leuven Scale for Involvement

Level	Involvement	Signals
1	Extremely low	Activity is simple, repetitive and passive. The child seems absent and displays no energy. They may stare into space or look around to see what others are doing.
2	Low	Frequently interrupted activity. The child will be engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there will be moments of non-activity when they will stare into space, or be distracted by what is going on around.
3	Moderate	Mainly continuous activity. The child is busy with the activity but at a fairly routine level and there are few signs of real involvement. They make some progress with what they are doing but don't show much energy and concentration and can be easily distracted.
4	High	Continuous activity with intense moments. The child's activity has intense moments and at all times they seem involved. They are not easily distracted.
5	Extremely high	The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent throughout nearly all the observed period.

Table 1: The Leuven Scale for Involvement as created by Ferre Laevers (2003)

This research study draws on the Leuven Scale for Involvement (Laevers, 2003) (See Table 1 above) in an attempt to assess whether children have opportunities to gain autonomy in the early years classroom. It is used to find ways to improve their experience by practitioners carefully observing, listening and further enhancing their learning by placing objects of interest within their early years environment.

With this study including one child with special educational needs, I needed to consider this limitation when carrying out any observations including her. The Tapestry app has offered the Leuven Scale Measurement for measuring engagement prior to this study however, in my setting, we have never used this available option due to the school using the EYFS Development Matters (2012) Framework as a guide to assess children's learning and levels. This decision to only follow the EYFS Development Matters framework (2012) was decided by the Senior Leadership Team as this was what was needed for analysing data in school as well as the league tables nationally.

Assessing children's involvement with their play using the Leuven Scale as a tool for this study allowed myself to observe the extent to which children were engaged within their play. If children were scoring lower on the scales, this informed my decision to continue listening and observing children's interests, to further implement these ideas into the environment.

3.5.3 Vignettes

Studying children's values, norms and beliefs poses methodological problems with the relationship between the child and the social structures they are surrounded by. Whilst considering these tensions this study uses vignettes to study 'ways human actions are shaped by cultural prescriptions or ideological forces' (Finch, 1987) and provides a short narrative within the specific social context of early years education (Riley et al, 2021). By implementing an 'in-the-moment' approach to learning and observing children in their learning environment whilst following their interests, this study intends to look at human actions within their learning environment and study the level of engagement children have with an activity which does not have a predefined learning outcome. Using this 'in-the-moment' approach whilst using vignettes enabled children to define the situation in their own terms (Barter and Renold, 1999). Through observations of children working within this 'in-the-

moment' approach to learning, taking notes, photographs and direct speech, informed the description within the vignettes. Using the research data and the theoretical framework, I attempted to 'plug in' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013) figured words to my data to achieve a reading that was 'both *within and against interpretivism*' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013:261). Using the theoretical lens of figured worlds was one version of events which formed the vignettes. These vignettes illuminated multiple themes which came through from this research data. These themes formed the thematic analysis discussed in the next section.

3.5.4 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative research has become an increasingly recognised and valued paradigm for conducting rigorous exploratory research to derive new theories or concepts (Nowell et al, 2017). This study uses thematic analysis as a research method, not to understand things that I already know, but to explore new understandings and to increase verification of the analysis (Nowell et al, 2017).

Thematic analysis is an iterative and reflective process that develops over time (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Within this study the analytic process involved reflection on the observations as well as reflecting on myself through the journal, in order to generate themes which might support new understandings in relation to the research questions. Having multiple sources of data collection including journaling and noting observations, helped document my thinking which may have changed throughout the research study and over a longer period of time, in order to reflect on these changes and uncover the reasoning behind them. Thematic analysis was conducted to closely inspect, compare and contrast the vignettes to uncover recurrent themes or relationships within the data. The analysis aimed to minimally describe and organise the data set in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This research used figured worlds to theorise actions and responses of children within their early years classroom. This was to develop new understandings around how children are orchestrating themselves within their learning environment and how this may affect the agency and autonomy of the child. Some themes within this study may have been given 'considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82) and therefore, it became important that I – as the researcher – used my own

personal judgement to determine what might be considered to be a theme. This required careful analysis from myself as the researcher to determine whether the theme captured something necessary and important which related to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given my position as an experienced early years professional, I came into this research with a wealth of existing knowledge and assumptions around learning, development and pedagogy within the early years. I also came to the analytic process with a developing understanding of figured worlds, which meant that my approach to the analysis was deductive at least in part. In other words, I was not coming to the analysis 'blind'; rather I was interacting with the data in a way that was influenced by my history-in-person, which in turn, had been recently informed by years of professional experience as an early years teacher, and more recently, an interest in the figured worlds framework. In choosing the themes I attempted to 'plug in' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013) figured words to my data which was a more deductive approach.

When contemplating the data analysis process it was important to consider the 'crisis of representation' (Pringle, 2017). The crisis of representation recognises that reality is represented through the limitation of language and so researchers can never fully replicate lived experiences (Denzin, 1997). This research study represents my own subjectivities through my own version of analysis. Thematic analysis offers a reflective approach through continual revisiting of the data, which can offer construction of alternative meanings and highlights the never-static and never-fixed process of 'becoming' (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) Although this does not include varied practitioner accounts, it does offer data to be continually deconstructed and constructed through concurrent data collection and data analysis. The crisis of legitimation (Denzin, 1997) acknowledges that the textual research is the subjective interpretation or construction of the researcher. The dual crises between representation and legitimation can help myself – as the researcher – to reflect on my own research paradigm and questions related to ontology, epistemology and methodology.

This study uses data generated by watching the children to uncover themes and to provide a rich thematic description which emerged from this data. Using an adaptation of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model following a plan, observe, reflect and reflex cycle supported these thick descriptions as it provided a reflective and cyclical process. I gathered

the similar themes from the analysis in the vignettes and placed them within a table to record these similarities. The vignettes provided the predominant and important themes which have emerged from coding the data. From this, I then collated the themes within a spider diagram using the three research questions to group them (appendix F). This informed the discussion's chapter.

3.5.5 Cross-Case Analysis

Cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2001) is a research method employed to gather knowledge from different vignettes in order to compare and contrast, for the production of new knowledge. It is a qualitative data analysis approach which is used as 'a way of aggregating data across cases' (Mathison, 2011:2b). The vignettes describe each observation and the children who were involved within that particular play experience. I chose to include only five out of the numerous observations which occurred during the data collection in order to ensure a detailed and rich analysis could be conducted. I chose these five particular vignettes as I noticed I had written about these particular observations in my personal journal and this offered another view in which I was able to understand this data. From these vignettes, a cross-case analysis was conducted to uncover emerging themes. Using this data analysis approach ensured that all data was systematically compared to all other data in the data set for inter-group comparisons (Somekh and Lewin, 2011). The cross-case analysis technique (Merriam, 2001) identified differences and similarities across cases. Each segment of data had to have similar components for comparisons to be made and had to be analysed thoroughly before differences and similarities between others data was sought (Mathison, 2011). It was a call 'for exploration of each new situation to see if they fit, how they might fit, and how they might not fit' (Strauss and Corbin, 1994:279). Using the cross-case comparison method sought discrepancies between similar data, and the clear discrepancies were then examined to see if they were structural or peculiar (Mathison, 2011). I paid attention to variations or anomalies in the data and tested out these theoretical propositions to uncover emergent explanations (Barbour, 2007). Any structural discrepancies became 'the source of fresh understandings of the data' and any peculiar discrepancies were troubled in order to assess how they subsequently related (Mathison, 2011:2a).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) were adhered to throughout this study. BERA endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child policy (1989) and advises that the best interests of the child are paramount (BERA, 2018). Ethical approval from Faculty of Education Ethics Committee was sought, before conducting any data collection.

3.6.1 Entitlement to Education

Ethical boundaries presented in this study include the requirement to give children their entitlement in terms of their education. Although carrying out the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach supported this research study, continuing my role of class teacher added additional pressures when data-gathering came a labour-intensive job (Anderson and Herr, 2012). Ensuring data was being collected to support this study, alongside the importance for children to be accessing an education became difficult. This created an additional workload for myself to ensure that every child in the class was accessing learning which interested them and they were able to apply skills in which they could use and apply in other areas of their learning. Although there are unavoidable ethical dilemmas involved with researching one's own practice, the tacit knowledge that an insider brings to the practitioner-action based research must be acknowledged and appreciated in order for professional change or possible new knowledge to be made (Anderson and Herr, 2012).

3.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Measures to protect confidentiality and anonymity were communicated clearly within the participant information sheet. Real names were not used during the collection of the data nor during the writing up of the project. Instead, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of those involved (BERA, 2018). Due to the nature of the research, it may be possible that in some cases, participant information may be linked to individuals, for example, a child's particular interest or favourite toy. Although this was an unlikely occurrence due to the relatively large number of children involved with the study and the actions taken to anonymise the data, this possibility was acknowledged within the participant information sheet, to ensure all parents/guardians and senior management team were aware of this (albeit low) risk. The senior leadership team were keen to ensure that the names and

identities of all children would be protected and to be mindful of protecting children's privacy during the reporting process. It was made clear from management that I was not to report on children who receive social care or any external agency support that may affect their position. I can confirm this thesis does not include the name of the school or the real names of the participants throughout the data collection or reporting process. Throughout the research process, I adhered to the school safeguarding policy which requires any safeguarding issues arising within the school day (including data collection for the purposes of my own research), to be reported to the safeguarding lead and senior management team. It was agreed that if such a case arose, all data collection for that particular child would be kept on hold until the issue could be discussed with the safeguarding lead for the school. Safeguarding children within the study is paramount and works in accordance with the Keeping Children Safe in Education document (2018). As I work at the school, I have an up-to-date and current enhanced disclosure specifically to work in the school and the nursery, as well as for the duration of the study.

Parents and children were informed during the consent process of the management and storage of data collected. Explanations of how the data would be stored, maintained and protected were outlined in the participant information sheet along with further information on the safe storage of data on a password protected computer. The analysis of data was authorised by senior management to be carried out off site, due to the anonymisation of participant names as well as the name of the early years setting. All data management processes were conducted in line with Manchester Metropolitan's Data Protection Policy, which in turn adheres to current General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulations. The use of artifacts for data analysis, including children's work, photos and pictures were used in the study with specific permission granted from parents and senior management if it could potentially disclose the identity of the child (this applied in vignette 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 as the children are included in the photographs).

3.6.3 Consent and Assent

As the early years leader within my setting, I was able to discuss the rationale for my research with senior management. Seeking approval in principle from the senior leadership team was obtained before discussing the research with parents/guardians and participants. This initial

conversation with senior management outlined the research, including an overview of the proposed aims, methods, participants, timescales and ethical considerations. Following this discussion, the senior leadership team granted approval to the research and completed a written gatekeeper consent form.

Research involving children requires consent from the parents or guardians and assent from the child themselves. Graham et al (2015) recognise that one of the most challenging considerations with conducting research with children is gaining children's assent as well as understanding their views and perspectives on the study. Although informed consent was sought from the parents or carers of the child, I also provided an age-appropriate explanation of the study to the children (BERA, 2018). This study used a social story to explain to the children the nature of the research, before asking them if they would like to take part (appendix C). The use of a child-friendly story facilitated delivery of appropriate and relevant information which could be clearly understood without confusion (BERA, 2018). Children were then offered the opportunity to discuss and ask further questions relating to the research process. Through this process, children were granted the right to express their views freely (BERA, 2018). At the end of the story, I asked whether children would be happy to be observed in their classroom to confirm their willingness to participate in the study (Rogers and Labadie, 2016), to which all the children confirmed their acceptance. As a researcher in this study, I had a duty to safeguard young children and their rights as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child policy (1989). This can be difficult when trying to also gain high quality information using a data collection process (Blackburn, 2015). As Denzin (1989) highlights when researching, collecting data and personal information of others, we must always think of the people within the study and not the project. It was my duty to protect the children's stories and to ensure that the children's needs come first.

The participant information sheet (appendix B) intended to inform parents about the nature of the study, as well as seeking their assistance in gaining the children's assent to the study. This information sheet invited parents to discuss the research with their child before deciding whether or not to grant their consent. One method for gaining assent from a young person is to ask them to verbally confirm if they would like to take part in the study. Conversely, a child may verbally inform the researcher that they do not want to take part or would like to

withdraw following initial participation. There are also less overt signs that I had to look out for which might indicate that a child did not want to take part (or wants to withdraw). These included: moving away from myself as the researcher, refusing to answer questions, changing the topic of conversation or even becoming physically aggressive. However, in some cases, children may feel obligated to conform to the researcher and feel they are unable to refuse their request (Blackburn, 2015). I will now outline the steps taken to obtain consent from parents and assent from children during the research process.

It was made clear to parents and children that they had the right to withdraw at any point throughout the project, without giving reason for their decision (BERA, 2018). Throughout the study, I was mindful of continually assessing whether or not children remained happy to take part in the research. This was to ensure that the children were being safeguarded throughout the process, but also to allow for the unpredictable nature of practitioner research, where research may lead to unexpected outcomes throughout the discovery process. Each activity was outlined before commencement and I used my personal and professional judgment to ascertain children's interest (or disinterest), either through verbal or non-verbal discussion. Children made their expressions clear from the outset and throughout the activities whether to participate or not. Examples of children's assent (or not) are outlined below. When Elsie asked 'Can I go and play now?', this was taken as a direct request to stop the observation and allow the child to continue with their own independent play choices.

Observation – Making Words Elsie [4 years] 'Can I go and play now?' (She asked me as she was going to participate in a teacher-led activity)
Observation – The Volcano Jim [4 years] I asked him what he was doing and if I could join in. He was happy to let me play and handed me an ice cube to put inside the volcano. (I asked as the children were already involved in their own play)

Table 2: Examples of children assenting (or not) to the research.

It was explained to parents and children that any preliminary data obtained may be destroyed at the request of the parents or participants in the study, including participant observations, artifacts and any field notes taken which related to that particular participant. Within this

particular research, all children who were contacted to take part in this study were granted permission by their parents.

3.7 Reporting

The findings of the study will be shared with parents and participants using a formal summary for the parents and an informational social story for the children using appropriate language and images to facilitate understanding. As a researcher I have a responsibility to share the findings of this study with the parents and participants whilst ensuring I maintain confidentiality as an ethical obligation (BERA, 2018). This encourages a trust in the research process and develop positive relationships. Any publication of data and findings would be made known to senior management before commencement.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the rationale for employing practitioner research to develop and evaluate a 'planning-in-the moment' approach. Using an adapted version of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research cycle allowed me to use and reflect on this child-centred approach. In the action research cycle, 'act' was removed from the 'act/observe' part of the cycle. This was necessary as I was observing the children's 'acts'. I have highlighted the importance of both 'reflectivity' and 'reflexivity' in relation to the theoretical framework of figured worlds. Within this paradigm, knowledge is understood to be a production of planned (and unplanned) interactions between children, adults and the surrounding environment (Holland et al, 1998). Therefore, a modified version of Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model was necessary, as it incorporates 'reflexivity' as an additional part of the cycle. Through this research process I noticed not only the figuring of the children's worlds (through reflection) but the figuring of my own world, which includes my 'history-in-person', my perspectives in relation to the wider context and my personal experiences with the world (through reflexion). My 'space of authoring' required reflexion before I was able to continue this cycle with the knowledge of my 'next move'.

This research study used an 'in-the-moment' approach to learning in order to follow children's interests and find areas of personal interest. Naturalistic observations including written notes and photographs were used to document the child's learning experience. The Leuven Scale

were also used to assess and record the levels of involvement of the children in their play. When areas of interests were acknowledged, I explored themes and activities to enhance the children's learning experiences within their educational setting. A research journal was also implemented each day to record actions which I had taken throughout the day and feelings which I had experienced during the observations, as well as uncovering personal challenges and how I authored myself. This was important as the theoretical framework of figured worlds foregrounds the authoring 'self', placing an emphasis on reflexively establishing my own positioning within the study.

This approach has many practical as well as ethical challenges. These include the issue of simultaneously adopting the role of teacher and researcher. The methods within this study allow both of my roles (as practitioner and researcher) to 'intertwine' (Schon, 1983:325), making this role much more manageable. This was manageable as, firstly, I am already an 'insider' and have already built stable and friendly relationships with both children and parents, and secondly, this study uses a methodology which is open-ended in order to facilitate meaningful and deep teaching and learning experiences (Pine, 2009). My desire to conduct interactional research with the children meant I would enjoy participating in interactions with children and the environment – as this research intended – but support and safety for all children was difficult to attend to whilst taking part in these interactions. Therefore, the collection of field notes and reflective journal writing became an imperative and necessary addition to this research study. This ensured my teaching was further implementing their interests, so the children would be supported and engaged in learning which was suitable and engaging for them.

Action research has both advantages and limitations. The advantage of using Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model is that each time the action process is carried out, there is potential for opportunities to reach a greater understanding of the problem. It is an iterative process and aids deeper reflections on the situation that results in the ability to solve problems. However, action research has its limitations in its validity and presentation of the study which may not represent a true finding of the results. An example of a limitation to conducting this type of research includes practitioners behaving in a particular way in order to create 'acceptable wanted actions, expected conditions and achieved goals' (LLiev,

2010:4209) as they are aware of the researchers' gaze within this environment. This study intends to overcome this limitation by continually reflecting and reflexing on this process through the use of a personal journal to document this journey, situating myself – as the researcher/teacher – within this research and understanding how my own position might influence the findings.

Chapter 4: Vignettes

This chapter makes meanings around analysis of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach by using vignettes to detail a selection of interesting observations presented in the early years environment. Throughout these observations I am recording children's interactions, their use of artifacts, how I adapt the teacher-led activities through 'planning-in-the-moment' and how this might offer space of authoring. The Leuven scale is used to reflect on these observations, as well as my own journal, including both reflection and reflexion. I attempt to make meanings of observations of children in their play worlds in relation to the theoretical framework of figured worlds. All extracts in italics, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the observation data. I intend to outline the themes occurring from the cross-case data.

4.1 Vignette 1: At the Doctors Observation

At the time of this observation the theme in the reception classroom related to 'ourselves' and 'our bodies'. With this theme in mind, a large human-sized plastic skeleton was placed as an enhancement within the Doctor's surgery role play area of the outdoor classroom. The leg had broken off the skeleton the day before and I felt annoyed and upset that our brand new toy had been broken. I, therefore, spoke to the children about how we look after our toys. The next day, one little boy took the leg of the skeleton and began to fix the leg back on to the body using the surgical tools and equipment within the role play area. This activity resonated with Vygotsky's (1978:99) understandings that children are actively participating in their development without being aware that learning is taking place. The children within this activity are participating in play which is extending their development without realising they are doing it. They are not doctors, but through imitation they are able to become actors within the social world. They are performing within play 'without any awareness that they are performing' (Holzman, 2018:47) and in doing so, they are "Being a Head Taller"' (Holzman, 2018:48). Vygotsky (1978) explains a child in their play acts 'a head taller than' (Vygotsky, 1978:102) themselves, as they behave above their average age and above their daily behaviour. This 'in-the-moment' activity drew my attention to the fact that often it is the unplanned activities instigated by the children that allow them to use their imaginations, moving beyond what the teacher might have imagined themselves. What I viewed as a problem, turned out to be a perfect opportunity to develop their play experiences as they began to figure a way to fix the bone of the body. Reflexing on this experience provided a 'pivot' in my own understanding of 'self' and highlighted the importance of considering my own positioning within the observations. In this moment, I was able to develop – as Bakhtin labelled – "outsideness", where I was 'able to create a vision beyond what is currently understood' (Holland et al, 1998:308) and a 'template for possible futures' (Holland et al, 1998:309). Here the children were gaining space for authoring of 'self' which offered me a realization for my own 'authoring of self' and how I wish to continue within my own role in the future. The figured world of a doctor's surgery which I had created and developed was perceived by me as now being broken and pointless after the skeleton's leg had fallen off. However, the children saw this as an opportunity to become 'real' doctors within a doctor's surgery, providing enhanced possibilities for them to engage with this figured world. These children participating in doctor's role play produced signs, material objects and actions which represented their interests and communicated their ideas (Wohlwend, 2011). They became

resourceful and creative individuals using the materials ready-available to make crucial meanings they wished to convey. The children became agentic through their design decisions by following their interests (Wohlwend, 2011). Reflexion on this observation and considering my own 'authoring of self', has changed my thinking with my own role and has made me consider the extent to which I – as the class teacher – need to allow children more space to be creative and be agentic in their own design decisions.

At the beginning of the observation Michael announced, *'I'm the doctor'.* In this way Michael immediately asserted his role of doctor within the role play and took on this figurative identity. He did not ask permission to be in this role but stated his position of power from the outset. Michael was a very quiet little boy who would not normally take the lead in group situations but within this new role of the 'doctor' in which he had identified, he has found a voice and is figuring his new identity in which he was able to author himself as a different person. He becomes confident and skilled within his role of 'doctor' and is able to give medical advice he has come across within his previous experiences.

> *'He's not dead.' Said Michael. 'His heart is still beating.' Michael said as he placed the stethoscope on his heart. 'That means he's okay. He's gonna need a plaster.' Said Michael.*

Michael is confident within his role and is able to clarify to others how he knows that his patient is still alive. His understanding of the doctor's job allows Michael to use his previous knowledge, experiences and understandings of the world to influence his current role of doctor. This is his history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) intertwining within his current figured world. His previous experiences have led him to believe that a plaster will fix the problem. This shows the extent of his current knowledge and he is able to apply these understandings to the problem within this imaginary play world.

His figurative identity shows he is in control and holds a position of authority by being the one to let others know the patient is still alive and declaring what the patient needs to get better. His figurative identity has been prominent throughout the observation and his authoring of self has led him to attain the position of doctor. This came at the expense of the other child

who did not have a choice in the matter but to adopt the position of the 'nurse' or 'doctor's helper'. The child who follows Michael's instructions - and begins to 'administer the injection and the lotion on to the body' – seems to be accepting his new figurative identity. He begins to author the himself as he administers the injections and lotions and confirms his position as he carries out his duties. Interestingly, Michael surprises me with his next comment within the observation…

Michael: His heart is beating Doctor.

Michael has now referred to the other child as 'doctor'. Although Michael has remained within the position of power throughout the role play, he is now assuming neutral territory in which both children are doctors and both have an important role to play within this scenario. The children's figurative identities at this point are beginning to reform and develop into positions of shared power. I noted, however, that it was Michael's decision to allow this neutral territory to form and was not instigated by – or provoked by – the other child.

This observation shows how the two children confirmed their figurative and positional identities, as well as finding a space for authoring 'in-the-moment' through the mediation of the cultural resources, tools and artifacts that the doctors surgery could offer. They have both reached level 5 involvement according to the Leuven Scale for involvement (Laevers, 2003). The artifacts within this example could be considered the overarching factor which made this moment happen. If the leg of the skeleton had not broken off, this learning may not have occurred and the confidence within these boys may never have been raised. This opportunity inspired two often quiet and subdued children to interact together within another world leading to the development of new knowledge as they begin to learn about the body and how they may fix the leg.

This observation highlights the struggle which teachers face in the forming and reforming of their position as 'teacher'. The fact that I saw the object as merely 'broken' rather than as a potential source of unplanned interest for the children, led me to reflect on the potential benefits of me gaining a more fluid approach to the environment rather than remaining rigid to the pre-designed planning and topics. In this way, this observation, created a space of

reauthoring for myself as a teacher and the expectations I hold within the classroom. It has made me aware that I must remain open to the limitless possibilities within creating an environment that promotes learning and development and that the things that go 'wrong' may actually be created as a space for authoring for others. It has made me mindful to take a less rigid approach to my teaching method and try to experience a broader approach to planning, provision and allowing flexibility in how children use the environment and seek out their own pathways to learning. This observation has offered opportunities for 'authoring the self'.

4.2 Vignette 2: Water Play Observation

The outdoor water area has a mixture of different tools, objects and open-ended artifacts for children to explore and investigate. The water trays were filled up and powder paint was left around for children to add/mix if they wanted to. I went to the outdoor area to ask a child to come and carry out a teacher activity and I noticed the children were surrounding the water area. I went to see what they were getting up to and reflected on the level of engagement children were showing in this area. Rather than continuing with the teacher activity I decided to change the plan and implement an 'in-the-moment' approach instead by observing the children in their play and extending learning if required. Jim noticed me within this space and began to explain what he was doing.

Miss I'm filling the water up and pouring it down. I moved that thing cos it's supposed to catch it!
Jim

Jim was clearly very confident and excited about how he was catching the water each time he poured it down the pipes. Showing high levels of concentration, involvement and fascination, he turned to the teacher to receive praise for his work.

What if we move that out the way and swap this? He asked.
Good Idea. I said.

Quite quickly Jim had included me within his learning by asking me a question to which I was invited to confirm or decline his idea. The 'we' within this question has significant importance for the observation as it confirms that Jim has included me within his independent play, shifting my position from 'complete observer' to the 'researcher-as-participant' (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Jim is asking for confirmation as to whether it would be a good idea to swap the pipe and he reaches out to the teacher to confirm his decision. On receiving recognition that his idea was a 'good idea', Jim gained the approval that he required.

Izzy then realised that she couldn't reach to pour the water in the tube. She went off and got a stepping stone to stand on so she could reach. 'But, we need to move it over more so that we catch the water!' said Jim. 'Oh, so what can you do?' I asked. 'Izzy, please can you get down so we can move it?' Jim said.

Although I am part of the play I begin to see my changing role from participant to researcher/teacher. I continue the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach and begin to ask problem solving questions during the play (which I am a part of and feel equal within), such as 'Oh, so what can you do?'. Although this question fulfils the Development Matters (2012) criteria, I am asking it to encourage Jim to become an even better engineer as he changes the pipes and height of the stepping stones.

Jim politely asks Izzy to get down so he can move the stepping stones to a different position. Here, we see the initial signs of Jim gaining a position of power within his role. Izzy went along with the idea enabling Jim to initially gain a leadership position.

> *'Let's get crates to make it bigger and hold it up!' Said Jim. Izzy went straight off to get the crates. The children all helped to stack them. 'Not that way! Sideways! Noooo the other way!' Jim explained.*

Here we see Jim has now gained control of the area and he is in charge of the water play engineering and construction. He gives requests out to the children in which he is able to confirm whether they did it right or wrong. He holds a position of power within the play and shows high levels of involvement on the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003). Jim watches over his engineers and can assess whether they are doing the job correctly. He shows power and confidence in his conviction as he says 'Not that way! Sideways!'. He is shouting at the children to get the crates the correct way round. Jim's positional identity has been assured at this point and his figured identity of the 'Chief Engineer' has been established. He has developed the ability to become a part of an imaginary world by mediating a particular response, to shift into the frame of a different world. Vygotsky recognises this as "pivoting" (Holland, et al, 1998:50). His identity and sense of agency are linked in his role as Chief Engineer, and correspondingly, so are those of the other children accepting the roles of his 'assistants'. Through play, the children used this opportunity to pretend together, mediating their social histories and shared norms for belonging, using artifacts to pivot (Vygotsky, 1978) among play worlds and outdoor 'classroom cultures to access more powerful identities and practices' (Wohlwend, [2011] 2017:63). Jim uses artifacts as a means to mediate his positional identity and has been able to find a space for authoring at the expense of the other children who are carrying out his duties for him. Interestingly these children seem to have willingly accepted their respective roles and adhere to his requests. He has managed to dictate what he wants to happen and has become the leader within his role. I find their complicity interesting: they are so implicated within this figured world that they conform as they would with rules in their classroom. The participation and responses in this particular social activity have provided a voice as they author the world, creating space for agency, to which they respond (Barron, 2013). The children who do not assume the powerful position

are able to contribute to their own role and negotiate their positioning in relation to Jim's. Jim no longer needs gratification from myself – his teacher – he has become the figurative teacher/engineer through the many little engineers he has employed and who listened to him.

> *'Jason, help move the rest of the crates away!' asked Jim. 'Miss, are they hurting you? Let me move them off you.' Said Jim.*

Again, Jim's powerful stance has enforced Jason to move the rest of the crates. He shows dominance and leadership. He has successfully figured his identity in his role (Holland et al, 1998). However, he continues with *'Miss, are they hurting you? Let me move them off you.'* This surprised me. He showed authority and leadership to the engineers he had employed in his play, yet showed his kindness and helpfulness towards me suggesting within this example, kindness and authority are not mutually exclusive. I was once an engineer he had employed. I was part of the 'we' from the beginning, however he does not control or dictate instructions to me, he shows care and consideration. He seems genuinely worried when he thinks the crates are weighing heavily on my feet. Jim shows he is still a self-regulated individual as he acts to help his teacher. The presence of myself may still be within the field of his figured world. He could be aware of the hierarchy and I may be causing the panoptic gaze on to him and his workmanship. It may have been my presence that had created Jim to behave as he did and so he was figuring his identity position in relation to my presence in the role. His authoring of 'self' may have occurred through the presence of the hierarchical gaze (Foucault, 1977). However, his response could just be down to the caring person he is and this manner of respect is how he treats others.

> *'I know. Take these two off and move that little green one.' Said Jim.*
> *'Yeeeeee we did it!' Shouted Jason*
> *'Noooo the water needs to go that way!' explained Jim.*
> *'Yeeeeee we did it!' Shouted Jason*
> *'Let's make it bigger.' Said Jim*

Jim's figurative identity as an engineer is confirmed as he demonstrates his expertise by saying 'Noooo the water needs to go that way!'. He then went on explain that the tube needed to be raised up by putting more crates underneath it. He was sure that it would make the water go the right way. When he tests his idea, he finds that he was correct and instead of assuming he had reached his goal which was to make the water go the right way, he said 'Let's make it bigger.' Jason is extremely proud of himself for completing the water pipes, however Jim does not see this an end goal. He only wishes for the water pipes to be made even better. Jim shows determination and sees limitless possibilities in the water pipe construction he is making. He strives for more and quickly shuts Jason's comment down by saying 'It can be made bigger'. He is 'planning-in-the-moment'. He then intentionally remodelled his engineering to raise the water tubes. His previous knowledge and experiences of working with the water has encouraged him to build something even better. His history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) generated new discoveries, new knowledge and new ways of knowing using the artifacts (water, crates and tubes). The artifacts are a mediator between his identity construction and his new learning experience of the engineering construct he has made. Once the water pipe construction is finished, Jim may find it difficult to retain his positional identity and therefore, it might be that he encourages the children to continue with the work and explains it could be bigger in order to retain his employees and retain his position of power. He does not celebrate with Jason that the job has been completed, he merely orders the water play to be made bigger. What I found interesting though is how Jim continues with …

'Miss do you know this word? Confident.' Asked Jim.
'Ooo what does that mean?' I asked.
'My dad told me I am confident. I can do this.' Said Jim.

Although Jim will not celebrate the water play construction with his 'employees', he will celebrate his successes with me. Through reflecting on this observation and Jim's initial comment where he views us both as 'equal' through the use of the word 'we', I wonder if Jim sees himself as a teacher like me – as though 'we' are the same or that 'we' are capable of the same things or that 'we' have power over others. He has figured his positional identity as equal to mine. He wants me to know what confidence means as he knows he has this ability.

It could be showing that Jim wants me to be proud of him and wants approval from myself as the authority figure. Through the orchestration of voices (Holland et al, 1998) – in this case, his Dad's voice – he is 'confident' in his ability to be an engineer and knows that what he is doing is right. He has referred back to a comment in which his Dad has told him he is confident and recalled the feeling he felt when his Dad called him this word. This recalled 'feeling' relates to his history-in-person as returns to a state where he knows he was 'confident'. Through the orchestration of voices, he knows that what he is doing is going well and he is also 'confident' in this activity too. He doesn't require gratification from his 'employees' for a job done well but refers to me – his 'equal' – to confirm that he has done well with the construction he has made and is striving for similar praise as he received last time. This need for praise at the same time reveals his positional identity as pupil interacting with his teacher within the figured world of school.

This 'in-the-moment' experience offered autonomy and agency for Jim and he was powerful within this positional identity (Holland et al, 1998). He used this power to find a space for authoring enabling his autonomy and agency within the nursery environment (Holland et al, 1998). Jim used his 'play as a space-making tactic that' manipulates 'school power relations by producing alternative contexts and importing otherwise unavailable identities and discourses' (Wohlwend, 2011:13). Jim invented a way 'out of – the constraints of dominant discourses in school' (Wohlwend, 2011:15) empowering different authorial identities. Jim was able to engage in activities which he was interested in rather than take part in a teacher-led activity which he may or may not have found as interesting. The use of language was also an important factor which upheld Jim's position of power which Holland et al, citing Bakhtin, note as the importance of 'command over those linguistic resources' (1998:128). He was able to become the leader with authority through his use of his communication skills to verbalize his stance within the role play. Through language, he could order his 'employees' to complete the tasks at hand. His commands allowed him to become the dictator within the role play. The mediation of artifacts and language all worked in combination to create a space for authoring for Jim (Holland et al, 1998). Without the need to continue with an 'in-the-moment' approach, Jim may not have found space to author himself and gain autonomy and agency within the classroom.

4.3 Vignette 3: Jigsaw Observation

Izzy was due to come over to complete a teacher-led activity as part of the original plan when I observed her struggling with her jigsaw. Izzy was already showing high levels of involvement with her learning so I decided to abandon the lesson I planned because she was demonstrating high levels of engagement and was at a crucial point where she needed support. This was an uncomfortable decision to make as a teacher as I have specific work to complete in order to meet the criteria of the curriculum. I decided to change the original plan and used this as a 'planning-in-the-moment' opportunity. When I went closer to the area where Izzy was working she felt my presence and said;

> *Miss, this one fits!*
> *(Izzy)*

Izzy felt the presence of the observer and was out to impress the teacher. My presence within this space had meant Izzy had begun to author herself in relation to me – the authority figure within the room.

Izzy had only managed to find two matching pieces of the puzzle but was struggling to find a system in which she could complete the rest of the activity. I decided to work with this child in order to scaffold her learning, to enable her to complete the puzzle independently next time.

> *I advised her to find all the straight edges first and it might help her build the shape of the jigsaw.*

Without this prior knowledge given by the teacher or peer, she was unable to complete the puzzle. By moving the child through the Zone of Proximal Development (as discussed by Vygotsky) I was able to support the child's learning. From this small input the pupil was able to successfully continue building her jigsaw gaining autonomy. By sitting next to the little girl, it encouraged another little girl to join in with the activity and she too helped by separating the straight-edged jigsaw pieces.

> *Miss, this one fits too!*
> *(Myleene)*

Izzy was now confident that she could complete this puzzle and continued to model how the jigsaw should be put together to her friend. This observation focuses specifically on the child's interactions with their early years learning environment and their process of *becoming* with relation to others (Holzman, 2018:45). Within this observation, I am able to observe the socialness of learning-leading-development as 'doing something together' (Holzman, 2018:44) as a collective. The children are learning through creating together (Holzman (2018:53) "between people" and not just a child to one other adult. It is in these initial stages of the observation that Izzy begins to position herself as the person of power within this relationship. She figures her identity as the 'teacher' and Myleene as the 'child' who is learning. The jigsaw was used as the mediating tool which allowed Izzy to gain her positional identity. This suggests that the educational context and classroom is an important factor to

consider when analysing observations as the objects in which have been placed within the space are becoming mediating tools children are using to represent themselves.

Oooo, I put it there then.
(Myleene)

Myleene again reaches out for confirmation of a 'job well done', but this time she is not speaking to the teacher for clarification, she turns to her friend who is assuming the position of teacher. She looks to Izzy for similar praise that she previously had experienced from her class teacher to help be considered as 'the good child' (MacLure et al, 2012). Myleene has figured herself within this relationship as the child being taught and is behaving in a way that a child would respond when they have done something good.

The flowers doesn't match here Myleene, look. (Izzy)

This goes here Izzy. (Myleene)

That doesn't go there. (Izzy)

A space for authoring opened-up through this activity, so that Izzy could direct operations. She confidently told Myleene that the piece did not match, becoming the authoritative figure within the relationship, empowering different identities (Wohlwend, 2011:15) which may otherwise be unavailable within the power constraints (Wohlwend, 2011:13). Izzy has watched the teacher and has taken on the figured identity of apprentice teacher within this role play. This shows how an 'in-the-moment' approach can open up a space for children to experiment with assuming a range of positional identities finding new spaces of authoring the 'self' (Holland et al, 1998). This vignette led me to reflect on Dahlberg and Moss' (2005:96) work on the need for a 'pedagogy of listening' within early years education. If I had not 'listened' to their play experience, I may not have decided to abandon the planned lesson and support the children at a crucial point in their play where they need to participate, improvise and respond to figured worlds so they can develop, change and reinterpret themselves in the process and access experiences of agency (Barron, 2013). Participation in this social activity and the responses to it, allowed the children to find a voice and negotiate their positional identity, which allowed them to improvise and author the world, creating a space for agency. Within this observation, we see the subject positions which have formed through the use of

'cultural resources which history makes available and the improvisation is a form of practice' (Barron, 2013:6). It demonstrates – as Barron (2013) recognises – that educators need to support children in finding a space for authoring through figured identities, where positional identities can be explored, challenged, alleviated and transformed.

Initially, I felt that Izzy's positional identity had come at the expense of her friend's, but on reflection, Myleene has found her space for authoring as she becomes the 'child-like' figure within the activity. This is confirmed again when the activity had finished and Izzy confirms that the jigsaw is complete.

> *Wow! We done it!*
> *(Izzy)*

Izzy celebrates the completion of the task with her friend but does not ask the teacher to look at the activity they have completed. This suggests that she feels secure and satisfied that she has completed the job as the leader and only needed to share her successes with those who took part in the activity. This observation has given Izzy power and confidence within her identity and does not need the praise from the hierarchical figure of the teacher. She has become this hierarchical figure of teacher and potentially reaches new levels of involvement with an 'I can do it' attitude.

During this observation, I had asked the class to tidy away and get ready for carpet-time but Izzy and Myleene asked if they could continue with their activity to which I allowed them to continue. When making the decision about whether to allow the girls to continue, I felt a tension between my role as teacher and role as researcher as discussed in the methods chapter (3.4.1). I would not have been happy for other children to continue their work, so why was I allowing them to do so? Was this due to me as a teacher wanting them to appreciate their jigsaw that had taken time to make? Or was my decision driven by my desire as a researcher to gain further data? These conflicting identities must have caused considerable amounts of confusion for the other children who had to tidy up and watch these two children continue in their play. I began to question whether I valued the autonomy and agency which these children had achieved in this activity at the exclusion of the agency and

autonomy of the other children within the class. The two children were able to direct their play outside of the usual constraints and routines within the classroom allowing them to gain a sense of agency, why was I unable to appreciate the activities and 'play' in which the other children were a part of too? This has led to my own professional position of teacher being questioned and a re-figuring of my own teacher identity. For example, following this observation, I began to realise the extent to which children are governed within their learning space. The performative discourse (including areas such as routines and expectations within the classroom) and issues with 'self-regulation' that are created within the educational context - and particularly within this example - meant that all the children had tidied away their toys except 'the chosen ones' who didn't have to. This hierarchical power and control which I am a part of, is able to dictate and remove agency and autonomy to each child and is part of the performative discourse with the observational process (as outlined in chapter 3.5.2.1). This makes me question how children become 'the chosen one' and to what extent children would need to go to, in order to become 'the chosen one'.

Although this observation has offered a space for authoring with 'in-the-moment' planning, it has shown how agency and autonomy is monitored, accepted and achieved through the gaze of the hierarchical figure of the teacher. I am able to give the opportunity, but I am also able to remove it. In response to my concerns over favouring the freedom of some children over others, I adapted my practice, 'planning-in-the-moment', by cancelling the music lesson that had been scheduled and allowing the children to continue with their activity, giving them extra time with their jigsaw. Although I usually stick to the predetermined routines as much as possible (as requested by the Headteacher), the vignette influenced me to change my approach to teaching and to change the routine in order to support the child's learning. Children are working within the power discourses informing the educational setting, which sometimes act to constrain their freedom and limit opportunities for prolonged involvement in play. As the teacher I am an important gatekeeper of children's regulated freedom, but I have limited agency due to the structural constraints within school and the broader policy context.

This observation shows how children are figuring their identity through the play in which they are part of. This independent play, which offered an 'in-the-moment' planning approach from

the teacher, has successfully enabled the completion of their project as well as gaining autonomy and agency. It has allowed children to adopt different positions as they engage in their play and has illuminated my position as a gatekeeper of children's regulated freedom within the classroom.

4.4 Vignette 4: Volcano Observation

The construction area was continually being used to build a train track or a tower with the blocks. I decided to implement an 'in-the-moment' approach within this particular area of the classroom by leaving out a mixture of open-ended objects to encourage the children to become a little more imaginative with the resources they had. I began to add objects to the environment to promote playful activities and exploratory open-ended learning (Wohlwend, 2017). I used this opportunity for an emergent play-based, learner-led opportunity to uncover children's possible interests. A cardboard cone-shaped construction object was the initial inspiration for these young boys to create a world which included a volcano erupting. I observed Jim placing ice cubes (from our current classroom topic) inside the volcano and I listened to him explaining to his friends that he would be making the volcano erupt. It became clear that he was leading this role and had identified himself with the position of leader within his play experience. He was authoring himself 'in-the-moment' using cultural resources and tools to mediate his position whilst his friends watched what he was doing. When observing the use of ice cubes being added to the volcano, it probed me to question his understanding of the volcano.

> *I asked Jim 'is the lava hot or cold?' To which he responded 'Cold'. Chase heard Jim's response and answered 'No, it's really, really hot. It can burn you.'*

Without this probing question, Jim's current understanding of the world would have offered incorrect information. This provides an example of how one child can guide another through the zone of proximal development, where coming to *know* something is a process of not knowing we didn't *know*. Within this example, the children are learning through imitating and re-imagining roles which they have watched others fulfil. This process of *becoming* is as Wertsch (1998) suggests, coming to know something cannot necessarily be separated from the cultural tools which mediate the act of knowing. The mediating artifact of the cardboard cone-shaped construction piece had now changed the leading roles within this role play experience and Chase took on a new position of leader; from this point Chase began to direct the play. Within this vignette, 'knowledge is power'. Chase was seen as the powerful provider of information and Jim's positional identity as role of 'leader' had quickly changed into the 'follower'.

Through these interactions with others, the children began to author and re-author the 'self'. The children's funds of identity, as discussed by Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014), were being culturally mediated as a social phenomenon that used the children's personal and significant life experiences as a way of defining 'self' and subsequently developing their identity. The children were becoming through interactions with other individuals who had their own set of beliefs, understandings and personal funds of knowledge. Mediation of the children's identity was being formed through practicing the roles in which they have experienced (Hedges, 2021).

His play experiences had changed quite dramatically following this new piece of information. The observation recalls:

> *Chase explained his own understanding of the lava to Jim, to which Jim began to look concerned. He has just placed all the small world people around the volcano and instantly appeared concerned for their safety if the volcano erupted. 'But that will mean the people aren't safe!' said Jim, appearing rather panicked.*

Jim's new understanding of the lava being hot had instantly affected his emotional response to the role play situation as he developed concerns with his figurative identity of 'guardian'

of these small people. This response shows how Jim is experiencing level 5 involvement on the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003) as he begins to show his emotion towards the toy figures within the activity and responds quickly in order to save them from the lava. I was aware that there were high levels of engagement due to the children's fascination, motivation and total implication with the activity (Laevers, 2003) offering the potential for children to experience deep levels of learning.

> *'What will you need to do to save the people then?' I asked Jim to encourage his problem solving skills. 'Go in the boat. Let's make one' said Jim.*

At this point, Jim was able to reclaim his position of power and was able to figure himself in many different roles including 'the engineer' and 'the life-saver'.

Through reflection of my own actions within this play experience, I wonder to what extent I was manipulating this observation for the evidence required for the Development Matters (2012) curriculum. Did my ulterior motive of every child having the correct knowledge and understanding of the world appear more important than the child developing knowledge through interactions in their play and how would I have changed this? Again, this has made me question the extent to which children are working within the constraints of the performative discourses. Once Jim suggested he would build a boat, I instantly responded with;

> *'What material are you using?' 'I'm using wood that is covered in a special material so it won't melt.' Jim told me.*

At this point in the observation, I became aware that I was manipulating the situation to suit the requirements of the Development Matters (2012) Curriculum. I am figuring my professional identity as a teacher and fulfilling the expectations of the Teachers Standards (2013). I am working within the constraints of the performative discourse as ultimately I am being assessed on the implementation of scripted curricula (Wohlwend, 2017:64). I am showing – within this example – how I am conforming to these pressures by questioning the children within their play, in order to develop specific subject knowledge relating to the

Knowledge and Understanding of the World part of the curriculum. The dilemma that early years teachers often face when working and playing alongside children is knowing when to intervene and when to let children experience prolonged periods of involvement.

Jim replied '*that is covered in a special material so it won't melt.'* What I found interesting about the choice of word 'melt', was that it related to our 'winter and ice' topic which we had been learning during our topic. He understood the meaning of 'melting' and related it to his play experience. Considering that the current topic was related to winter and ice, it is interesting that this observation relied heavily on heat and volcanoes. This topic was not part of the continuous provision activities which had been placed in the room by the teacher as the current enhancements in the room all related to the topic of winter and ice. This makes me consider the environment itself and the extent to which it allows children to follow interests outside of the predetermined class topic. This observation shows autonomous individuals who are agentic as they have gone against the teacher's pre-planned activities and have followed their own interests in place of it. The presence of open-ended artifacts within the environment facilitated children pursuing interests and developing knowledge beyond the predetermined topic. Ephgrave (2018) suggests practitioners' observations should recognise and support activities which nurture children's interests within the environment using the 'in-the-moment' planning approach. Within this observation, I needed to understand the children's funds of knowledge in order to ascertain whether this activity was a fleeting interest or whether this was a more sustained interest which they might want to pursue further in their own play. Children's funds of knowledge are embedded in their cultural practice and are implicit; therefore, are difficult to recognize and articulate (Hedges & Cooper, 2016:310) without asking more probing questions, engaging in follow-up conversations and observing children carefully to reveal the influences of their funds of knowledge. A 'planning-in-the-moment' approach uses children's interests as a guide with a more organic, flexible approach to the curriculum and learning environment. It allows the author to re-develop their identity as created as an object in the social world, they can use their figured worlds to 'recreate versions of themselves and therefore, develop a sense of agency' (Holland et al, 1998). The observation recorded that…

The boys then spent some time re-enacting possible scenarios for helping the people survive the devastation that the volcano was causing. They began to use expression for the voices of the people and began to work together to help recover all the people from the lava.

The boys at this point are able to orchestrate the voices of others (of the small world people) through understanding this experience themselves (Bakhtin, 1981). Although they have never touched lava, their understanding and of the words 'heat' and 'hot' helps them to imagine and act out the voices of others. They are engaging in dialogue, changing their voices and making appropriate actions in their role play. Through language, they have been able to navigate their understandings by building on their previous knowledge and learning from each other about the lava. They have reached deep levels of engagement, even when the teacher is asking probing questions throughout their role play.

Once the boys had made the volcano and had ensured that all the small world people were safe, two little girls came over to join in and brought horses with them. Jim immediately explained to the girls that the horses needed to be on the grass over there (and pointed to a round green mat). He was completely disregarding the girls who wished to join the play; he had confirmed his positional identity as he directed them to where they needed to go. This example showed that through the use of an open-ended artifact to mediate the positioning, each child was able to find a space for authoring the self. Jim was working within the constraints and managed to claim back his role and became an autonomous individual with agency by following his own interests which went beyond the topic.

4.5 Vignette 5: In the Kitchen

Corey had spent his morning in the mud kitchen in the nursery outdoor area. He was immersed within his independent play and was showing intense concentration and persistence with his activity (Laevers, 2003) as he decided to act out his understandings of what happens within the 'kitchen' environment. His level of engagement encouraged me to follow an 'in-the-moment' approach by observing him during his play experiences and to 'step-in' during this experience if the moment arose.

In the initial stages of Corey's play, he was figuring his identity through learned previous experiences of the 'kitchen'. This is another example of how Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is a process of learning without knowing they are doing it (Holzman, 2018). Corey is imitating and re-imagining the roles of others within the figured world of the kitchen environment which he has watched others enact and has internalised through tacit learning. The cultural tools mediated the act of knowing (Wertsch, 1998) and the process of *becoming* as described by Holzman (2018). This resonates with Bruner's (1996) understanding of the cultural tools, text, symbols and thinking which children go through, and are part of the construction of reality through "meaning making". This also supports Rogoff et al's (2018) beliefs that we need to incorporate children's cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into the learning environment in order for children to construct their identity and sense of 'self'. Corey's history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) seems to have led him to believe that there should not be mud inside the kitchen and it should be a clean space to work in, so he decided to clean up the sink using the brush as it was clogged up with mud.

> *He put the brush inside the cup of clean water and began scrubbing the sink until it was clean and shiny. He then looked under the sink and began to clean again, noticing it wasn't quite as clean just yet. He showed determination in getting it as clean as possible before he continued his play by pouring the cup of water down the sink (as it was a little muddy from all the cleaning) and re-poured fresh water down the teapot into his cup.*

Corey could not continue his activity of making a cup of tea until he had ensured his kitchen was clean. Again, his history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) has enabled his understandings to ensure his area is clean before adding the fresh water to his teapot.

> *He pretended to drink from the cup and gave an expression as if it must have tasted delicious. He then cleaned up the cup in the sink and placed it on the drying rack.*

Due to the lack of spoken language within this observation, it is difficult to get a full sense of what the child was thinking, but it was clear from his facial expressions and actions that he was highly involved in his figured world.

> *Corey was so involved with his learning that he didn't even hear us ask to tidy away! He continued with his play and began making more drinks. As Corey was so involved with his learning, I decided to leave him to explore a little longer, whilst the rest of the children went inside for snack.*

Corey was in a deep sense of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979) – so absorbed in his play that he did not hear the request to come inside. He was experiencing level 5 involvement on the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003) and so, I decided to continue the 'in-the-moment' approach and allowing him extra time to continue play. He was so immersed with his activity that his perception of time appeared to be distorted and his attention was solely focused on the task he had at hand. This sense of deep level engagement shows Corey – in this instance – is gaining autonomy and agency as he is making choices for himself and is taking control of himself. He is capable of initiating his own learning within his environment and make his own choices and decisions. He felt secure within his learning environment, which was unruled by adults (Ephgrave, 2018) and was able to figure his identity by experiencing another world (Holland, 1998). It is hard to be certain as to whether he was playing the role of adult, father, chef, cleaner or another area where the kitchen would be used. This space offered him a multitude of differing identities and an opportunity to imitate the socially desirable behaviour of these adult-roles and 'adjust their actions to meet the norms associated' (Kozulin, 2003:164) with them. Without this use of language, it is hard – as the observer – to be sure as to which role he is taking part of in this play; however, it has made me aware of the importance of the role that language plays.

Corey used the kitchen tools to mediate his identity. This particular figured identity is personal to his own experience, he had something which others cannot tell, but can only speculate as to what role he was playing. When children tried to join in with his play, he did not appear to notice or hear them. This experience was his alone. Bakhtinian discourse explains that '*language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the*

other... The word in language is half someone else's' (Holland et al, 171-172). Corey was not allowing others to be part of his internal dialogue. He had created a space for authoring which he resided alone within. He was taking a powerful position in keeping his dialogic imagination to himself. In Bakhtin's terms, the meaning that we make of ourselves is, "authoring the self," and the space in which authoring occurs is defined by the "vocal" perspectives on the social world (Holland et al, 1998:173). Corey left his friends and teachers only able to guess what he was doing, suggesting he was authoring the self. Dahlberg et al (2007) explains this as a 'game' of 'Guess what I am thinking of?' where teachers provide clues and the child tries to figure out the answer. In this example, Corey challenges this idea as he leaves the teacher/researcher trying to 'guess' what he was doing through the actions he was doing and the expressions he was making.

> *Corey continued playing for a further 10 minutes before he noticed all of his peers had gone. He quickly turned around, noticed I was stood at the door to nursery, waited a short while, put all his kitchen tools down and ran towards the door. I explained to Corey that he could continue in the kitchen if he wanted to, but he carried on inside to wash his hands ready for snack.*

This seems to suggest that Corey could be entangled in the disciplinary nature of education as he would normally follow routines as requested by the adults and is regulating his behaviour to fit with his nursery experience. Corey seemed shocked that he had not heard the request to come inside for snack. The fact that he listened to the advice of the teacher and tried to continue playing but then runs inside suggests that he felt uncomfortable with the idea of not conforming to the regular rules and routines. His behaviour suggests that perhaps he felt he had pushed the boundaries and disregarded the rules. He was in a situation where he did not want to get into trouble and conforms to the usual routine immediately even when the teacher has told him he can continue. It is possible that he is aware of the 'gaze' of the teacher as Foucault (1977:217) discusses and relates to Bentham's panopticon. Bentham's (2008, initially 1787) panopticon was originally developed for the control of humans (or animals) and is now associated with prisons, where the gaze of the other may be felt at all times, even when they are not there. This was used for disciplinary purposes and to

enforce self-regulation. Again, this resonates with vignette 2 with the water play observation when Jim felt the gaze of his teacher.

I also considered my own decision to allow him to continue in his play and struggled to understand why it would be okay for him to continue playing while everyone else has to tidy their toys away. I have allowed him to extend his learning through play and have granted his play as a valuable experience but have not done the same for the other children. I am essentially allowing his autonomy and agency in the environment. He is 'the chosen one'. Again, this resonates with vignette 3 in the jigsaw observation where Izzy was able to continue her activity whilst the rest of the class had to tidy up. I have come to realise that I am able to give and remove children's autonomy and agency as I make decisions to either enforce or ignore the routines in place within the nursery setting. This vignette has shown how I am able to bend the rules when I perceive to do so.

Viewing this observation from another angle, I reflect on an extract from my personal journal, which stated…

> *His face looked in shock when he froze, thinking, 'I'm gonna be in trouble now'. When he turned his back, he saw me stood at the door and I told him to carry on with his busy job. He continued for a short while and then placed all the items back where they would be placed in a kitchen.*

I began to orchestrate voices for Corey within my own personal journal as I stated *'I'm gonna be in trouble now'*. I had not heard this but assumed that was what his facial expressions were telling me. I noticed the importance of facial expressions as another form of 'talk'. I had used his 'shocked' expression to tell me a story about how he was feeling in that moment. Although Corey had not used verbal language within this observation as he played independently, I became aware that I was assessing his body language in order to tell me a story to explain my own perception of the observation.

> *He continued for a short while*

Corey continued for a short while but then chose to conform to the usual rules within the setting. He tried out his positional identity and was working within his space for authoring but appeared to conform to the performative pressures placed within educational settings. The classroom is underpinned by structure and routine and, although Corey was enjoying autonomy while working within the kitchen, he quickly decided to leave his play and join in with the routines of the nursery. This could be down to the conditioning of routines and expectations, or it could be that he was scared of missing out in what was coming next. Afraid of not conforming, his friend then came in, as initially instructed by the teacher, leaving Corey outside in the kitchen. His friend became an important addition to this observation as it is appeared as though he was afraid of being the 'bad' child (MacLure, 2012), and therefore chose to conform to the expected rules and routines as instructed by the teacher leaving his friend to 'get in trouble'. The power structure that he is naturally part of may have governed his identity through vigilance (MacLure, 2012).

This observation highlighted the performative structures within schools and the possibility that children are conforming to routines in order to be the 'good' child. It also shows the importance of language in order to understand what I was observing. Without the verbal communication, I can only 'guess' what I am witnessing and build an objective perspective through observed actions. The space which I created – the kitchen – became an important part for Corey's learning and development as he used these mediating tools to author the 'self' and achieve high levels of involvement which helped for the development of an autonomous individual with agency.

4.6 A Collection of Reflections on the different roles that the journal has played: My personal Journal

I have never recognised the strength of my feelings towards the educational systems and that of my developing career as an early years teacher until I read back over my own journal. Feelings of anger, excessive use of exclamation marks and the additional comments I add in between the brackets, have made me see that when I write my journal at the end of each day, I am not experiencing moments of happiness and pleasure, but rather anger and frustration. My journal has become the mediating factor between my personal identity with that of my professional identity and expectations as a teacher. In the following extract, I reflected an incident where I was asked by the Deputy Head to authorise a staff absence from nursery. This led me to receive an abrupt email from my line manager (who works below the Deputy Head) explaining that I do not have the authority to authorise staff absences as part of my job role as Nursery Manager. I only manage the staff in terms of where they are situated within the classroom environment.

> *My position has been made clear that I do not have control of the teaching and learning part of my role. 'I only manage staff'.*

In the orchestration of voices (Holland et al, 1998), I find myself mimicking comments of my work colleagues in order to portray the feelings and emotions which I am experiencing. Adding voices to my story offers a different inner dialogue. Rather than using this journal just as a way to reflect my own feelings, the voices of others have also become part of my own story.

I notice that throughout my writing within this journal, I continue to add brackets to my words allowing the dialogue of my inner voice to add additional value to this comment as a way to portray my feelings about the Read, Write Inc programme.

> *They will be focusing on Phase 1 sounds and blending words (at three years old)!*

This additional layer of commentary, where I allow my feelings to surface gives me a chance to take control of the situation by making my feelings clear (Bakhtin, 1981). I have found my voice. I have found it through the use of a journal and a keyboard. I am heteroglossic. Bakhtin (1981:291 – 292) explains this as;

> all languages of heteroglossia… are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.

I am able to provide feelings which I would not speak out loud and I have created another space for authoring my feelings. This journal has become an important artifact in figuring my own multiple and sometime competing personal and professional identities reflected in these different voices.

I am part of what Ball describes as a culture of performativity (Ball, 2015). I am following the rules, I am self-regulated and I do as I am asked by the school management team and, indirectly, by the government, even when this goes against the grain of my own thoughts, feelings an opinions. In the following example, I voiced my opinion that the teaching assistants should not need to take part in the additional time that clubs take after school, as the teaching assistants already lose fifteen minutes during their own dinner time in order to cover Reception dinner times. I articulate my feeling that my role of 'Nursery Lead' is just a title. I am not part of the senior leadership team including the Headteacher and the Deputy Headteacher and this is challenging my role (Foucault, 1975).

> *Having said that, I haven't really got a say in the matter. I am unsure what my role as 'Nursery Lead' consists of, but I don't feel like I have much say in any matter that arises.*

By acknowledging my lack of power, I am taking control of the situation. I am finding my own space for authoring through explaining my feelings and authoring the situation. I am

heteroglossic as I represent the self through the language I speak in my journal (Bakhtin, 1981). I use this journal as an opportunity to stake my claim to power. No one can touch the space within my writing in my journal. This journal has become an important artifact in authoring my professional identity as a teacher and has supported me in recognising how I must consider my position within this learning space. This highlights the importance of considering my own personal and professional *funds of knowledge* (Hedges, 2012) within these socially mediating play experiences and how this may affect the child's experiences with the world.

I have noticed that many times throughout the first month in my new role as Early Years Lead, I am trying to assert my position, but I am being told on a number of occasions 'no'. The senior leadership team enforced the expected routine and structure (such as dinner at a certain time) and have insisted that nothing changes outside of the 'norm'. I have noticed I am continually challenging the 'norm' in order to benefit the needs of the children as discussed from an extract from my journal below.

When asked by the senior leadership team to ensure that Nursery children have workbooks, I dismissed this idea and explained the importance of learning through play and spending more time in conversation with the children to develop their communication and language skills. My advice was overruled and the workbooks did have to go ahead, but again, attempted to retain some agency by contributing to the design of these books and the expectations around the kind of work that would be completed within them. I am contesting the use of the artifact (in this case, the workbook) in order to work better for the children and their learning.

> *I have decided to base a lot of the work inside this book on talking activities and writing lots of post-it notes of direct speech whilst they are carrying out the work.*
> *I have also decided to allow children to follow their own direction during the activity and allow them to control what will happen during the discussion.*

Here I am taking back my positional identity and reinstating my control. Like the children working within their learning environment, I have managed to find a space to produce alternative contexts and employ a tactic to negotiate school power relations (Wohlwend,

2011:13). I have found a space to empower a different identity, allowing me to invent a way to work through the constraints of dominant discourses in school (Wohlwend, 2011:15). I will do workbooks but under my own conditions and space of authoring. Conditions which suit my understandings of being a teacher within a nursery. I am figuring myself within my new role as 'Nursery Lead' and my professional judgements attempt to put the needs of the child's development at the centre (Holland et al, 1998).

Throughout this journal, I see a continual forming and reforming of my professional identity as a teacher being challenged. Sometimes I am happy in the role of the teacher I have become. Other times, I question why I became a teacher at all. When a child was completing a teacher activity at the table, the child said, *'Can I go and play now?'.* My personal journal shows how this question made me feel.

> *… I felt like I had failed him …My dilemma here, is how do I satisfy the needs of the curriculum and the needs of the Headteacher.*

I begin to question my own practice and my own professional identity as a teacher as I write about my feelings of guilt and failure. I am figuring my own identity as a teacher who is constrained to the performative structures within the educational setting of a primary school. I have 'failed' him, is a large burden to bear and I wonder what other jobs I would be a part of that would make me feel this way.

In the incident that I reflected on within the journal extract above, the little boy was figuring his own positional identity. He demonstrates that he is not afraid to ask the question to his teacher who is in a powerful position. Whilst he is asserting his positional of power, I begin to lose my own. When analysing this extract I reflected on all the other children who may not have found sufficient space of authoring to allow them to ask this question; choosing to conform to the teacher's wishes, even when they didn't want to.

There are times within my journal where I have documented occasions where I have been able to author myself as the kind of teacher I want to be: a teacher who can successfully access an area of interest for a child in order for them to love their learning experiences. This

extract taken from my personal journal documents my feelings towards the child's learning experience in vignette 5 (the kitchen observation).

> *This was an AMAZING experience to be a part of. The other staff were confused that I had afforded him this extra time in his play but what I was witnessing felt like a 'blossoming' moment in his own learning.*

I have been able to verbalise my position by explaining this moment as 'blossoming' as well as using capital letters to emphasise just how amazing the experience was. With this extract, the amazing experience which I was observing was the child being so involved with their learning that they were completely unaware of time and space around them. This was the first time I had experienced this as a teacher and although I discuss this being a 'blossoming' moment in his learning, this was also a 'blossoming' moment in my own professional identity. I use language within my journal to control and explain my emotions in this space I have created, I am confirming that I am a 'good' teacher and that I am capable of satisfying the needs of the children. I have figured my world as a teacher again and reconfirming my identity as a teacher and what I want to be like as a teacher.

Although I am happy that 'planning-in-the-moment' has 'afforded him this extra time in his play' and have realised that 'play' is encouraging this child to become an autonomous individual, again, I struggle with the control and power I have over the room. Affording this extra time in play – as an 'in-the-moment' approach would support - has celebrated this little boy's autonomy and agency in relation to this space he was working within, but I have not valued the autonomy and agency of the other children in the class within their 'play' experiences, who had to 'tidy up' when asked first time. I am the hierarchical power; I am able to give autonomy and agency and I am able to take this away. As Mills (2003) discusses, individuals are able to enact or resist power using multiple systems which are strategically used to inform their decision. From reflecting on these moments where I felt I was figuring my identity as a teacher who wants to follow the child's interests in order to promote a love of learning, I am now questioning these feelings once again in a continual readjustment in my own identity as a teacher (Holland et al, 1998). 'Planning-in-the-moment' has offered

autonomy and agency to this little boy during his play experience, but this approach must be used carefully in order to ensure fairness and equality in the classroom.

Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

The vignettes (outlined in chapter 4) show my initial thinking when grappling with the research data and have generated themes which have occurred throughout some or all the observations. This was an important step when organising the data as these focused the findings into discussions around these developing themes.

The section describes how the processes of thematic analysis and cross-case comparison along with the use of reflection have assisted my thinking and meaning-making throughout the study. I will then return to the aims of the study and discuss how the findings have addressed these aims and generated new understandings in relation to the research questions.

5.1 Themes

The themes identified within the vignettes are outlined in Table 3 along with examples for each. Generating this table enabled me to organise, connect and make sense of these themes to support the cross-case analysis method in the following section.

5.2 Table of Themes with Examples from Data Collection

Key themes and subthemes which have been identified through the analysis of this research are;		Examples from the Vignettes
Themes	1. Mediating Artifacts	The water play observation (vignette 2) and the volcano observation use open-ended objects within the environment. The kitchen observation (vignette 5) uses subject-specific artifacts in the construction of identity within role play. My personal journal (vignette 6) became the mediating artifact in the development of 'self'.
	1.1 Open-ended artifacts	The doctor's observation (vignette 1) uses objects within a predetermined environment facilitating 'mini worlds'. The open-ended artifacts in the water play observation (vignette 2) and the volcano observation (vignette 4) allowed children to follow their own interests.
	2. Reforming 'self', positions and roles	The water play observation (vignette 2) and the volcano observation (vignette 4) exemplify the mediation of positional power through language. The volcano observation (vignette 4) demonstrates a change in roles and a re-authoring of 'self' through addressivity and their response to being addressed. The kitchen observation (vignette 5) demonstrates the importance of non-verbal communication within 'mini worlds'. The personal journal (vignette 6) offered a space for the authoring of 'self' through the rejecting and resisting of what was classed as a 'good teacher' through documenting my reflections in writing.
	3.Cultural Capital	The doctor's observation (vignette 1) and the volcano observation (vignette 4) illuminate the importance of the transformational relationship between social and cultural capital (Huang, 2019). The jigsaw observation (vignette 3) and the volcano observation (vignette 4) demonstrate how learnt subject specific knowledge can be used to gain a powerful position within play experiences facilitating 'mini worlds'.
	4. Performativity and Governmentality Pressures	The water play observation (vignette 2) considers the 'gaze' children are playing within in relation to the discourse. The jigsaw observation (vignette 3) and the kitchen observation (vignette 5) consider my position of validating some learning over others. The personal journal (vignette 6) recognises tensions faced by me as a practitioner working within the early years sector.

Table of Themes (Table 3)

5.2 Cross-Case Analysis

This section – organised according to themes and sub-themes – uses a cross-case comparison method based on Merriam's (2001) book on Qualitative research and case study applications in education. The theoretical framework of figured worlds to uncover a detailed analysis of each theme, to investigate possible contributions, implications and limitations of this research study. By exploring these themes I seek to address the three research questions which underpin the study.

5.3 Theme 1: The use of artifacts to mediate the 'authoring of 'self'

An initial theme which arose within the data is that all five observations of the children as well as my own personal journal involved the use of artifacts to 'author the self', a phrase used by Holland et al (1998) to capture how objects in the environment may affect the positioning of 'self'. These mediating artifacts ranged from a plastic skeleton, a jigsaw, a cardboard cone, water and water tools, a kitchen and, finally, the journal in which I documented this research journey. Figured worlds underpinned by the use of artifacts, performances, discourses and activities that happen within them and in the mediation of human action in order to 'open up' figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998:61). Artifacts 'are the means by which figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned, and made socially and personally powerful' (Holland et al, 1998:61). The following sections are subthemes which have formed through reflections on the vignettes alongside the theoretical framework of figured worlds.

5.3.1 Mediating artifacts in the forming, reforming and positioning of 'self'

Reflecting on the importance of artifacts within my own figuring as a practitioner and researcher, I realised how the journal itself had become an important factor in the 'liberation and expansion of [my] human capacities' (Holland et al, 1998:64), acting as a mediating tool for the forming and reforming of my professional identity. As I moved through the project, my professional identity was never consistent nor static but 'constantly changing' positions (Holland et al, 1998:63) as I began to recognise myself through the social worlds I am working in. Although I recognise my limited power throughout my journal, I also learn how to control myself from the outside (Vygotsky 1978 cited in Holland et al, 1998:64). I am learning how to position myself and the way in which I want to be figured as a teacher, taking back control of

the situation in this recognition. I have used the artifact – my journal – as a space to document my thoughts and feelings in order to author the self. I became heteroglossic using the journal, as I used the journal as an opportunity to stake my claim to power and show 'the possibilities of *becoming*' (Holland et al, 1998:64).

My 'inner speech', described by Voloshinov (1986:86) as a "stabilized social audience, is recorded within this journal, documenting the evolution of reason, motives and values as I navigate my professional environment (Holland et al, 1998:189). I mimic *'I only manage staff'* within my journal as a way to say the thoughts which I would not speak out loud. It demonstrates how languages 'evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia' (Bakhtin, 1981:292) and how the words I speak in my journal allow me to orchestrate my professional 'self' with my own intentions and values. The following quote from my personal journal, is an example of how the journal allows me to put my 'inner speech' into black and white, exposing thoughts which I would not produce within 'outer speech' to others (Holland et al, 1998:188).

> *Having said that, I haven't really got a say in the matter. I am unsure what my role as 'Nursery Lead' consists of, but I don't feel like I have much say in any matters that arise. (Journal, 10th September 2018).*

Using this journal, I have found a way to work with the governmental constraints in order to gain autonomy and agency as a teacher and the construction of my professional identity. The journal acted as a space to allow my inner speech to come to the surface and allow me to become agentic within my role as teacher. I have found my 'space for authoring' within my role as teacher. This will be explored further in the 'forming and reforming of self' section.

5.4 Theme 1.1 Open-ended objects facilitating 'mini worlds'

The cultural artifacts – with a particular focus on open-ended objects - included within the children's classroom became an important consideration when reflecting on the environment and space the children are playing within. All five observations show children independently interacting with their learning environment in topics which have interested them. Within each of these particular observations, the children all demonstrated high levels of involvement (Laevers, 2003) with children appearing to be in a state of 'flow' (Csikzentmihayli, 1990). This

was important for Holland et al's (1998:272) understanding of the importance of 'making worlds' through "serious play" where play can support children in developing agency by engaging their funds of identity. Children within this state of flow are following their interests whilst ascribing new meanings to them. Children are acting with agency and mediating their sense of 'self' which is continuously shaped and reshaped. Identity and agency are being developed recipriocally. There were other instances throughout daily practice where children were and were not in a state of flow, however, these vignettes were chosen for analysis as they are rich in information on how 'planning-in-the-moment' may provide a space for authoring self providing high levels of involvement.

5.4.1 Open-ended artifacts facilitating 'mini worlds' in the environment

An open-ended early years environment has the potential for artifacts to provide unlimited open-ended opportunities for play and subsequent learning. Wohlwend (2017) explains that children's early learning environments provide a space for learner-led opportunities that are emergent and play-based. By observing children within their environment, teachers are able to identify and enchance children's interests by adding materials, artifacts and objects to support open-ended learning and exploratory play. The varied use of the cardboard cone-shaped construction piece in the children's play echoes Lenz-Taguchi's (2010) point that open-ended objects can 'serve as tools of liberation from control by environmental stimuli' (Holland et al, 1998:63) as children are able to be creative in response to their own environment. Open-ended objects allow children to follow their interests in a less structured environment using their own culture and personal drive 'as resources to construct a narrative' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:114). The open-ended objects become meaningful and provide a sense of freedom, promoting the autonomous and agentic child through a collaboration of interactions with others and their personal histories.

The water play area was a permanent feature within the early years outdoor classroom, reflecting a typical set-up within many early years classrooms. As the practitioner, I had created a 'socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others' (Holland et al, 1998:52). By constructing the classroom in this way, I am orchestrating children's opportunities to engage with activities within their

'mini worlds' which are relevant to everyday life, allowing children to begin to learn the expectations ready for the 'real world'. These 'mini' figured worlds are created as the representation of the real world where children are interacting with the environment and others in the development of – what Holzman (2018:45) – discusses as '*becoming*'. It is within these 'real' 'mini' worlds where children are learning to *know* within their play through interactions and developing interests for meaning-making and for 'making worlds' (Holland et al, 1998:272). Within the water observation we also see children not only interacting with their peers, but interacting with everyday tools such as crates, tubes, guttering and water pipes, in order for children to understand the purpose of these objects, build their own symbolic understandings (Holland et al, 1998:272) and to creatively respond to something they choose for themselves, through interaction with the artifact and social interaction in play experiences. For example, the crates were placed at the side of the water play area as 'loose parts' to be used throughout any area within the outdoor playground. The children used these crates to explore their water play further by placing the guttering at a steeper angle. The use of open-ended objects led to the children becoming motivated and fascinated with their activity. This enabled the children to be involved in "serious play" (Holland et al, 1998:272) as they were able to creatively respond to the materials which were available. This supports Hedges (2021) findings, where teachers are required to expose children to multiple sources of learning and funds of knowledge in order for them to choose those which interest them. This open-ended artifact offered a space for the children to 'make it their own' and follow an interest which inspired them, in turn developing their agency and formation of their identity. When Jim came to the end of the water play construction he had built he decided to *'make it bigger.'* He did not want this activity to end as he was totally immersed in it, reaching level 5 Involvement (Laevers, 2003).

The use of open-ended objects is also a key feature within the volcano observation as the child interacts with a cardboard cone-shaped object found in the construction area and uses this as a volcano in order to follow his own interests as part of the 'in-the-moment-planning' approach. The cardboard-cone shaped object acts as a "pivot", a 'tangible symbol' (Holland et al, 1998:50) that may create different meanings in different figured worlds in the future. Through interactions within play worlds, children can access powerful identities and practices by mediating their social histories and shared norms for belonging (Wohlwend, [2011]

2017:63). As pointed out by Barron (2013), the western world of early years education has a pre-existing figured world relevant to this study in order for children to have the opportunity to "pivot" into different worlds in the hope this will broaden their learning experiences. This open-ended object had offered the child the opportunity to creatively respond and pursue an area of interest for himself. Vygotsky highlighted 'the role of tangible objects, made collectively into artifacts by attribution of meaning, as tools that people use to affect their own and others' thinking, feeling, and behaviour' (Holland et al, 1998:50). Within the kitchen vignette (vignette 5), artifacts (mini spoons, cups and a child-size sink) had been arranged by me, as the practitioner, to create a mini-world for the children to play in. This allowed children 'to manipulate their worlds and themselves by means of symbols' (Vygotsky's, 1978) (Holland et al, 1998:49) which they have seen in their own home. These worlds – as orchestrated by the practitioners – may not be of interest for each individual child suggesting some children may find it difficult to follow their interests when artifacts are too subject-specific.

As pointed out by Barron (2013), the western world of early years education replicates pre-existing figured worlds relevant to this study. Early years classrooms consist of snack times, story time, creative and messy play, sand and water play, construction materials, role play and child-sized furniture to represent the home (Barron, 2013). This is created in order for the 'instructing adults' to be able to support the children's learning and promote particular ways of being within 'a diverse yet powerful social universe' (Holland et al, 1998:272). Practitioners providing these spaces – or 'mini worlds' – within their continuous provision are essentially moulding children to be well developed models of our society. 'Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents' who are a part of 'meaningful acts' that are 'moved by a specific set of forces' (Holland et al, 1998:52). Although Corey (in vignette 5) is interacting freely within this space and is demonstrating high levels of involvement, we – as practitioners – have appropriated this space with the correct utensils to ensure the child is gaining valuable information within this 'mini world' about the space of a kitchen which brings to question the extent of 'individual authorship' (Holland et al, 1998:272) when this space is appropriated by practitioners.

Although practitioners may assume they are providing child-centred practice, they may 'simultaneously adopt positions of power to ban or restrict certain play interest and choices'

(Chesworth, 2016:297). This is one of the reasons why it was important for me to consider my own authoring within this space. Children's activities in reality are 'manipulated by adult-imposed restrictions in terms of what, where and how play is allowed to take place' (Chesworth, 2016:297). Although he has chosen to take part in the play world of the kitchen which has been setup by the practitioner and he is showing high levels of involvement, his play is limited due to the tools which have been placed in the environment. He understands the cup is for drinking from and a spoon is for stirring the cake mixture, but his tools may have limited his imagination as he uses the tools for purpose. Corey uses the utensils for their required purpose. As argued by Casler & Kelemen (2005), children 'use social information to rapidly form enduring artifact categories' (Casler & Kelemen, 2005:472). Children quickly learn that particular objects have particular purposes; after using a particular artifact just once with its functional purpose in-mind, they will begin to understand the use of the tool as 'for' that particular purpose and avoid using it for another feasible purpose. Corey does use tools for the expected purpose within this kitchen observation, but this has developed through his own funds of knowledge which he has observed adults fulfil and has gained traction in his interest. Although these utensils offered within this 'mini world' provided a space for Corey to re-represent and re-imagine experiences, early years environments would also benefit from using open-ended artifacts such as tubes, guttering and buckets. This would help children develop their own interests through personal application of its use providing space for 'play and imagination for creating and crafting learning possibilities' (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:115) within a 'mini world' of their choice.

Corey in the kitchen observation demonstrated high levels of involvement (Laevers, 2003) with his activity as he was unaware of the request to tidy away by the teacher as he was so involved with his play. Corey was involved in "serious play: (Holland et al, 1998:272) experiencing a state of 'flow' as suggested by Csikzentmihayli (1990). Corey has learned to detach himself from his reactions to his 'immediate surroundings, to enter a play world – and to react to the imagined objects and events of that world' (Holland et al, 1998:50). Although all of the observations show children deeply engaged with their activities, this is the only observation where the child became so deeply engrossed with his activity that he did not hear the requests of his teachers and therefore, continued with his activity until he eventually noticed all the children had disappeared around him.

5.4.2 Artifacts in a predetermined environment and topic

The only observation where children were immersed in an activity that was directly related to the current learning topic was that of the 'Doctor's Observation'. The current topic at the time of the observation focused on 'bodies'. To support this topic I had developed a role play area appropriated with the 'cultural tool kit' (Holland et al., 2001: 65) of a 'doctor's surgery'. Pre-determined planning within this topic led to the plastic skeleton being placed in the role play area along with the kinds of surgical tools you might find within the doctor's surgery. These artifacts were placed there to provide opportunities for children to interact with and build their knowledge through play (Holland et al, 1998). The four other child-led observations were not related to the current early years topic and emerged from the imagination of the children.

The doctor's observation took place within a predetermined environment using 'constructed symbols…learned though social interaction' (Holland et al, 1998:6), in other words objects which were placed there to be used in a very specific way by the children. The cardboard box, on the other hand, could provide a multitude of imaginative experiences through refiguring the object in order to creatively respond to the object. These reflections on the limitless potentiality of artifacts led me to wonder if the leg of the skeleton had not broken, would the space for authoring which opened up within the observation have occurred as the object may not have allowed space for imagination and creativity. What is interesting about the plastic skeleton within this observation is that the children have made the skeleton bones a proxy for a whole 'flesh and blood' person's body demonstrating how they have chosen to refigure this object in order to creatively respond to it. They are demonstrating their potential as creative and resourceful individuals, using the artifact to make meanings inline with their emerging interests (Wohlwend, 2011). This suggests that there is a place for some subject-specific artifacts being placed within the classroom in order to broaden the children's knowledge and linguistic repertoire about a specific subject, as it is possible for children to creatively and imaginatively respond to the artifacts even if they are subject-specific. An example of this is clear within The Doctor's observation, where children creatively responded and crafted their figured worlds to the theme within the classroom, which enabled them with a space for possibility as Urrieta Jr, (2007a:115) discusses. However, this particular observation has made me question whether the children would have demonstrated such high

levels of involvement had the leg of the skeleton not have initially broken off. It is hard to imagine what the children may have done with this skeleton had the leg not broken off and created a need to 'fix' the problem. Pristine objects that have been carefully designed to enrich a particular topic have the potential to support subject-specific knowledge and understanding in order to extend the children's learning about a subject, however, practitioners following subject specific topics may curate the classroom to fit into the current theme or topic following the desire to be 'a good' teacher and align with conventional practices.

Providing items which are related to the theme, may provide limited learning opportunities for children who are not interested in that particular topic and therefore, practitioners should be observing subsequent interactions and engagement with the topic to assess whether the children are stimulated by the theme or not. This acknowledges that there is a space for a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach within the early years environment and supports the use of open-ended artifacts for children to follow an area of personal interest. It has shown the importance of providing objects that can allow children to creatively respond to their play, in order to 'exercise their imaginations' and introduce their own topics of interests to their play (Woods, 2017:89). However, this study also recognises the importance for some subject-specific objects to be included within the early years environment in order for children – especially those children who may have less experience of the mini-worlds that teachers seek to create – to provide them with a broader knowledge of understanding of the world, to support language development and develop their cultural capital (more on this in section 5.5 and 5.9). Reflecting on the particular artifact of the skeleton within the doctor's observation, it is static and has been placed in this environment to support learning of a topic. Children following interests and '*making worlds*: through "serious play,"' allows new figured worlds to come about (Holland et al, 1998:272). Practitioners need to deepen learning through topics of interests and social interaction to fully meet developmental needs across emotional, physical and mental health development (White, 2008) supporting how practitioners use imaginative play as a way for children to access these 'play worlds' in order for "serious play" (Holland et al, 1998:272) to occur.

The cultural artifact of the skeleton is used in this environment in order to assist the children's performances as actors in their world (Holland et al, 1998), mediating what is culturally significant. They are forming in practice – by becoming the doctor and nurse in their role play – using the cultural resource of the skeleton to author themselves in the moment (Holland and Lave, 2009). The skeleton became a mediating device in which the children were able to enter the world of a doctor, interact, author the 'self' in relation to a medical professional and continue a 'flow' within their play, through language and prior knowledge around 'the body', to help in the mediation of their positional identity. Teachers leave such artifacts in the environment in the hope that children will learn about it through social interaction in their play (Holland et al, 1998). The cultural artifacts that teachers use in order to enhance the environment with the current theme or topic are then used within the child's figured world in order to mediate positional identity in the social world to recognise 'self' and 'position individuals with respect to those worlds' (Holland et al, 1998:63). When deciding how to use cultural artifacts to foster children's interests, teachers need to be mindful that an interesting idea for one child may not be of equal interest to others and therefore they should provide multiple topics or themes where appropriate. As Al-Mansour (2018:127) argues, although children were involved with pretend play and were playing as a group immersed within the same theme with opportunities for social interaction and artifacts which promoted open-ended play, 'they had very different agendas and plans to serve their play', which this research study has continued to implement throughout the 'in-the-moment' approach. This suggests that the focus must be placed on a diverse approach to teaching subject-specific topics with a rich environment that can promote independent and creative learning with endless possibilities for open-ended questioning, investigations and never-static, open-ended objects like the water play area evidences within this research study. This is not suggesting that an environment driven by a particular topic does not have a place within this space, but requires careful work from practitioners to ensure all children are included and engaged with an area of interest in their learning. The doctors observation within this study is a good example of how an object which appeared static, offered opportunities for the children to use their imagination when the leg fell off. The leg falling off should be seen as an opportunity for enriching learning rather than the issue that the object had broken. In order to provide this stimulating, child-centred environment, it requires experienced teachers given enough

time to plan and prepare, along with training on how to carry out an 'in-the-moment' approach (Power, 2019).

The curriculum should offer children the opportunity to think critically and creatively, to help solve problems and to make a difference nurturing them towards becoming creative leaders in their future lives (Sharp, 2004). However, the practitioner should still keep in mind the necessity to broaden the children's knowledge and linguistic repertoires. Planning for effective learning needs to be themed around the children's interests, as mediated through the teacher's understanding of the child's funds of knowledge (Hedges, 2021) and not solely by curriculum guidance, gender or fads at that time. Wohlwend (2012:593) refers to this as children's 'immersive engagements with commercial transmedia' which has 'sparked controversy over the identity-shaping potential of gender stereotypes'. It is important for teachers to follow the children's interests by ensuring careful observation of the child in their play and listen to their conversations throughout this experience in order to fully understand what children are interested in, rather than assuming their interests are based on stereotyping and what they deem to be popular currently. Role-play areas can have enhancements within them but the stimulus and enhancements provided may be used in very different ways from what we – as practitioners – may expect, as play enables 'improvisations by recontextualising the here-and-now reality of the classroom' (Wohlwend,2012: 607).

Practitioners need to ensure they are allowing children the space to creatively respond to their environment and not discourage children from using different artifacts within different areas of the classroom. If children are interacting with the enhancements and using them differently than expected, they are able to use their imagination and extend their creative thinking through crafting their figured world to enable possibility (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:112). Ensuring opportunities for children to engage with artifacts in open-ended ways will offer children the chance to engage in a range of processes and develop key skills. Providing open-ended role-play will inspire the 'awe and wonder' as they discover an interest for themselves. However, as noticed within the doctor's observation, subject-specific role-plays do have a place within the early years environment when practitioners intend to broaden the knowledge of a particular subject and therefore, should not be permanently removed from the early years classroom.

5.4.3 Open-ended artifacts removed as the children progress into Reception

An important aspect of the doctor's observation was that it took place when the children were in the first half-term of their reception year. The other four observations took place during their nursery experience. This led to me reflecting upon the difference between the open-ended objects available in the nursery classroom with that of the static, aesthetically pleasing subject-specific objects available in the reception classroom. Within the reception classroom children are subjected to a more structured, formal play experience, with continuous provision activities that are aimed at the learning and construction of specific pre-prescribed knowledge rather than a free-play experience. This research led me to question whether this approach is actually detrimental to the child's learning experience as it may limit children's opportunities to interact freely with artifacts in a way that builds on their histories-in-person. The formal structured routines and environments that the reception classroom offers, may potentially provide limited expression of interests for the children suggesting their space for authoring for autonomy and agency may be hindered if they are not also given the opportunity to interact with open-ended objects. This 'all-work-no-play approach to early learning' (Wohlwend, 2017:64) has occurred through the watchful eye of schools under state scrutiny, where teachers are assessed against national league tables and their implementation of scripted curricula (Wohlwend, 2017:64). As a practitioner I recognise the importance of structure within schools to inform children of the parameters they are working within and the need to show a progressive environment from nursery to reception. However, to work with these more formal approaches employed in the reception classroom, data from this study suggest practitioners should provide some opportunities for open-ended objects within the environment to allow for exploratory play in order to respond to these artifacts with their own personal interests. This would offer space for authoring as the practitioners recognise and respond to the children's interests rather than guiding children through pre-prescribed learning experiences at all times.

5.4.4 Summary of theme 1: The use of artifacts to mediate the 'authoring of self' and the potential value of open-ended objects in facilitating 'mini worlds'

All of the observations which have used an 'in-the-moment' approach – where I have been able to follow the children's learning rather than ask them to carry out a teacher activity – have offered high levels of involvement for some of the children involved through play worlds which are 'made up of Geertz's (1973b) "web of meaning"' (Holland et al, 1998:51). "Web of meaning" refers to figured worlds which include 'cultural realms peopled by characters from collective imaginings: academia, the factory, crime, romance' etc (Holland et al, 1998:51). This approach appears to intrinsically motivate children to learn allowing for sustained levels of concentration and fascination with an activity, where children are able to 'take shape within and grant shape to the coproduction of activities, discourse, performances, and artifacts' (Holland et al, 1998:51). In providing open-ended artifacts, children are able to freely express their personal preference of interests facilitating the creation of 'mini worlds' – both verbally and non-verbally – through interactions which author the 'self'. The vignettes provide examples of how such materials can enable the mediation of shared histories (Wohlwend, 2017). Once this has been achieved, children are able to achieve high levels of involvement as per Laever's (2003) scale for measuring involvement and wellbeing. Children can find their space for authoring using open-ended artifacts to construct meaning in order to creatively respond to their learning environment through interactions that rely on both non-verbal and verbal communications. This allows for children to author their play world, lead their learning and figure themselves through open-ended objects in order for them to respond creatively and imaginatively, as a way to work within the constraints which the educational environment creates. This strongly suggests that that open-ended objects do have a place within the early years classroom and not all artifacts need to be subject-specific in order for children to learn.

5.5 Theme 2: Continual forming and reforming of 'self', positions and roles

A consistent theme throughout all five observations of children in their early years environment and my reflections within my research journal is the continual changing and reforming of 'self', positions and roles, presenting the complex nature of being a child and a teacher in an educational setting. All five observations of the children as well as data from my own journal demonstrate how language was a key mediator in the interactions between children and between child and teacher which contributed to the authoring of 'self'.

5.5.1 Language as a tool to form, reform and position 'self' through addressivity

The concepts of positional (real world interpersonal) identities and figurative (within imaginative role playing) identities, which are constantly at play, in dynamic relations with each other and never static, may provide an opportunity in the authoring 'self' through the continual forming and reforming of 'self' for agency and autonomy. Starting with the reflection of my own personal journal, I have become aware that my diary has become a space to direct my personal thoughts and opinions, which I would not have expressed to others. The journal had essentially become my companion as my voice was being heard by myself as I wrote my thoughts down. This relates to Bakhtin's notion of dialogism in which 'there is no human action which is singularly expressive' (Holland et al, 1998:169) and 'there is a constant interaction between meanings' (Bakhtin, 1981:426). I use the journal to 'answer' my figured world to allow my space for authoring my professional self. Holquist (2002:47) explains this idea;

> *"So long as I am in existence, I am in a particular place, and must respond to all these stimuli either by ignoring them or in a response that takes the form of making sense, of producing – for it is a form of work –* ***meaning*** *out of such utterances."*

Throughout my journal, I go through the continual changing and reforming of 'self' through my professional role as teacher (discussed further in the next chapter). The words of others to which I have been addressed – for example *'Can I go and play now?''* – have caused tensions in my response between my professional identity and my personal identity. I "author" the world using 'pre-existing materials' and structures related to the educational context as Levi-Strauss (1996 cited in Holland et al, 1998:170) describes as 'bricolage'. In authoring myself through this journal, I draw upon 'the words of others' (Holland et al, 1998:170) – such as the colleagues I am associated with – to which I have been exposed in the reforming of 'self' to confirm that I am a 'good teacher'. I use this journal as recognition of good work and in the continuation of readjustment within my professional role. These moments within my personal journal led to moments of resistance, which were part of my collective experience of becoming a teacher and were what Bourdieu (2000:177) described

as “awakenings of consciousness”, which belong to the order of my own *beliefs* and my own funds of knowledge. This is my *‘space of symbolic position’* (Bourdieu, 2000:178) between the structure of the system of education and the agents (or myself) which produce them. This allowed my inner voice to reject and resist what was classed as a ‘good teacher’ which offered me “alternative figurings” to become available through these “ruptures of the taken-for-granted” (Holland et al, 1998:141). This was evident when I had to comply with the expectations of hierarchy to implement workbooks in nursery, but I decided to base a lot of the work on talking activities evidenced through post-it notes of direct speech and photographs and activities. This demonstrates the multitude of subject positions to choose from, from conforming to the requirements of a good teacher, to working within the constraints to make it my own. My professional role derives from a natural sense of my everyday routine (Törrönen, 2001) as a teacher and what I consider my professional role to entail. I work within the constraints in order to meet both hierarchical expectations and my own beliefs in what would be classed as a ‘good’ teacher.

5.5.2 The authoritative voice to gain a positional identity

Reflecting on the water play observation, language is used verbally in order to gain a positional identity. When Jim dictates to his ‘employees’ that they needed crates to make the engineering of the ‘water play’ even bigger, Jim begins to stake his claim as a powerful leader as demonstrated in the following extract from the water play observation;

> *‘Let’s get crates to make it bigger and hold it up!’ Said Jim. Izzy went straight off to get the crates. The children all helped to stack them. ‘Not that way! Sideways! Noooo the other way!’ Jim explained.*

These utterances ‘are shaped to the social situation’ and have positionality – as Voloshinov (1986:87) explains, as people coexist ‘in mutual orientation moving to action’ (Holland et al, 1998:169). Utterances ‘are constructed between socially-related and thus positioned persons’ (Holland et al, 1998:188). Jim has constructed his identity as superior in relation to Izzy. Through gaining a positional identity through utterance, Jim creates a neutral territory when he refers to me – his teacher with the hierarchical gaze – as ‘we’. ‘*What if we move that*

out the way and swap this? He asked.' Through language he has managed to change my role from participant to researcher/teacher and has worked within the constraints of dominant discourses of schools in order to empower a different identity which may not have been otherwise available (Wohlwend, 2011). Jim is seeing us both as equal through the use of the word 'we'. 'We' are the same. 'We' are capable of the same things. 'We' both have power over others. Through these utterances he has identified his position in relation to mine and Izzy's by mediating the feelings of being constrained and comfortable. For example, to speak to me (his teacher), he commands Izzy in order to enter into the space of another (his teacher) (Holland et al, 1998:127). *'Not that way! Sideways! Noooo the other way!' Jim explained.* The positional aspect of subject position is important within this example as it shows Jim's subject position has been strengthened and Izzy's subject position weakened (Törrönen, 2001). His social position is reliant on Izzy being present within the social world in the implementation of 'authoritative voices' (Holland et al, 1998:128).) His identity has been formed not only by being addressed by Izzy, 'but the act of responding' (Holland et al, 1998:172) which Izzy did. He was able to represent himself to himself 'from the vantage point (the word) of' (Holland et al, 1998:172) Izzy. The authoritative dialogue which Jim uses 'is fused with authority and power' (Cohen, 2009:338). It appears Izzy accepts Jim's authoritative discourse and acts on his requests as 'authoritative must be accepted without question' (Cohen, 2009:338). Jim – re-enacting the role of the adult through his pretend play – has gained authority and power over Izzy and she must adhere to his commands without questioning him as a leader. What is interesting about this observation is how Jim uses this 'authoritative voice' towards his employees, but when he speaks to myself – his teacher or his 'equal' – he shows consideration and kindness.

> *'Jason, help move the rest of the crates away!' asked Jim. 'Miss, are they hurting you? Let me move them off you.' Said Jim.*

Jim is showing authority within the differing 'contact zones' (Pratt, 1991) of adult and child. The difference in Jim's emotion of language becomes really clear within this example. Although Jim sees us both as teachers and as equals with this neutral territory, he is quick to help when he thinks the crates are hurting me and is aware of the authority within the 'contact zone'. Jim will not move the crates for his employees, he will move the crates for

other equals who have the same or similar status to himself. Jim is defining his identity through 'social representations and the dynamics of positioning between self and the other' (Andreouli, 2010) finding a space for authoring himself. As Duveen and Lloyd (1990) discuss, Jim is structuring his social world through the social representation of the object (in this example, the crates) as well as the position towards the crate that is available. It demonstrates how positions and meanings are the two necessary components in the construction of social identities. He has used his figured worlds to recreate versions of himself and therefore, develop a sense of agency.

5.5.3 Knowledge to gain a positional identity

Language can provide an important vehicle for the authoring of 'self', leading to changes in positionality. Language is sometimes used to demonstrate knowledge for 'mediating human activity' and 'mediating development of higher psychological processes' (Kozulin, 2033:94), which itself can be a vehicle for shifting power dynamics. Children working within these spaces in order to author the 'self' require many opportunities for interactions in order to develop their communication skills, as well as to use 'the languages, the dialects, the words of others to' (Holland et al, 1998:170) author the 'self' and develop the 'I'. Like the water play observation (as outlined in vignette 4), the child within the volcano observation uses language as a means to gain a position of power through their response to being addressed. When Chase offered valuable information through the use of language about the lava being hot, it enabled him to achieve a powerful position within the role play supporting the idea that 'the use of knowledge signals identity' (Holland et al, 1998:135). Within this example, Chase used the words – which 'come articulated by others' (Holland et al, 1998:171) – to develop the 'I', which incidentally changed his positional identity. As Bakhtin (1981) discusses, voices within differing groups - 'contact zones' - may carry more authority, prestige or power, suppressing the voices of other groups (which will be discussed in further detail in the social and cultural capital section in theme 3 of this chapter). In this example, the knowledge Chase had offered Jim suppressed Jim's voice and provided a space of authoring for Chase. Chase became the 'voice of authority, and the person of greater experience' developing his own "authorial stance"' through 'history-in-person' (Holland et al, 1998:183). Although Jim and Chase are relatively new to the educational systems, it is possible they are already aware of the educational evironment valuing "correct answers" over freely expressing himself (Kozulin et

al, 2003:94) which supports the reason why Jim lost his positional identity when he did not have the correct information. The knowledge Chase had inferred may have been an example of “human interest” which suggests that the topic he was a part of in his play may have been retained as it was a more meaningful and engaging topic according to his personal choice (Kozulin et al, 2003:94).

Through the use of language within the jigsaw observation, the child is able to pass on the skills conveyed through language from her teacher, to the other child wanting to learn how to complete the jigsaw. This offered Izzy’s figured world to ‘take on an element of rank and status according to this relational hierarchy’ (Holland et al, 1998:58) as she had valuable knowledge she could pass on. Izzy’s identity is ‘formed in the process of participating in’ an activity that is ‘organized by figured worlds’ (Holland et al, 1998:57). Izzy has been positioned as powerful as she uses language as a way of communicating an effective way to complete the jigsaw. This highlights ‘the role communication plays in the play-literary agenda and the role such communication plays in a child’s social world’ (Cohen, 2009:340) as the self represents ‘“itself” through a collective language’ (Holland et al, 1998:173). The play-literary agenda relates to children’s social dialogues through interactions during make-believe play activities which contributes to the development of their written language. ‘These dialogues are important because they are internalized as self-regulatory inner speech’ (Cohen, 2009:331).

This study using a figured worlds lens has shown the importance for multiple speech opportunities within the classroom. This is because children require these interactional and communicative experiences – both verbal and visual, as part of this ‘second language learning’ – in order to understand signs and symbols and to develop a repertoire of symbolic artifacts within their lived world, as well as to develop the ‘self’ (Kozulin et al, 2003:349). Using a figured worlds lens has also identified that knowledge can have the potential to gain power within play and it is therefore through the use of language to pass on this knowledge that children are able to form and reform within their leading role.

5.5.4 Gratification

Language is also used within the water play observation as a way to receive approval from the teacher. *'What if we move that out that way and swap this?' He asked. 'Good idea'. I said.* I noticed that Jim uses the word 'we' within this example, demonstrating how Jim included me within his play which I feel changed my role from teacher to child playing and investigating. As well as this, this confirmation from the teacher for a job well done enabled Jim to continue with his activity knowing he has 'good ideas'. As Moscovici (2000:107) discusses "the relationship between the Ego and Object is mediated through the intervention of another subject." Through positive reassurance from the teacher – being the other subject – he is able to structure his identity in order to orient himself within the world (Andreouli, 2010). Jim is part of the self-other-object triangle – as theorised by Duveen (1993) – in order to construct his identity through a social representation, allowing him to position himself in a particular way in relation to the symbolic field of culture. Similarly, the child in the jigsaw observation also wants to receive approval from the teacher. *'Miss, this one fits!'* said Myleene, in which I responded with a 'smile' for a job well done. Interestingly, although I responded and addressed Myleene with a non-verbal expression for 'well done', this was enough for her to understand that she is doing the right thing and has done well at the job she has completed. Foucault (1977:180) explains that teachers 'must endeavour to make rewards more frequent than penalties' as they are 'encouraged by the desire to be rewarded in the same way as the diligent'. This places an important focus on both the verbal and non-verbal use of language.

5.5.5 Non-verbal expressions and body language facilitating 'mini worlds'

Non-verbal expression was also central to the observation where Corey played silently in the kitchen. As Corey was independently interacting with his activity, it was hard to capture his thoughts, feelings and emotions as he was not communicating them to anyone and his position during play meant we could only see his back. However, through his actions and mediation through objects, it almost provided an "inner speaking" through 'sign-image' (Holland et al, 1998:37) of what is expected to happen in the space of the kitchen. He was experiencing another world – a 'mini' world within the 'real' figured world which this thesis has uncovered – and figuring his identity through mediating devices. In his play world, Corey may have taken on a mixture of roles relating to 'the kitchen' as possibly the chef or cleaner

as he crafted his figured world to enable possibility (Urrieta Jr, 2007a:115). This space offered him the opportunity to assume play within a 'mini world' which offered a multitude of differing identities: as argued by Holland et al. (1998:56) 'it is often unclear which (or how many) figurations are instanced by interaction'. In order to 'author the self', we must 'orchestrate' many different perspectives of the social world, using the words of others and implicating them with our own intentions offering us a number of different identities depending on the social world and context which we are a part of. If Corey had experienced this play with a friend, it could possibly uncover his figured identity as he may use language to articulate his role further. Without this use of verbal language, it is hard – as the observer – to be sure as to which role he is taking in this play.

5.5.6 Orchestration of voices

Language is used throughout the volcano observation, water play observation and my personal journal for the orchestration of voices. When I reflect on the water play observation, I notice how Jim refers back to the voice of his father who describes him as 'confident'. Within this example, I can see how Jim has recalled the voice of his Dad and orchestrated this within his current play activity in a positive way. Bakhtin discusses the orchestration of voices as 'the voices' and 'the symbols' which are 'socially inscribed and heteroglossic. Often the voices are in conflict. For example, the 'Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) member may hear the voices of other members, but she also hears the voices of her friends who still drink' (Holland et al, 1998:178). These conflicting voices require putting together for the 'orchestration of such voices, which Bakhtin calls self-authoring' (Holland et al, 1998:178). Within my own personal journal, I use language and the orchestration of voices to mimic comments of my work colleagues in order to portray the feelings and emotions I am experiencing by 'arranging overheard elements, themes, and forms' (Holland et al, 1998:171). An extract from my diary reads;

> '*My position has been made clear that I do not have control of the teaching and learning part of my role. 'I only manage staff'* (Journal, 14th September 2018).

Adding voices to my story by including speech marks within my writing, allows me to 'orchestrate' many different perspectives on the social world using the words of others and implicating them with my own intentions (Holland et al, 1998) within this 'figured world, which Bakhtin (1981) called "dialogism" (Holland et al, 1998: 169). I 'draw upon the languages, the dialects, the words of others' (Levi-Strauss, 1966 cited in Holland et al, 1998:170) to which I have been exposed, navigating heteroglossia and developing a sense of autonomy and agency. Rather than using this journal as a way to reflect my own feelings, the voices of others (my work colleagues in this example) have affected my own and have become part of my own story. When voices are in conflict, the orchestration of such voices require putting together in some way (Bakhtin, 1981). As stated by Holland et al (1998:173) 'the self authors itself, and is thus made knowable, in the words of others'. The orchestration of voices within this journal serves as mediator in the process to form and reform as a practitioner. Within this journal, I can see I do not like a particular version of myself as created as an object in the social world 'from collective experience' (Holland et al, 1998:171) and so I use my figured worlds to recreate versions of myself in order to develop a sense of agency. This is clear as I begin to resist the performative structures and standard ways of teaching, as I note in my journal;

> '*I have also decided to allow children to follow their own direction during the activity and allow them to control what will happen during the discussion'* (Journal, 26th September 2018).

Not only do I use my journal to mimic the voices of my work colleagues, but I also noticed I begin to orchestrate voices for Corey in the kitchen observation by imagining Corey saying;

> *'I'm gonna be in trouble now'* (Journal, 27th November 2018).

I haven't heard this comment as Corey remained silent throughout his observation, but I have assumed this comment through analysing his facial expressions and body language. The use of both non-verbal and verbal communication is therefore used in the orchestration of voices and that 'identity and the self are discursively produced in the course of communication' (Andreouli, 2010:14.4).

5.5.7 Artifacts as a mediator in the forming, reforming and positioning of 'self'

Reflecting first on my personal journal, this mediating artifact sheds light on the forming and reforming of my professional identity as a teacher. My identity is never-static. The following journal extract illustrates the words of the child working within a teacher-led activity and how this affected my own professional identity, as I realise he is not experiencing level 5 involvement as required according to the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003).

'Can I go and play now?' … I felt like I had failed him …' (Journal, 12th November 2018).

Through the struggle of pleasing as well as satisfying the needs of the children, I find myself experiencing feelings of guilt and negativity towards my own teaching and begin re-figuring my identity through questioning my own practice. I have 'the ability to take the standpoint of others as' I learn to objectify myself by the qualities of my 'performance in and commitment to various social positions' (Holland et al, 1998:4). My social position – defined by the structurally significant cultural form of the school – intends for my professional identity to be formed around the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2013) in order to engineer the 'good teacher'. My identity has been constructed as I 'care about and care for what is going on around' (Holland et al, 1998:5) me. When the child questioned my practice, it confirmed that I had not adhered to the expectations and standards to be a teacher as I have not, for example, 'promoted a love of learning' as per a requirement defined by the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2013:13). My identity has been figuratively formed from my 'personal world and the collective space of cultural forms' within the teaching world (Holland et al, 1998:5) using my 'cultural tool kit' and submitting myself to a 'set of cultural forms that have their own peculiar limitations and constraints' (Holland et al., 1998: 64).

The figured world of the school is important in terms of the performative discourse and the way that I – as the teacher – am experiencing it. Using the term which Holland et al (2001:52) employ – 'standard plot', I am figuring my identity in terms of the regimes which I am entwined in, such as OFSTED inspections and school league tables. This neoliberalist approach provides the 'standard plot' in which the narrative describes how things should be and what schools – and teachers – are measuring themselves against. It is the 'standard plot' that I am working within, which makes me question my professional and positional identity when I have

not met those targets. Interestingly, it is through language – which had become a key theme throughout this research and is used as part of what Holland et al (1998: 64) describe as my 'cultural tool kit' – that I have begun to author myself. The words uttered by the child have repositioned my identity. I have used his words in order to 'orchestrate' different perspectives of the social world (Holland et al,1998). His words have affected my professional and positional identity as I refigure my position to include feelings of failure in my job role, as I had not paid attention to his unwillingness to take part in the activity which I asked of him. During this re-figuring of my own professional and positional identity, it had offered an opportunity for the little boy to take on this position. The child's question, *'Can I go and play now?*' (Journal, 12th November 2018), made me question my own professional identity, whilst allowing him space for authoring his positional identity through these experiences (Holland et al, 1998:5). Within this example, Chase gained his positional identity through asking this question which demonstrates his resistance to the performative natures, but now I consider how many other children would take this risk or just continue to conform to their teacher's requests. Children tend not to dispute the authoritative word of the adult and continue to comply (Cohen, 2009) – like with Corey in the kitchen observation when he immediately came inside once he had realised the rest of the children had already left – demonstrating how performativity provides 'no space for an autonomous' 'self' (Ball, 2003) but the production of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1979:294 cited in Ball, 2003:219).

To illuminate this continual change and refiguring of my professional identity, my journal goes on to say;

> *'this was an AMAZING experience to be a part of'…and a ''blossoming' moment in his own learning'* (Journal, 27th November 2018).

This journal extract demonstrates how through the journal I am authoring myself as a 'good teacher' and have regained my professional identity. Bakhtin (1981:345-346) discusses this as an 'internally persuasive discourse' where 'it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with 'one's own word"' (cited in Holland et al, 1998:182). I am using different figured worlds – including the 'good teacher' or the 'conforming teacher' for example – to recreate versions of myself to develop a sense of agency in relation to others as in my consciousness, the internally persuasive discourse is 'half-ours and half-someone else's'

(Bakhtin, 1981 cited in Holland et al, 1998:182). The figurative identity that I create within my journal enhances the sense of agency, as I begin to experience an element of control over my own positional identity. I take on a different stance as I attempt to orchestrate the voices of 'amazing' and 'blossoming' in my self-authoring as a teacher (Bennett et al, 2017). 'The reorganisation and extension of social speech' is transformed 'into new forms of inner speaking. It changes the nature of subjectification' (Holland et al, 1998:182). As Holland et al (1998) elaborate, the sense of agency is created through the cultural forms, which are practised through social life and are always forming and reforming. Through the cultural forms previously discussed – such as language, the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2013) and the 'standard plot' (Holland et al, 2001:52) – I have demonstrated the very complex nature of being a teacher and how this role is experienced through changing and reforming 'self'. I have used this journal – this artifact – to find a space for authoring my professional identity and as a mediating tool in gaining control over my position. I remind myself of my figured world as the 'good teacher' in order to confirm my ability in this role and take back control of the 'failure' I once felt. Discourse of the good teacher (as presented in my own journal when I conform to the needs of the Senior Leadership Team), competencies, caring, diversity and many others become 'internally persuasive' as I begin to make meaning for them through 'actions in diverse ways using 'borrowed' elements of these discourses, tensions and contradictions between them which mean that self-authoring as a teacher 'requires orchestration of often conflicting voices. I make these elements my own by 'intertwining them with my own words to produce a unique response to the world: a stance' (Bennett, 2017:252).

5.5.8 Positional Identities

A number of the observations provided examples of the use of cultural forms to develop agency. An example of this is illustrated through the volcano observation, where the little boy who thought the volcano would erupt ice, lost his leadership position through another child having important knowledge that affected his role play.

> *I asked Jim 'is the lava hot or cold?' To which he responded 'Cold'. Chase heard Jim's response and answered 'No, it's really, really hot. It can burn you.'*

Although Jim loses his positional identity and this is reclaimed by Chase at this point in their play, Jim remains involved (Laevers, 2003) and attempts to win back this position by emotionally responding to the role play by responding with… *'But that will mean the people aren't safe!'.* Jim uses his 'cultural tool kit' (Holland et al., 2001: 65) to access 'emotion' as a way to regain control by creating a sense of urgency within the play and encouraging them to follow his ideas, to help regain his positional identity.

> *Bakhtin shows that, from the very fact that cultural resources are indelibly marked by social position, people can reassert a point of control through the rearrangement of cultural forms as evocations and position. The equation of the means of expression and social force – the notion of voice – works both ways. It positions persons as it provides them with the tools to re-create their positions. The fields of cultural production that circumscribe perspectives become, in Bakhtin's handling, spaces of authoring (Holland et al, 1998:45).*

This was Jim's 'first step towards an authorial stance' (Holland et al, 1998:182). He is using his emotional response as part of his 'internally persuasive discourses' (Holland et al, 1998: 182) that have been married to his own beliefs in the creation of his positional identity. Jim is dialogically formulating his identity as discussed by Bakhtin, in order to reinstate his positional identity (Holland et al, 1998). Using the resources available in his play and language about the safety of the small world people, he is able to express his identity and shape the 'self' as 'it is dialogized, figured against other possible positions, other possible worlds' (Holland et al, 1998: 238). A combination of 'history-in-person' (knowing that heat can burn) with that of dialogism (addressing and answering stimuli), has enabled Jim to refigure his performative identity from 'follower' to 'leader' (Holland et al, 1998). Similar to my personal journal, we see a never-static, constant change and refiguring of identities as 'the author…creates by orchestration…arranging overheard elements, themes, and forms' (Holland et al, 1998:171).

All of these observations appear to contain changes in positional identities, highlighting the potential for the 'self' to be reformed through play. 'Figured identities arise and are reproduced in the special attitude of play or, more precisely, imaginative framing' (Holland et al, 1998:141). Using figured worlds as a way to unpick these observations has made it

noticeable that it is a never-static position and can be changed and reformed throughout the 'imagined template cast over the everyday' (Holland et al, 1998:141). The kitchen observation highlights these continual changes as well as Corey experiencing another world where he is able to figure his identity in relation to the 'roles' we see 'within a kitchen'. 'What counts in play, and what counts in the identities of figured worlds, is the cultural relations, the "rules," that govern the movements of a game' (Holland et al, 1998:141). He has a great number of subject-positions from which to choose within the figured world created by the teachers. The social representation of the kitchen and the cultural resources available following the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), have provided him with a multitude of identities which is allowing him to position himself in different ways within the symbolic field of culture (Duveen, 1993). Within this play world, Corey is able to change his identity and access a new identity through history-in-person. The space offered him a multitude of identities and could have been extended further had he included others within his play.

5.5.9 Summary of theme 2: The continual changing and reforming of 'self', positions and roles

Through reflections of both the five observations and the personal journal using figured worlds to theorise the continual forming and reforming of 'self', it has illuminated the importance in the mediation of cultural artifacts and language (both verbal and non-verbal) as a way for people to recreate their positions in their space of authoring.

Cultural resources can offer children the opportunity to 'reassert a point of control though the rearrangement of cultural forms as evocations of position' (Holland et al, 1998:45). It discusses the forming and reforming of 'self' as individuals assume different roles within the spaces they are situated within. This has placed an increased importance on the children's cultural capital and has acknowledged the extent to which these cultural artifacts have power in the representation and reforming of 'self' through the dynamic relations between positional and figurative identities.

Language became a key theme throughout all the observations and my personal journal. Using a figured worlds lens, it is hard to perceive of an observation in which language was not used in order to position oneself. 'Vygotsky and Bakhtin together articulated a powerful

version of human life as necessarily mediated' and 'as produced by social interchange among persons' (Holland et al, 1998:viii). Through addressivity, people are able 'to organize and manage their own and others' behaviour' (Holland et al, 1998:280), and it is through this response to being addressed in which we recreate our own story. What these reflections have acknowledged is the importance in both verbal (voices) and non-verbal communication (actions) in the development of an identity and the extent in which identities are mediated through the use of language/communication and cultural artifacts, as identity is 'improvised – in the flow of activity within specific social situations – from the cultural resources at hand' (Holland et al, 1998:4). It has already been acknowledged that open-ended objects within the early years environment can reassert control through rearrangement of these cultural forms, but this is mediated through the 'notion of voice' (Holland et al, 1998:45), in order for children to recreate their positions and gain autonomy and agency.

5.6 Theme 3: The children's social and cultural capital – *Would 'planning-in-the-moment' be considered as an appropriate approach for children who may have different experiences within the world?*

Although cultural capital was not a key theme which emerged from the data as a whole, it was an anomaly noticed within the volcano observation which I wanted to explore further. Cultural capital – a recent aspect which has become a key part of the OFSTED discourse – relates to the knowledge children need to prepare them for their future, through the opportunities and experiences they have been exposed to (OFSTED, 2019). The term cultural capital has therefore become common parlance within schools and acts a frame for how teachers consider ways to broaden children's knowledge and experiences. Children have a 'cultural legacy' developed through the collective experiences of being with others. Through social interactions, 'cultural forms come to individuals and individuals come to use cultural forms' (Holland et al, 1998:176) within the 'mini worlds' created within the classroom. This includes the symbolic capital (the social and cultural capital) of the children within their early years setting and has been recognised as an important factor affecting autonomy and agency of children, when children's personal histories and social classes may cause tensions within their play worlds. 'Social divisions – gender, class, race, ethnicity – that separate those who are routinely privileged from those who are not' (Holland et al, 1998:130), can also have meaning across many figured worlds. The prior experiences children bring to their learning environment may enhance or create tensions within their play worlds as children enter their learning environment with the~~ir~~ funds of knowledge which they have gained through their life experiences (González et al, 2005b:ix). 'Localized figured worlds have their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth,

their own “symbolic capital,” to use Bourdieu’s term’ (Holland et al, 1998:129). Different social classes and personal experiences bring a wealth of differing information and knowledge to these play experiences. For example, the volcano play scenario was created by a child using the cardboard cone who already had knowledge about this particular subject.

However, it could be argued that Ofsted’s appeal to schools and teachers to develop children’s ‘cultural capital’ actually refers to maximising their access to the symbolic (i.e. social and cultural) knowledge practices of the dominant culture (i.e. white, western, middle class ‘high’ cultures). whilst access to the knowledge practices will undoubtedly aid children’s navigations of the dominant figured world of mainstream English schools and early years settings, there will remain tensions given many of these children’s histories-in-person over what count as important and/or useful knowledge practice, and this may reflect in the ways that young children might interact with the pedagogy in their educational settings.

It is possible that ‘traditional didactic teaching methods and assessment regimes’ may not ‘address the needs of children living in poverty or from different cultures’ (Power, 2019:571). The traditional methods of teaching and the structure of the curriculum may not support all children with differing cultural capital which they have secured through their personal histories. A permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993) is required which is open to children’s interests, cultures and desires, and is negotiated with children, rather than placed upon them (Wohlwend, 2017). Teachers need to give credence to children’s interests through recognising and responding to what is deemed important in their lives. Without this response, there is a possibility of providing a narrow curriculum delivered in unsystematic ways (Hedges & Cooper, 2016).

The volcano observation initially made me envisage that implementation of the ‘planning-in-the-moment’ approach could possibly limit the learning experiences for children whose experiences with the world may not be valued by English educational systems. As Power et al (2019:589) argue, the curriculum may potentially ‘privilege some learners over others’. Therefore, this research is not dismissing the use of subject-specific objects placed within the environment as these are useful for the scaffolding and broadening of children’s knowledge and linguistic repertoires. However, it requires practitioners to ensure these subject-specific objects have the opportunity to be transformed into a creative and engaging play activity – like the skeleton was in the doctor’s observation as his leg had fallen off.

Malaguzzi (1998) discusses the idea of the early years setting as an 'aquarium' and the many different types of fish which inhabit the space. This illustrates the diverse range of outside influences, cultures and unique experiences which children and their families bring to the setting. Family plays an important part in the initial stages of the child acquiring cultural capital (Huang, 2009). Bourdieu argues that family is the first institution that offers education and plays a part in the role of acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Children's characters in these play worlds are first experienced in the family culture allowing children to 'see the world through signs of their parents' (Holquist, 2002:82). These 'improvisations of the parental generation are the beginning of a new habitus for the next generation' (Holland et al, 1998:18). Children having the opportunity to play allows them to – as Wohlwend (2011) discusses - act on these signs whilst representing and communicating these ideas. Families support children's personal, social and emotional behaviour including such things like having manners at the dinner table or to chew your food with your mouth closed. It is possible that children from a wealthy family- with economic capital – may potentially be able to offer different experiences, than other families who may not have access to these opportunities. For example, being able to afford additional support in their child's education in order to learn professional knowledge or gain prestigious qualifications (Huang, 2019). This suggests that the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach should still be supported by a collectiveness of learning to ensure that all children have access to learning, regardless of economic capital. However, on reflection of this initial thought, the volcano observation illuminates how children's social capital enabled an extension of knowledge about the volcanoes. Through knowing another person who had knowledge about volcanoes, the observation became a transformational relationship of social and cultural capital (Huang, 2019). Children were able to interact with each other and their teacher in order to build on their funds of knowledge in the play world. This is also true of the jigsaw observation where we see the learned knowledge of one child help another child to complete the jigsaw. Although the topic was not as abstract as the idea of volcanoes, we also see a transformational relationship of cultural and social capital (Huang, 2019).

5.6.1 Mediation of an open-ended artifact in facilitating 'mini worlds'

As I have previously touched upon, children come from a wide variety of different backgrounds, leading them to a mixture of experiences with the world. Bourdieu (1986)

discusses that cultural capital must exist in three forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalised state. The objectified state relates to the cultural resources children are surrounded by within their learning space. The embodied state relates to the mannerisms and language in which they have embodied and the institutionalised state relates to the child's education, language and credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). The volcano observation resonates with the idea of the objectified state as the children are using the cardboard cone shape piece in the construction of knowledge. This particular item was a cultural product which enabled the child to share cultural knowledge by possessing it (Huang 2019). With the artifact being an open-ended object, it offered a space for the children to creatively respond to the object in order to provide knowledge through the combination of social and cultural capital. Using the mediating artifact of the cardboard cone shape construction piece, the embodied state – as discussed by Bourdieu (1990) – combined culture and knowledge in the communication of the child's hexis. The hexis is the body posture and the way in which they hold themselves from their learnt cultural capital which has been passed on through their histories (Holland et al, 1998:281). The children's hexis - in this example - changed when the other child provided important (and correct) knowledge about the volcano being hot within this 'mini' world situated within the 'real' figured world'. The child at first had a position of power and their body posture demonstrated that of a 'leader' (such as a strong presence with their head facing up, pointing, gesturing and a showing a wide and open posture), however, when this power was removed by the other child, the body posture changed within this social space (showing the body closing in, shoulders curled in and the head facing downwards) highlighting the importance of non-verbal communication. Manifestation of the child's positional identity and leadership changed the dynamic equilibrium from the instigation of the activity to the response of his play mate, who demonstrated his own cultural knowledge, which affected the quality of his positional identity. When one child followed their interest about volcanoes and introduced it to others who may have heard of it but never really understood it, through this play they discovered and learned important information about volcanoes which they may have not realised they already knew. As Holzman (2018) explains, children begin to *know* through these interactions with others in a collective activity. They have learnt this through observation and imitation and is part of *becoming.* Children do not imitate everything they have observed, but rather, children *creatively imitate* others depending upon what interests them. However, it does pose the issue of whether the other

children would have ever gained this knowledge and learning about volcanoes, had the other child not brought this up in their play. This questions whether children whose experiences with the world which are not valued by English education systems would access an open-ended environment without some structure or informed learning by the practitioner.

Within this example, social capital offered the child a learning opportunity to develop their cultural capital. Through social capital, one child introduced this specific scenario into their small world play and could then provide valuable information through the embodied state in order to communicate these understandings to their friends. Once the words 'hot' and 'heat' were introduced when describing the lava, the other children's 'field' of knowledge helped them to envisage what this situation might be like using their funds of knowledge to interpret these understandings. This was also relevant within the water play observation, where the open-ended tools including crates and water pipes have enabled Jim to become 'an engineer'. Through communication in this embodied state along with the crates as the objectified state, we see a collaboration of social and cultural capital working together in combination as the children create a water construction area. This suggests that there is a place for an open-ended early years environment, however, it must not dismiss a subject-specific environment altogether. A combination of cultural and social capital allows an open-ended environment to be included within the early years classroom but acknowledges that this must be supported by practitioner guidance when trying to broaden and extend children's learning.

5.6.2 'Cultural field'

Using the volcano observation in relation to Bourdieu's term 'cultural field', I intend to unpick the dynamics of capital (Huang, 2019) within this example. Bourdieu (1993:162-163) describes a 'field' as a 'separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy.' A 'field' is 'not absolutely autonomous, for they subsist in what Bourdieu calls the field of power, which is itself an aspect of class relations' (Holland et al, 1998:58). Following Bourdieu (1989), the choice of play within this volcano example might be considered to be a reflection of the person's social status. The fact that Jim chose to represent the cardboard cone as a volcano rather than a traffic cone – which children might commonly see on their way to school each day – may reflect an aspect of his particular cultural capital. Through Jim's experiences with the world and his own developing

funds of knowledge – with both his family life and in his education – the volcano has been part of his sphere of knowledge and he has chosen to assume play with this particular memory or interest in mind. This is not determined by self-development but derives from a person's cultural trajectory, such as education or family (Huang, 2019). Chase providing valuable knowledge to their play with the volcano producing hot lava and not cold ice cubes, illuminates the 'field of power' to which Chase was able to claim the position of power within this play. This is a reflection of Chase's prestigious social status informed by his family and education.

Children bring to school a wealth of knowledge and experience in relation to their own personal surroundings and upbringing. However, these funds of knowledge prepare them to differing extents to engage with the school curriculum. 'Knowledge is about the way people view and understand the world, which is gained via a specific culture that an individual lives in' (Huang, 2019:45). Also relating to the resource of knowledge is Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus where knowledge and habits of behaviour derives through a 'specific culture that an individual lives' (Huang, 2019:48). Considering the different socio-economic classes, children may have class-based understandings of the world which differ from each other. This can include the way in which the child speaks, their attitudes, behaviour and values as well as their use of terminology and vocabulary (Huang, 2019). As discussed by Bourdieu (2010) in considering the notion of 'habitus':

> *The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (principium divisions) of these practices. (Bourdieu, 2010:165–166)*

The relationship that is established between the children reflects their social and economic conditions with that of their 'corresponding position in the universe of life-styles' (Bourdieu, 2010:166) and this 'only becomes intelligible when the habitus is constructed as the generative formula' (Bourdieu, 2010:166) which classifies the practice 'into a system of distinctive signs' (Bourdieu, 2010:166). Children having the opportunity to play produces *signs* that represent and communicate ideas (Wohlwend, 2011). These signs distinguish social identity with these children through the 'fundamental structuring principles of practices and

the perception of practices' (Bourdieu, 2010:166). Therefore, the boys within the volcano observation bring together a wealth of differing experiences and knowledge in collaboration which they are able to give to each other offering a wider understanding of values, beliefs and attitudes.

Reflecting on these concepts of cultural capital and habitus as proposed by Bourdieu (2010), I come to consider this within the doctor's observation. Michael claims the positional power from the outset and takes the figurative identity of the doctor in the role play. In doing so, that leaves Michael's friend to become the doctor's assistant or nurse. Michael and his friend have entered a 'professional-status' figured world using the objectified and embodied state (Bourdieu, 1986). The doctor's observation offered Michael to use the resources, tools and artifacts (Bourdieu, 1990) that are associated with the figured world of 'doctors', to assume a positional identity which reflects that of a professional status. Michael uses his current field of knowledge about doctors and initiates it within his play by communicating through his personal histories of attending the doctors when he has been poorly as his resource of knowledge derives through a 'specific culture that an individual lives' (Huang, 2019:48). This highlights the importance of parents in their transmission of human capital to their child (An and Western, 2019) and that the production of cultural capital 'is formed outside the education system' (Sortkaer, 2019:650). According to Bourdieu (1977), the capital which the parents pass on to their child is the necessary requirement for the child's success. In this example, Michael being taken to the doctors by his parents has extended Michael's cultural capital and he is able to include this within his play experiences. Michael's previous knowledge of 'doctors' allows him to explain the situation. *'He's not dead.' Said Michael. 'His heart is still beating.' Michael said as he placed the stethoscope on his heart. 'That means he's okay. He's gonna need a plaster.'* Michael's previous knowledge of how plasters and injections are used to help patients get better allowed his positional and figurative identity to form. These utterances 'are shaped to the social situation' (Holland et al, 1998:40) and the 'semantic facet of speech' (Holland et al, 1998:128). Michael uses his play worlds to impersonate these professional jobs through how he sees and experiences the world, what he thinks they do, their values and their practices. However, the habitus is incorporated within our styles, body movements and dispositions (Bourdieu, 2010). Therefore, although Michael is able to react and impersonate within these play worlds, he still has his own talk,

vocabulary, attitudes and values (Huang, 2019) which he adds to the role-play through 'an unconscious set of bodily movements' (Huang, 2019:48). This places focus on the verbal and non-verbal communication which has presented as a key theme throughout this thesis.

5.6.3 'Knowledge is power'

When reflecting on the jigsaw observation, I noticed that once the child had learnt a more efficient technique for completing a jigsaw was able to teach this to the other child who then decided to join in. This interaction mediated by the jigsaw had essentially built the foundation of her 'teacher' role within her play and she could use this 'knowledge' as a powerful tool over the other child. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1962:51) is relevant to this observation and the idea of 'knowledge is power'. Through play, Izzy has entered into another world, as Holland et al (2001:236) explain 'through play our fancied selves become material.' Izzy had become a teacher and carried out this role through her observation of history-in-person which 'is a sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded' (Holland et al, 1998:18) in the present. What I found interesting when comparing this observation with the volcano observation, is that while the little girl completing the jigsaw used her new knowledge to gain a powerful position of leadership as she taught her friend how to complete the puzzle, the little boy acting out the volcano scene, had lost his position of power due to his lack of correct knowledge demonstrating how improvisations 'can become the basis for a reformed subjectivity' (Holland et al, 1998:18). As Vygotsky (1978) explains, having never been aware of volcanoes being hot, he was unaware that he would be giving an incorrect answer, however now he has learned this information it is now part of his own funds of knowledge. This demonstrates the ever-changing and fluid nature of positional identities depending on and in accordance with a variety of contexts (Taylor, 2015) as discussed by Holland et al (2001:128), where 'positional identities manifest themselves in different social situations.' Once Jim's friend advised on the lava being hot, his friend assumed this positional identity of 'leader' within their play and Jim had to readjust to his new position of 'follower' highlighting Holland et al's (2001) concept that change in social situations has affected the position on the children. This relates to Vygotsky's notion of mediation where internally persuasive discourses – such as the viewpoint of the lava being hot – 'mediates the

reorganisation and extension of social speech into new forms of inner speaking. It changes the nature of subjectification' (Holland et al, 1998:182).

Jim – in the volcano observation – was motivated with his learning from the beginning and was the reason that the activity occurred, however, Chase became stimulated and engaged with this learning once he had valuable information to add to this play experience. Jim was motivated as within his sphere of knowledge the lava was considered cold and he was happy in his play, unaware of this misconception. The teacher's requirement to ask questions and provoke thoughts about the lava – as part of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and learning as a collective approach (Vygotsky, 1962:51) – caused the observation to continue in a different direction, essentially changing the dynamics and purpose of Jim's play experience highlighting the 'impositions of discipline' once again (Holland et al, 1998:64). Chase's prior knowledge – his 'history-in-person' – enabled him to rectify this misconception rather than the teacher highlighting an importance for cultural capital within the early years environment. Other children offering their ideas and knowledge provided valuable information to others. Knowledge provided a positional identity (Holland et al, 1998:135) within the volcano observation and demonstrated how the construction of knowledge is important through play (Mooney, 2013). However, allowing other children to rectify this misconception has actually reformed Jim's role as 'leader' to the 'follower'. This '*continual* readjustment, reorganisation and movement' (Holland et al, 1998:45) is a factor of cultural resources and the figured worlds 'that give meaning to people's interaction' and 'change historically in ways that are marked by the political struggles and social valuation of their users' (Holland et al, 1998:45). Had I – the teacher – not addressed this misconception with a question, Jim may have retained his position of leader. Jim's autonomy is overruled, negotiated and reconstructed by the constraints of power within this figured world (Holland et al, 1998). This example shows how figured worlds conceptualises agency as not residing solely within the individual but as a collective participation in understanding, organising and imagining the 'self' where the space of authoring is a contested space of struggle. Jim is having to create 'self' by orchestration working within (or against in this case) a set of constraints that may become possibilities (Holland et al, 1998).

5.6.4 Summary of theme 3: The children's social and cultural capital

In exploring the notion of 'cultural capital' in further detail, it has become apparent that cultural capital was a key theme throughout all of the observations, although only came to my attention whilst exploring cultural capital within the volcano observation. This theme has highlighted how having valuable knowledge about a topic has the potential for the individual to assume a powerful position with their play experiences. This section has recognised the importance of 'knowledge' within some learning experiences and how using an 'in-the-moment' approach, can extend children's funds of knowledge within an area in which they are interested. The 'planning-in-the-moment' approach offers an opportunity and space for differing social classes to collaborate and celebrate a wealth of different lived experiences and personal histories for the development of learning opportunities through the use of exploring their own interests using open-ended objects and artifacts. It recognises the importance of some subject-specific artifacts placed within the environment in order for practitioners to extend and broaden knowledge but acknowledges that a collaboration of both cultural and social capital offers children with experiences not valued by English educational systems, a way in to learning more about these topics using open-ended artifacts. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital provides an understanding of the child within their learning environment and the extent to which they are autonomous individuals with agency. It also places an importance on both verbal and non-verbal communications in the development of these play worlds to enhance personal and professional knowledge.

5.7 Theme 4: The pressures of performativity and governmentality

The five observations of children in their early years environment and my reflections within my research journal present a very complex picture of what it means to be a child within their learning environment as well as what it means to be a teacher and how this role is experienced.

5.7.1 Governmental regimes and disciplinary pressures

A recurring theme noted through the observations and my own personal journal, was that of the role of governmental regimes and disciplinary pressures within the educational setting. Reflecting on my journal, the continual refiguring of my professional identity (as outlined

previously) was, in part, influenced by the hierarchical pressures to conform to a set of regimes and a regimented structure in early years as I am exposed to the 'competing and differentially powerful and authoritative discourses and practices of the self' (Holland et al, 1998:29). These constraints included the need for workbooks in nursery, although I had already voiced my opinion to the management team that a workbook would be an inappropriate method for children in nursery, my decision was over-ruled and workbooks were to be implemented (Journal, 26th September 2018). The dialogic position 'brings into focus the iconic potential of both the behaviour and the artifacts that are produced in interaction, and the roles these symbols may play in changing or perceiving identity and subjectivity' (Holland et al, 1998:15). These workbooks would be used to label children as 'high' and 'low', as well as provide the evidence needed in the judgements of grades by their teacher.

The conflict between my own judgement as teacher who works with the children and the 'best decision' as proposed by the management team shows the tensions I am working within. Although my professional identity was refiguring in relation to the 'acts of others' (Holland et al, 1998:42), I took back control as I *'decided to base a lot of the work inside this book on talking activities and writing lots of post-it notes of direct speech.'* My own funds of identity were challenged and – as Wohlwend (2011) discusses – I was able to empower a different identity in order to invent a way of navigating through constraints of dominant discourses in school. Although I had to broadly follow the expectations of the leadership team, I took back my positional identity and reinstated my control by using the workbooks, as requested, but under my own conditions. My behaviour demonstrates my refusal of the subject position and resistance to being 'pushed into line by relations of power' …by 'the particular people' whom I interact with (Holland et al, 1998:14). Through my own understandings of 'culture and self' (Holland et al, 1998:45), I 'illustrate the conceptual move' of 'self-fashioning' (Holland et al, 1998:29) through internally persuasive discourse.

5.7.2 'The chosen one'

Further exploring my role as a teacher in relation to performativity and governmentality, I noticed that within the jigsaw observation I had given the children completing the jigsaw extra time to play whilst the rest of the class had to tidy away and attend to their usual nursery

routine. The extra time to play was validated by myself as their teacher; however, I did not offer this benefit to the children during the volcano observation. This hierarchical power and control which my position of teacher affords me, enables me to grant or remove the development of agency and autonomy to/from each child. This makes me question how children become 'the chosen one' – the child which the teacher may favour in that moment – and to what lengths children would need to go, in order to become 'the chosen one'. Teachers are exercising their powerful positions through discipline of 'observatories' of human multiplicity (Foucault, 1977:171) and each gaze forms 'a part of the overall functioning of power' (Foucault, 1977:171). Although this jigsaw activity has offered a space for authoring 'in-the-moment' planning, it has shown how agency and autonomy is monitored, accepted and achieved through the gaze of the hierarchical figure of the teacher. I am able to give the opportunity, but I am also able to remove it.

Structures are needed within organisations such as schools to let others know the parameters they are working within, including what work is to be carried out, how it will be carried out and when it is to be carried out. These structures create the boundaries between constraints and freedom. They prepare children for their future and remind them of the need to follow rules. As a teacher, who has already been brought up surrounded by constraints, and who is required to fulfil the requirements of the Teacher Standards (2013), the management team and other teachers within my school, it is instilled in me to ensure this structure and routine is enforced in my own practice. By allowing the girls to continue their jigsaw, I went against the structures in place. I had contested the "structure-in-practice" created as part of the "field" and in relation to the children interacting within my space (Holland et al,1998:58) and used my personal and professional judgement to allow the children more time in continuing their activity so they could complete their jigsaw. Interestingly, the children continued with their jigsaw and almost 'smirked' at the other children that had been asked to tidy up as the girls came to identify themselves as actors of more privilege and power in the worlds formed through day-to-day activities (Holland et al, 1998:60). They were given this freedom and they took it freely.

Whilst I adhered to the early years routine and structure throughout most of the observations, I noticed I had also relaxed the rules within the 'In the Kitchen' observation.

Corey in this observation did not hear the rest of the children tidying away and was too focused on his activity to notice. When he realised, although he tried to continue his play, he appeared not to be able to cope with the disciplinary pressure of disregarding the rules as set by his teachers. For Corey, the pressure to conform seemed to take precedence over his high level of involvement which he was experiencing with his activity. He was offered freedom but he appeared to be uncomfortable under the constraints of not abiding by the rules. Social expectations encourage 'personal order' and engendered positional identities that govern and discipline individuals in order to serve the wider economic and political interests of neoliberalism. Therefore, subjectification and governmentality are aligned in identity construction (Taylor, 2015). It is possible that the young girls who I sat with during their jigsaw activity, may have felt more comfortable with the additional freedom granted to them, as they had been told to continue playing straight away. However, this little boy may have felt under more pressure to conform to the regular routines as he may have been unsure if he was already in trouble for not listening in the first instance. His decision to conform appeared to be influenced by the social forces which he was experiencing at that particular moment.

5.7.3 Self-regulated individuals

Due to the performative culture that children are subjected to, they may feel compelled to conform to the hierarchical surveillance team and demonstrate 'self-regulation'. Interestingly, 'self-regulation' is a new strand within the new Development Matters (DfE,2021) Policy which was enforced in 2021, highlighting the central importance of children developing into well-formed individuals in society. Foucault describes 'self-regulation' as the institutional 'panopticism' (Foucault, 1977:217), which is based on Bentham's panopticon. The fear which is instilled within the individual creates self-regulated individuals. This allows the adjustments of behaviour according to the rules and expectations of the inspector. The gaze becomes part of the performative system and is used not only to regulate teachers, but also the children working within their space. Self-regulated individuals are created without the decision to join the performative system but are expected to adjust to the expectations and criteria this entails which means that performativity not only has an effect on the teacher's practice, but also on the 'play' which children are a part of. 'Surveillance thus becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977:175).

Corey experiences the gaze of the teacher after he realises all the other children have gone inside for snack and he was the only one who had not conformed. Even when he is offered additional time to continue his play, he considers the idea and then runs inside to quickly conform like the rest of the children illuminating his instilled nature to comply to the disciplinary apparatuses which have 'hierarchized the 'good' and the 'bad' subjects in relation to one another' (Foucault, 1977:181). He was aware of the 'gaze' that the teacher was giving and was unable to continue his activity 'by bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden' (Foucault, 1977:183). Corey's conformity to the disciplinary powers in school has confirmed his part in the 'normalizing' of institutions, as discussed by Foucault (1977:183). This is what Bakhtin (1981:345) calls the 'contact zone'. This zone – as understood by Cohen (2009) – is the social space in which the child and adult meet and can often lead to conflict with one another as 'children's ideologies clash with the authoritative word of adults, as the authoritative word must not be disputed; it must always be accepted without question' (Cohen, 2009:338). Interestingly, the 'gaze' which Jim is experiencing during the water play observation actually enhances his positional identity in his play and he uses it as a way to gain neutral territory between the teacher and himself as the figured world he had created took on an 'element of rank and status according to this relational hierarchy' (Holland et al, 1998:58). This will be discussed further in the next paragraph.

Teaching has resulted in a culture of performativity through the multitude of regulatory devices including OFSTED inspections, curriculum and testing, prioritising classroom practice and centralised guidance (Brown et al, 2015). 'Governmentality' which teachers adhere to has enforced the children to behave in the same manner and respond according to the routines in place. Institutions are 'subject to a whole micro-penality of time' (including routines, lateness, interruptions of tasks etc) (Foucault, 1977:178). The set rules and routines within early years affect the autonomy and agency of children in the classroom. Children develop agency within their independent play, through the spaces of authoring that they negotiate, mediated by the learning environment and their relations with others. But this agency is limited by the need to adhere to set routines within their day including 'snack time' and 'toothbrushing' (Barron, 2013). These routines are considered more valuable than that of the

early learner experiencing the world around them through independent play, but as Ephgrave (2018) reiterates, the level of involvement during snack time is often very low.

5.7.4 The 'good' teacher

The findings within this research have shown that practitioners using the Development Matters (2012/2021) curriculum may possibly manipulate the interactions with children to collect the evidence required through 'competing sites of the self' (Holland et al, 1998:29) highlighting a limitation to this research data. Teachers may 'fit' learning to achieve the developmental goals and to satisfy the curriculum rather than to enhance the personal experiences and achievements of each individual child. As Hedges & Cooper (2016) discuss, teachers need to build a curriculum around children's interests with their choices being placed at the centre of the curricular decision-making by using analytical framings to understand children's interests, to encourage deeper interpretations and genuine conversations. The discipline procedures in educational institutions produce 'subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies' (Foucault, 1977:138) enabling teachers to be part of the 'mechanics of power' (Foucault, 1977:138) that encourages teachers to behave in accordance to the 'good' teacher. Within the doctor's observation, the child achieved targets within a multitude of areas set out within the curriculum document and I found myself capturing this moment in order to present evidence for pupil progress meetings and OFSTED. Michael had previously been 'underachieving' relative to a number of the age-related expectations within Development Matters and therefore, I found myself celebrating the achievement of the age-band targets he was meeting. This observation illuminated my view of the child in terms of 'clever' or 'low' or behind', 'marking a hierarchy of knowledge or ability' (Foucault, 977:147). Each child is being ranked relative to their peers and being viewed as a label in accordance to their academic abilities. This highlighted another limitation to this research, as I – as the practitioner – began to interpret the observations in terms of ability and age-band documentation which this research sought to prevent. Removing the need to rank children in accordance to their peers and to celebrate individuals successes on their achievements through their interests still proved to be a difficult task when we – as practitioners – have this instilled within our professional identity. 'Each pupil, according to his age, his performance, his behaviour' (Foucault, 1977:147) is categorised and ranked against another. As a practitioner working within this field, I have become an 'object in a social world given meaning

by these signs' which is a form of self-management (Holland et al, 1998:142). Through 'self-management', practitioners may manipulate these interactions, in order to 'tick' children off against these standards and collect evidence for targets met. The constraints teachers are working within, assume that gathering evidence towards these standards is central to the role of a 'good teacher' and has become part of what Bakhtin would characterise as 'my inner speech' (Holland et al, 1998:142) as practitioners begin 'to rearrange, reword, rephrase and re-orchestrate different voices' in order to develop an 'authorial stance' (Holland et al ,1998: 183) and 'internally persuasive speech' (Holland et al, 1998:184). It highlights the tension between the performative pressures to heavily guide and assess children in their 'educational space' which functions 'like a learning machine' (Foucault, 1977:147), with that of allowing the children to engage in more open-ended play opportunities through a 'planning-in-the moment' approach with social interaction and "otherness" (Holzman, 2018:47) forming a collective experience for children. All of these observations question the ulterior motive of the teacher in order to achieve and evidence certain areas of a child's learning as 'the self is treated as always embedded in (social) practice' (Holland et al, 1998:28). Although the 'instructing adult' may 'compel rote action' or heavily guide learning, adults are able to work within these constraints by following children's interests in order to 'extend, through their support, the competencies, the "answerability"' (Holland et al, 1998:272) in order for children to gain autonomy and agency.

The findings of this research have shown how governmental regimes are imposing pressures for children to conform and become self-regulated individuals. Children are trying to access autonomy and agency through their collective play but are restricted through time-constraints, compliance to set rules and routines, and the requirement for teachers to ensure a balance of 'direct whole-class teaching, small-group teaching, partner work and play' from their teachers (Bold Beginnings, Jones et al, 2017:5). Corey – in the kitchen observation – gained agency and autonomy when I decided to go against the regimes in place and allow him extra time within his play. However, as soon as Corey had realised all of his friends had gone back inside for snack, he also went inside as his need to comply with the routines and structures was instilled, even when he was told he could stay outside longer. Play, as mentioned by Vygotsky, is 'created on the margins of regulated space and time' (Holland et al, 1998:272). The routines in schools are instilled within the children and although in the

kitchen observation *'I explained to Corey that he could continue in the kitchen if he wanted to'*, he decided to run *'inside to wash his hands ready for snack'.* Play can be hindered by adult-led learning activities and set routines as discussed in the Bold Beginnings (Jones et al, 2017) document, where it was found that teachers sometimes directed the child's play. For children to *make worlds* (Holland et al, 1998:272), they need to be a part of "serious play" (Holland et al, 1998:272). "Serious play" provides new figured worlds, opening up cultural genres and develops new social competencies. Play is 'instrumental in building their symbolic competencies, upon which adult life depend' (Holland et al, 1998:272). Activities require free expression to develop 'new social competencies in newly-imagined communities' (Holland et al, 1998:272), as Corey experienced in the kitchen observation when he *'was so involved with his learning that he didn't even hear us ask to tidy away!'.* With these performative discourses, it proves difficult to implement the 'in-the-moment' approach to teaching as a full-time commitment in the classroom. Planning is required to be completed in advance as per the instruction of the headteacher, as well as resources to be available for each activity. In order to successfully implement the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, teachers – with support from their managers – need to essentially 'let go' of what they know and have learnt as a teacher and simply be with the children in order to support their learning interests.

All five of the selected vignettes as well as reflections on my own journal, reflect varied responses to the performative discourse, where the authors are positioning themselves in different ways within their roles. The performative discourse impacts on the figured world of the children in their learning environment and the way in which they are positioned within it as they begin to shape their bodies to the needs of learning in a "technology of self" (Ball, 2013:133). As a practitioner, the performative discourses are creating a continual forming and reforming of my professional identity as I grapple with the needs to conform to hierarchy and the requirement to meet the needs of the children in order to be a 'good teacher'. The figurative and positional identity of the 'good teacher' which I try and establish throughout my personal journal, must also fit with the internally persuasive discourse of myself in relation to my own history-in-person (Holland et al., 2001: 33) and motivations of becoming a teacher (Perryman and Calvert, 2019: 2).

5.7.5 Summary of theme 4: The pressures of performativity and governmentality

All of the observations have shown how the pressures of performativity and governmentality can affect the positioning of the child within their figured world. The 'field' of the school presents its own 'laws of functioning' (Bourdieu (1993:162-163) and teachers are forced to comply with the governmental regimes and expectations of OFSTED and the curriculum in order to comply with the Teachers Standards (2013). Children are implicated within these pressures and have become 'self-managed' (Holland et al, 1998:142) individuals in their building of 'inner speech' where 'speech, language, literature, and art […] are 'the pivotal media through which consciousness and subjectivity develop' (Holland et al, 1998:viii).

5.8 Research Questions

This section seeks to consider the findings from the study in relation to the research questions.

5.8.1 Research Question One: What factors affect autonomy and agency for the child?

Through this research study I have explored a number of factors which seem to be affecting the autonomy and agency of the children within my early years classroom in line with a figured worlds framework. Figured worlds considers the authoring of 'self' through the orchestration of different perspectives in the social world, using the words of others and imbuing them with their own intentions. The social world of the early years classroom within this study has been shaped and constructed by my own positioning in relation to my personal, cultural and professional beliefs and understanding. This suggests the learning environments children are playing within may have reflected the needs of the curriculum, OFSTED and the schools Senior Leadership Team rather than that of the needs of the children, leaving limited space for the children to author the 'self' (Holland et al, 1998) and gain autonomy and agency within their 'mini worlds'. The research has noticed that children have responded to their learning better when interacting with a topic or theme which they have created. This research has highlighted the tensions experienced as a teacher trying to respond to the children's interests while needing to adhere to structured curriculum guidelines and school routines. This has proved to be an important factor when considering the autonomy and agency of the

child in their early years classroom, especially when practitioners are trying to ensure each child passes each age-phase to ensure they are on-track to achieve the Early Learning Goal by the end of reception. Senior Leaders need as many children to achieve their Early Learning Goals as possible to ensure that the data has not decreased from the previous year. This research has highlighted how comparing data across schools nationally and internationally, may hinder the possibility of children following their interests, as schools need to ensure they can meet the 'performance' figures and therefore, must follow the prescribed learning method rather than giving children the opportunity to choose for themselves. This also becomes an issue when some cohorts of classes have more children who do not meet the curriculum criteria to pass and therefore, have more interventions to try and get them to pass. All of these factors are affecting the autonomy and agency of children within the classroom.

5.8.2 Research Question Two: Within the constraints of governmental regimes, how can teachers follow children's interests in order for children to gain autonomy and agency?

Through critically analysing the observations, developing the vignettes and exploring these in relation to the theoretical framework of figured worlds, this research has demonstrated the potential to use an 'in-the-moment' approach in order to potentially provide a space for children to author themselves within the constraints of governmental regimes and policy. The findings of the observations have shown how the pressures of governmentality and performativity can affect the positioning of the child within their figured world of the early years classroom. The early years setting and its 'field' which it is situated within presents its own 'laws of functioning' as discussed by Bourdieu's (1993:162-163) work. Teachers are compelled to adhere to the expectations of OFSTED and the curriculum in order to comply with the Teachers Standards (2013) which they are bound by within their professional role. These regimes implicate the child within these pressures causing children to become 'self-managed' (Holland et al, 1998:142) in their building of 'inner speech', allowing them to find a space to work within these constraints. This research has found that 'planning-in-the-moment' has the potential to work within the constraints in order to follow children's interests, so they are able to become autonomous individuals with agency.

5.8.3 Research Question Three: Can 'planning-in-the-moment' provide further space for authoring?

This study has acknowledged a space for 'planning-in-the-moment' within the early years classroom in order to maximise opportunities for pupils to gain autonomy and agency. Allowing children to follow their own interests led to them becoming deeply engaged with a topic which related to their own funds of knowledge and funds of identity. This suggests that practitioners and schools following the needs of the child using an 'in-the-moment' approach, while also carefully considering the potential role of artifacts placed with their environment, can support children to mediate the 'self' through their relationships and the language they share through collective experience. The research highlights the potential for open-ended objects in the early years environment to facilitate 'mini worlds' in order for children to generate creative and imaginative responses, providing them with opportunities to follow their own ideas and to create spaces for authoring the self. By providing children with opportunities to use artifacts in flexible and open-ended ways, it allows practitioners to further extend children's learning on a topic which they are already engaged and motivated by both harnessing and developing their funds of knowledge and funds of identity. This interaction with their peers is also developing children's cultural capital and their ability to gain further learning from their friends. This can also inspire children to find out more about a subject that they may not have already known about. This study, however, does not disregard the more structured use of subject-specific artifacts (such as the skeleton in the doctors observation) within the learning space, but acknowledges the importance of these objects in order to scaffold and broaden children's knowledge and linguistic repertoire.

Summary of Chapter Five

This study has enabled me to see the elements of the importance of play emphasised by Vygotsky and how discourse can frame the figured worlds that these children find themselves in. It has recognised how the children can position themselves within the world, navigating dialogically the way that their world addresses them. It is within the larger figured world where we have another dimension at play, the 'mini figured worlds' are what make this time so special in a child's development and has acknowledged the notion of 'flow' (as discussed by Csikszentmihalyi (1979)) and the notion of space in which to develop that 'flow' can offer them. This would be their sense of authorship and therefore their sense of selves.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summary of thesis

The purpose of this research was to explore ways to navigate the tensions between the need for high levels of young children's engagement in activities and the requirement to work within the constraints of current policy, which might act to limit opportunities for children to become fully immersed in their play. A practitioner researcher account of everyday teaching in a community primary school was conducted to:

- examine the ways that children are positioned by current early years policy and practice
- explore the factors affecting children's autonomy and agency using the theoretical lens of figured worlds
- consider how 'planning-in-the-moment' might provide further space for authoring the 'self' and opportunities for high levels of involvement

The research involved observing children in both the nursery and reception classroom whilst implementing a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach to follow the interests of the child. Observations were conducted from September 2018 until December 2019 and followed the same group of children from their nursery to reception experience. It employed a methodology based in action research creating vignettes from observations of children in their early years learning. The vignettes were thematically analysed to uncover emerging themes and a cross-case analysis method was employed to explore the factors which facilitate the development of agency and autonomy in the early years classroom.

The four themes that arose out of the vignettes can be summarised as follows:

1. The use of artifacts to mediate the 'authoring of self'
   1.1 The potential value of open-ended objects in facilitating 'mini worlds'
2. The continual changing and reforming of 'self', positions and roles
3. Children's social and cultural capital
4. The pressures of performativity and governmentality

The themes acted as an organisational device when attempting to make sense of my data and generate new understandings in relation to my research questions. In the section that follows I will summarise the conclusions that I have drawn from the process of meaning-making.

6.2 Conclusions from the research findings

There are four main (albeit tentative) conclusions that I have drawn from this practitioner research study.

1. The findings of this study suggest that children are able to author the 'self' in a range of ways. The data suggests that there is an important place for open-ended artifacts in the early years classroom, as they can help support children follow their own interests by creating a multitude of 'mini worlds' within the broader figured world of the early years classroom. The 'mini figured worlds' are what make this time so important and necessary in a child's development, supporting the notion of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1979) and the space in which 'flow' can offer their sense of authorship and their sense of selves. However, the research also acknowledges the value of more structured implementation of some subject-specific objects in order to scaffold and broaden children's knowledge and linguistic repertoire.
2. This research has illuminated knowledge as a powerful tool in the continual forming and reforming of positional identities through interactions within children's play worlds. The data suggests that a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach has the potential to engage children in activities which are of interest to them and allow space for children to interact and respond to these interactions through addressivity enabling continual forming and reforming of 'self' and their positions within these roles. However, practitioners must also consider children's cultural capital and navigate the tension between valuing and harnessing children's existing knowledge, while also providing the experiences that children need to broaden their knowledge beyond their existing histories-in-person. The vignettes illustrate how when children are given the space to collaborate, celebrate and share a wealth of different ideas, lived experiences and personal histories, there are further opportunities for developing their cultural and social capital.
3. This research has acknowledged the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication in the development of identity and the extent to which identities are mediated through the use of language/communication and cultural artifacts. The study has recognised the children's hexis as a way of communicating a positional identity and notices the dynamic interplay of interactions through hexis. The study

recognises the importance of children being subjected to different subject-specific learning for the accumulation of knowledge and vocabulary for the development of identity. It has recognised how the children can position themselves within the world, navigating dialogically the way that their world addresses them.

4. The research findings provide support for the potential of 'planning-in-the-moment' to offer ways for practitioners to work within the constraints of the discourse, governmental regimes and pressures while also providing children with further space for authoring the 'self' in their early years classrooms. This research also acknowledges, though, that practitioners are likely to face tensions when trying to work within these boundaries due to structures creating the margins between constraints and freedom. Using a personal journal within this study provided a space for me to interpret and explore my own views, allowing me to consider these tensions and to work within the constraints to find ways to author myself as a practitioner in my role.

I will now highlight the contribution to knowledge that this study has made, before moving on to explore the potential implications for practice and possible avenues for future research.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

The purpose of this thesis was to explore children's autonomy and agency in the early years classroom using the theoretical framework of figured words. I used the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach as a way of providing further space for authoring the 'self' and generating opportunities for high levels of involvement, whilst working within the constraints of the performative discourse and early years policies and practices. This research using 'in-the-moment' as a pedagogical approach alongside a figured world as the theoretical lens used to analyse its potential for developing children's autonomy and agency. This research offers original and unique data findings, which make an important contribution to practitioner knowledge around the autonomy and agency of children learning within the early years.

This research used Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) action research model in order to implement a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach within my early years classroom. Through adopting the theoretical framework of figured worlds (Holland, 1998), the study acknowledged that 'reflexivity' is implicit in 'reflectivity'. Using this extended action research

model, allowed me to reflect not only on children figuring their world and finding space for authoring 'self', but it was necessary for myself as the researcher and practitioner to reflect on these activities in order to know the action to implement for the cycle to continue again in line with a figured worlds approach. This ongoing process of reflection/reflexivity while observing children figuring their identities within their early learning classroom, allowed me to realise the importance of understanding my own figuring of identity and how I was authoring myself as a practitioner and researcher within this space.

While previous work has shown that a figured worlds framework offers a means 'to uncover and theorise the complex ways in which young children experience and perform their identities and respond to the social and educational practices in particular contexts' (Barron, 2013:15), this study has illuminated how the two figured world dimensions of identity: positional (the real world) and figurative (within role play) are in dynamic interplay with each other. The immersion in imaginative play facilitates the development of 'mini worlds' allowing a medium for fluid shifts in each, offering children opportunities for space of authoring and personal growth which more rigid curricular routines may constrain highlighting the need for an 'in-the-moment' approach to learning.

Using a figured worlds approach, this thesis has highlighted an important role for the use of open-ended objects placed within the early years learning environment. As Holland et al (1998) explain, agency is collaboratively created through cultural forms, which are practised through social life and are always forming and reforming. Engagement with open-ended artifacts offers limitless opportunities for 'serious play'; children are able to continually form and reform 'self' within the differing identities and positions they are able to become in their 'mini worlds', which these objects have helped to represent. These open-ended objects can be transformed into many different entities depending on the child's imagination, allowing children to continually refigure the 'self' through creatively and collaboratively responding to their own ideas and interests, supporting children's autonomy and agency. Figured worlds can help to illuminate interactions as a vehicle for learning and developing children's identities. The development of identity and agency occurs through the ongoing struggle with 'orchestration', as through language and movement, children 'orchestrate' the voices around them and gain further knowledge of the world (Holland et al, 1998).

While previous research has found ‘differing access to funds of knowledge may contribute to children’s status, inclusion and exclusion from play’ (Chesworth, 2016:306), this research has found that through the mediation of cultural artifacts, children are able to develop and extend their knowledge within the ‘mini worlds’ they create and participate in. These artifacts offer the children a transformational relationship between social and cultural capital as they begin to explore the play world they are situated within, as well as navigating the broader figured world of their early years classrooms, developing ‘their own valued qualities, their own means of assessing social worth, their own “symbolic capital,”’ (Holland et al, 1998:129). This research acknowledges the range of different experiences which these children bring with them to school, with some experiences being valued by the English education system more than others. However, this research seeks to avoid placing children from different backgrounds in a position of deficit. Rather, this research suggests that the use of open-ended artifacts in children's play can a vehicle to facilitate the Bakhtinian dialogical interplay of addressivity and response between children and their peers. This research shows that this dialogical interplay has the potential to broaden children's experiences and to develop their curriculum-related knowledge, as well as other 'unplanned' learning. A ‘planning-in-the-moment’ approach requires skill from teachers to navigate the balance between ensuring curriculum coverage while also allowing the generative spontaneous interplay that occurs as children pool their histories-in-person, exchanging elements of social and cultural capital, which are not bounded by curriculum documents.

6.3.1 Summary of Contributions to Knowledge

The study has attempted to capture the lived experiences of children in their early years setting as well as that of my own experiences as their teacher in order to explore. The findings of this research suggests that the ‘planning-in-the-moment’ approach allows children to operate beyond performative constraints to develop of autonomy and agency in their early years settings, in order for children to have their own values and understandings of the world and collaborate and celebrate a wealth of different lived experiences and personal histories. Practitioners are able to plan ‘in-the-moment’ according to the child’s interests – as learned through observation of children within their ‘mini worlds’ – in order to promote a love of learning in an area in which they are interested. The thesis has acknowledged the constraints

both teachers and children are working within; however, the use of open-ended objects placed within the environment has facilitated these 'mini worlds' which children are a part of and has provided space for children to figure their identities by following their interests in order to mediate their positional identities in the social world through addressivity and their response to being addressed. This has enabled children to author the 'self' (Holland and Lave, 2009) through collaboration and gain high levels of involvement (Laevers, 2003), promoting autonomy and agency. The individual is forming in practice using the open-ended cultural resources that they have adapted to author themselves in the moment.

6.4 Implications for practice

The findings of this project, which has explored a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, offer some implications for practice. The aim of this pedagogical approach is for practitioners to attend to children's interests and respond to them 'in-the-moment' rather than following structured plans, made in advance, which centre around curriculum requirements and an imperative to move children through a normative sequence of developmental steps by the end of reception. This research study has recognised that an 'in-the-moment' approach within the early learning classroom allows children to collectively work within the constraints of the performative discourse for the development of autonomy and agency in their early years settings. This was evident in the Kitchen observation (vignette 5) where Corey felt secure within his learning environment, which was unruled by adults (Ephgrave, 2018) and so, he was able to figure his identity by experiencing another world (Holland, 1998). An 'in-the-moment' approach alongside the implementation of open-ended artifacts has offered space for children to experience these 'mini worlds' and have their own values and understandings of the world. This study alongside previous research into implementing an 'in-the-moment' approach has recognised its potential in supporting 'a divergent and dynamic curriculum' (Chesworth, 2019:8); however, a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach can be difficult to achieve in practice given that the number of children within a class can make it hard for the teacher to follow each child's interests. Ethical issues may ensue when some children's interests are given credence over others as they may be deemed more relevant to the English education systems and the curriculum. This may pose questions as to whether 'planning-in-the-moment' in practice is able to provide opportunities for all children to work to their strengths and whether it is possible to following the interests of all children. An 'in-the-

moment' approach, therefore, presents both opportunities and challenges for the practitioner and raises the question of whether equity relates to equal provision for all or whether it should be based on a more tailored approach centred around children's histories-in-person.

This research study further supports Chesworth's (2019:8) finding that when exploring the potential merits of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach, we must consider 'the capacity for teachers to engage with the complex and uncertain interests that unfold in early years settings' (Chesworth, 2019:8). Teachers require specific training and ample practice to ensure they are able to offer an 'in-the-moment' approach within their setting. An 'in-the-moment' approach requires practitioners to remain open and aware of possible interests in which they are able to implement further within the learning space. This takes careful noticing from the practitioner and the ability to quickly respond to situations, and events including the 'mini worlds' which are continuously forming and reforming within this learning space. This commitment to noticing, however, is worth the investment, as these 'interests afford possibilities for children to co-construct complex and creative play' (Chesworth, 2016:306). This research study has suggested a juxtaposing of free-play and teacher-led learning within an 'in-the-moment' classroom in order for children to develop their subject-specific knowledge and their linguistic repertoires.

The research suggests that there is a place for open-ended objects as a way to open up 'mini worlds' within the early years environment and to develop children's autonomy and agency in the early years classroom. It suggests that an overly-scaffolded approach to students' learning, using resources which have a tightly prescribed purpose, which restricts their ability to think creatively and follow their own interests might not always be appropriate. Instead teachers might consider ways to strike a balance between imparting subject-specific knowledge in order for all children to access their learning within their independent play world, with that of the expectations of the curriculum and the early learning goals the children are expected to achieve by the end of reception. Alongside the need for practitioners to understand the implementation of fostering a more flexible, open-ended approach within the early years environment, this research motivates the need for further interrogation by researchers, teachers and policy makers of the notion of cultural capital and the way it is

currently framed within schools. The interpretation of data within this study through the lens of cultural capital suggests that although collective interactions with open-ended objects develop autonomy and agency in the early years environment, there is still a place for the use of more heavily scaffolded learning opportunities using subject-specific objects placed in the environment for a specific purpose. This is to ensure that all children, who bring a wealth of different experiences to the classroom (some of which are valued more or less than others within the English education systems) are able to broaden their cultural repertoires by extending the scope of their 'knowledge and understanding of their world' as prescribed by the early years curriculum. While the notion of what counts as valuable knowledge remains contentious (Gettier, 1963), this study suggests that a balance between an interest-led approach alongside scaffolded experiences which target specific aspects of the curriculum is needed. By allowing children and teachers to respond creatively and flexibly to the environment 'in-the-moment', children are able to figure their worlds in powerful ways, leading to transactions of both social and cultural capital. Artifacts can play a powerful role in the process both as mediators of pre-planned curriculum knowledge, but also as mediators of children's histories-in-person as they figure their 'mini worlds' in creative ways.

6.5 Limitations

As with any research there are limitations to the study which are outlined and considered within this section.

The observations observed by the teacher may not have provided the whole picture. Observations are difficult to record and observe at the same time (Burton and Bartlett, 2004) and it is possible that parts of the 'story' may have been missed out unintentionally, as the teacher/researcher wants to view the observation in a particular way. Observer judgements can affect the validity of the study due to their close involvement and possible preferred outcome from the study. Research bias has to be acknowledged as a limitation to this research study due to the subjective interpretations I have made from the data (Burton and Bartlett, 2004).

The observations may have also caused the children to behave differently in the presence of the observer (Cohen et al, 2011). 'The observer may affect the situation' (Burton and Bartlett,

2004:114) when children are able to feel their presence. This research required the presence of the researcher/practitioner in order to extend children's learning experience if the opportunity arose. That said, this research study does benefit from having the same class teacher as both researcher and practitioner. This should have reduced some tensions with the observer causing children to behave differently.

Using a figured worlds theoretical approach in order to uncover these findings could also be considered a limitation to this research study in the sense that arguably, application of a different theoretical lens, may have led to different conclusions. However, the use of figured worlds has been generative in allowing me to deepen my understanding of the way in which the children form and reform their identities within the classroom environment. Figured worlds has informed the understandings of children's autonomy and agency within the classroom and has highlighted the formation of 'self' within this environment. However, figured worlds is a methodology that captures what might have gone on and not necessarily what is going on. Figured worlds is a framework which interprets how people see their worlds in their interactions. With the age of the children in this study, it would be difficult to get them to explicitly story their own experiences. The information, therefore, did not come directly from the children, but rather 'guess work' from myself as the observer and researcher, looking at the dynamic interaction of people in their figured world. Again, this limitation was mitigated to some extent by the fact that I considered not just the children's figured worlds, but also my own. I considered my own 'authoring of self' through the use of a journal which captured my own views, insight and thoughts, and helped me to make sense of how my own positioning might frame the way I interpreted the findings.

The dual role I have been undertaking during this research is also another limitation as I have been the practitioner and researcher throughout. Although this has benefitted the research in terms of making it possible to readily gather information through day-to-day observations, I wonder whether children may have behaved or acted as they did due to the presence of me as the teacher-observer. These experiences may have been different if the presence of the teacher had not been in view, as the power structures which practitioners adhere to govern the identity of the child through vigilance of well-formed subjects (MacLure et al, 2012).

There were times where I experienced a conflict between my two roles as teacher and researcher. In some situations, I felt I may have been manipulating the observations in order for the children to think more about the choices they were taking part in within their play. This reflects Jagger and Smith-Burke's (1985) assertion that 'teachers screen their observations through their philosophy, their knowledge base, and their assumptions whenever they are involved with' (p. 11) observing children. An example of this, was when I encouraged the children to think about how to save the small world people in the volcano observation and then asked what the material of their boat would be made of. This changed the children's play experiences and led their learning into a direction which may have been manipulated by my own agenda (as the teacher and researcher). Encouraging adults to observe and engage in children's play allows children to become creative thinkers and promote their independence in their play; however, adults may potentially lead learning into a direction which meets the expectations of the curriculum.

The research collected many observations but only the select few were chosen to explore in more detail as vignettes for this study, as this thesis was aiming for depth and richness rather than mere breadth. The study would benefit from analysing the other observations this study collected to gain insight to further themes which may arise as part of this study. It would also be interesting to see more evidence for this approach in other Early Years settings which extend beyond this one class which this study presents.

My own reflective journal is also very limited as I have shared aspects of my journal and not the whole story. I have kept my journal for the two years of my teaching practice so that my experiences were captured 'in-the-moment'. My journal has explored the journey of both a teacher working within the profession, alongside the journey of a researcher exploring the learning experiences of children.

6.6 Future research

This research has revealed a need to consider children's cultural capital and the different experiences which children bring to their early years environment, which is currently a key area of focus for OFSTED. Future research would benefit from further exploration of the idea of cultural capital and its relationship with social capital, which this began to unpick. Although

this research has briefly acknowledged this relevance of this relationship to the early years classroom, a further detailed exploration around these two ideas in a wider range of settings is warranted, including investigation of and how 'planning-in-the-moment' might enhance the development of children's cultural and social capital.

A key finding from this study has been the potential value of open-ended artifacts to support learning and agency. While the role of artifacts has been studied here through the lens of figured worlds, it also resonates with a different body of work around multimodal literacies. Pahl and Rowsell's (2013) publication of Artifactual Literacies in the SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy is similar in some ways to this study because it explores how artifacts are used to make sense of identity and to 'position learners differently' (pg. 274). This study would benefit from further exploring objects and how they 'shape what it means to be literate' (Pahl and Rowsell, 2013:275) children's meaning-making within their social and cultural worlds.

This research has highlighted the potential of a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach and further opportunities to implement this within practice. However, it acknowledges multiple constraints, as practitioners may find it difficult to use this approach sustainably within their classrooms. Future research would benefit from a larger-scaled study applying the 'in-the-moment' approach to early years education as policy may require evidence-based practice. Governmental regimes and policies are in a very different landscape and requirements to provide justification for intent in early years practice for OFSTED might conflict with the ethos of an 'in-the-moment' approach. Further studies may allow for policies to support the use on an 'in-the-moment' approach which would benefit from outlining exactly what 'planning-in-the-moment' is and what it looks like in practice. Outlining the requirements of this approach may provide further clarity in support for governmental regimes to acknowledge this as a pedagogically sound method of learning within the early years.

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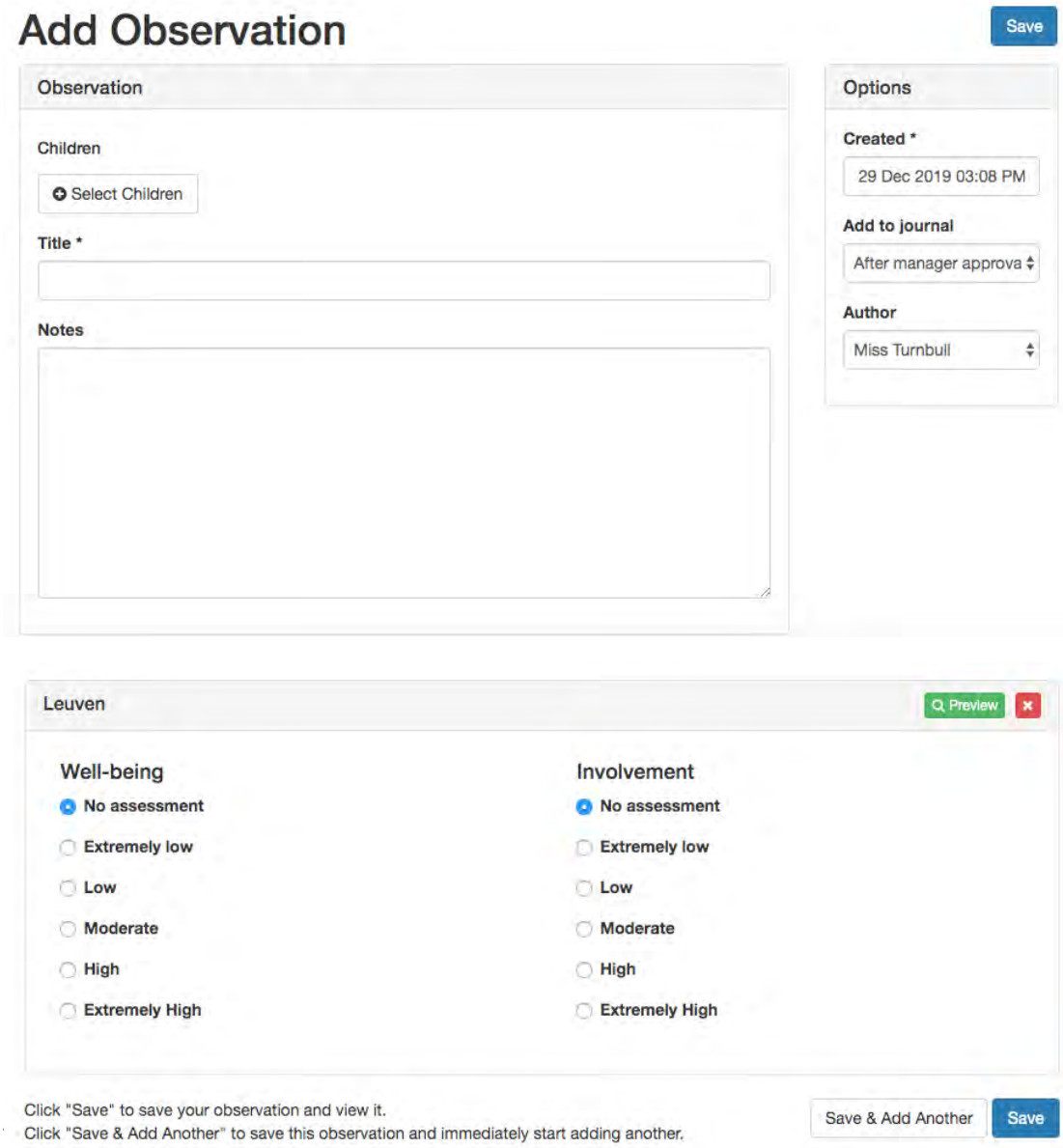
List of Tables

Appendix

Appendix A – Leuven Scale 'Level of Involvement' document for recording observations.



Appendix B - Participant Information Sheet

Title: How can children's interactions in the classroom promote independence?
I would like to invite your child to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you and your child. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

The study aims to work with children aged between 3-5 years to motivate, stimulate and engage them in their learning. This research study seeks to explore any possible factors that might affect their independence and learning.

What is the purpose of the study?
This is a research study as part of my Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of the study is to observe children in class and see what factors might affect their learning in the classroom. The research will involve observing children whilst they are playing, finding out what interests them and providing more resources to extend their learning. I will also be noticing how children interact with other children, staff within the classroom and with their environment. As part of my role as their classroom teacher I will be trialling an approach called 'planning-in-the-moment', which is becoming very popular in early years classrooms. This approach involves allowing the children to follow their interests and has been found to be successful in promoting children's engagement and learning in other early years settings. I hope that this project will allow me to gain a better understanding of how we can support children's independence and learning within nursery and reception.

Why has my child been invited?
Your child has been chosen to take part in the study because we are interested in the experience of 3-5 year olds. I have chosen to carry out my research within your child's class because I work with them every day as their class teacher and I already have a good understanding of the children and their interests.

Does my child have to take part?
No. It is completely up to you to decide whether you wish your child to take part in the study. Children are not required to take part in the study and taking part will not affect their learning opportunities in school. We will be observing and exploring ways to support the independence and learning of *all* children in the class, regardless of whether they are part of the study. Observing children and providing resources to support their interests and learning, is a routine part of our everyday practice in early years. Please do not feel under any pressure for your child to take part. You do not have to give a reason for saying 'no'.

If you would like your child to take part, please complete the consent form, which has been sent home with this letter. I will also speak to the children about my research during one of our lessons. The children will listen to an informational storybook written in child-friendly language, which explains what research is and what will happen if they decide to take part. I will make it clear to all children that they are not under any pressure to take part in the study and that they can change their mind at any time, without giving a reason. As well as encouraging children to let us know verbally if they would like to take part, I will also be

sensitive to their general behaviour throughout the project, to check if they are comfortable with being observed and talking to me about their learning. If your child lets me know (either by telling me or through their behaviour) that they no longer want to take part, I will withdraw them from the study.

What will happen to my child if they take part?

The research will be conducted during the summer term of this school year and also from September during the reception year. Your child will be observed as part of our everyday routine and, therefore, will not be required to do anything different during the study. If your child takes part we will we will use some of these observations within our research to help us to develop our understanding of how interactions between children, other children, staff and the environment can support learning in the early years. We will also keep a copy or photographs of your child's work, which they create as part of their everyday learning/play, such as pictures, drawings, paintings or writing. Your child will not be asked to complete any additional work. I will also make additional notes in a personal and confidential research journal (which will include no names of staff or children) at the end of the school day to help me to reflect on the interactions that I have observed throughout the day.

Children will be observed during their play and during teacher-time. When a child shows an interest in something in particular, we will 'plan in the moment' providing additional resources to support their learning. This process of observing children closely and then providing resources and activities to support their learning is something that we do as routine practice in early years and so all children will experience this, regardless of whether they are taking part in the study. The only difference if your child does take part in the study, is that I will also use observations of your child to help me think about and write up my research.

Whether or not your child takes part will not affect the support that they receive in school or the assessment of their learning. All children will be supported and assessed in the same way.

What will I or my child have to do?

Nothing will change in terms of the child's experience in their early years setting. They will be attending the same sessions, at the same time of day. The only difference is that I will be using observations of the child, which I make as part of our day-to-day practice in early years, to develop my understanding of how to support children's learning and independence. I will write up the ideas which I have developed from these observations into a report for my research degree.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By taking part in this study, we hope to further early years research by exploring how interactions between children, other children, staff and the classroom environment might promote learning when using a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach. We cannot promise that this study will help you or your child individually, but the information we get from the study will help to increase our understanding of how to support children's learning and independence in the early years.

Are there any risks?

The observations and ways of working with the children will not fall outside the day-to-day routines and activities which would normally occur within the early years setting. As the researcher is already the class teacher, with full DBS clearance, this project does not present any risks to your child's safety. If a child discloses any information during an observation which is a cause for concern in relation to the safety of the child, the Senior Safeguarding Officer for the school will be informed who will look in to this matter further and follow the usual procedures.

There is a small risk that by focusing on my research and teaching at the same time, I might act in ways which I may not have done otherwise, e.g. by spending more time observing some children than others; however, this risk is low given that observing children and providing resources/planning activities to support their learning is a normal and essential part of the early years. I will make sure that I make this risk as small as possible by ensuring that all children receive the same amount of attention in terms of assessment and support, regardless of whether they take part in the study.

Where observations involve interactions between two or more children, we will only include them within the research study if all the children within that particular observation have provided their consent to take part.

How will the data be stored?
All information which is collected about your child during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any data collected about your child (e.g. children's work, drawings, my reflections on observations of your child) will not include the child's name. Instead a pseudonym (made-up name) will be used to identify each child. Your data will be collected and stored safely on a password protected computer accessed only by myself (Miss Turnbull), and will be backed up on another password protected computer. Any written data will be stored in a locked cupboard accessed only by myself.

How long will the data be kept for?
The data from the research will be kept for a maximum of 5 years. The research data will only be viewed by myself and my university supervisors. The data will not be used for any future research and will be safely destroyed at the end of the project.

What will happen if my child does not carry on with the study?
If you or your child, decide that you no longer want him/her to take part in the study, all the information and data collected from your child, to date, will be destroyed. I will continue to observe your child and support his/her learning as a normal part of my role as their class teacher.

A child may show us that they no longer want to take part in the study in a number of different ways, for example, by telling me that they don't want to take part or by seeming uncomfortable about me observing them as they play. I will be sensitive to these needs and will withdraw the child from the study if appropriate.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be published as part of my Doctor of Education thesis (a long report that I need to complete as part of my degree). This report will include details of the observations of the children, quotes from children talking while they play and some examples of children's work. I will use this data to write about my experiences of using 'planning-in-the-moment' to support children's independence and learning and to develop my understanding of how children, teachers and the environment interact to support learning. The report will be written in such a way that the children who took part will not be able to be identified. Your child's name (or any other identifying information) will not appear in any report or presentation arising from this research. I may also talk about the findings of the study at research conferences and within journal articles. These results can be made available to you, should you wish to see them. I will provide a summary of the findings at a stay and play session within the reception year. I will also provide parents with the opportunity to takeaway more detailed information about the results of the project.

Who has reviewed this research project?
This study has been reviewed by Manchester Metropolitan University Supervisors: Dr Steph Ainsworth and Dr Dominic Griffiths as well as the Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?
If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you could speak to Miss Turnbull, who will do her best to answer your questions. You are also free to contact my university supervisors: Dr Steph Ainsworth, s.ainsworth@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2344 and Dr Dominic Griffiths, dominic.griffiths@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2077. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through contacting the Faculty of Education Ethics team: FOE-Ethics@mmu.ac.uk. The Chair of the Faculty Ethics Committee is Professor Ricardo Nemirovsky, R.Nemirovsky@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2023.

Contact details of the researcher:
Researcher Name: Chloe Turnbull
Researcher Email: chloe-amelia.turnbull@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Staff Participant Information Sheet

Title: How can children's interactions in the classroom promote independence?

Manchester Metropolitan University

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

The study aims to work with children aged between 3-5 years to motivate, stimulate and engage them in their learning. This research study seeks to explore any possible factors that might affect their independence and learning.

What is the purpose of the study?

This is a research study as part of my Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of the study is to observe children in class and see what factors might affect their learning in the classroom. The research will involve noticing how children interact with other children, staff within the classroom and with their environment. As part of my role as their classroom teacher I will be trialling an approach called 'planning-in-the-moment', which is becoming very popular in early years classrooms. This approach involves allowing the children to follow their interests and has been found to be successful in promoting children's engagement and learning in other early years settings. From this, that this project will allow me to gain a better understanding of how we can support children's independence and learning in within nursery and reception.

Why have I been invited?

You been invited to take part in the study because we are interested in developing our understanding further of how to support the independence and learning of 3-5 year olds in the class that you currently work in. I have chosen to carry out my research within this early years class because I work with them every day as their class teacher and I already have a good understanding of the children and their interests. I have invited you to take part as we would like to investigate how the interactions between children, staff, other children and the classroom environment can support children's independence and learning.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is completely up to you to decide whether you wish to take part in the study. You are not required to take part in the study and whether or not you choose to take part will not affect our professional relationship or your position as a member of staff. Before you decide, take time to decide whether you wish to take part and there is no pressure while you decide. Feel free to ask me any questions or you may wish to speak to another person before you decide. You do not have to give a reason for saying 'no'. If you would like to take part, please complete the consent form which is attached to this letter.

What will happen if I take part?

The research will be conducted during the summer term of this school year and also from September during the reception year. You will not be required to do anything

different within your job role. The only difference is that you might be included in some of the child observations, which we will use within this research study to help us to develop our understanding of how interactions between children, other children, staff and the environment can support learning in the early years. The observations will take place as part of our normal day-to-day assessment practices. I will also make additional notes in a personal and confidential research journal (which will include no names of staff or children) at the end of the school day to help me to reflect on the interactions that I have observed throughout the day. For my research, I will be using some of these observations to help me to think and write about the role that these interactions play in supporting children's learning and independence. I will only include interactions within my research where all members of the interaction have provided consent.

If you do not wish to participate in the study you will not be at a disadvantage. You will still be observing children participating in activities in the classroom, both teacher-led and independent play, as per your current job role.

What will I have to do?
Nothing will change in terms of your job role. The children will be attending the same sessions, at the same time of day. The only difference is that I will be using observations of the child, which I make as part of our day-to-day practice, within my research, to develop my understanding of how to support children's learning and independence. I will write up the ideas which I have developed from these observations into a report for my research degree.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
By taking part in this study, we hope to further early years research by exploring how interactions between children, other children, staff and the classroom environment might promote learning when using a 'planning-in-the-moment' approach. We cannot promise that this study will help you or these particular children, but the information we get from the study will help to increase our understanding of how to support children's learning and independence in the early years.

Are there any risks?
The observations and ways of working with the children will not fall outside the day-to-day routines and activities which would normally occur within the early years setting. There is a small risk that you may feel uncomfortable about having observations which describe you interacting with children and/or the environment within the research. However, I would like to emphasise the focus of the research is not you as an individual but on the interactions that take place within the setting and how these might support learning and independence. All observations will take place as part of normal day-to-day assessment activities; they will not be used for any purpose other than to support our usual planning and assessment activities within school and to support my thinking and writing within my research project.

Any observations that may include you as a staff member will not be included if you do not give consent.

How will the data be stored?
All information which is collected about yourself during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any data collected will not include your name. Instead a pseudonym will be used to identify staff. Your data will be collected and stored safely on a password protected computer accessed only by myself (Miss Turnbull), and will be backed up on another password protected computer. Any written data will be stored in a locked cupboard accessed only by myself.

How long will the data be kept for?
The data from the research will be kept for a maximum of 5 years. The research data will only be viewed by myself and my university supervisors. The data will not be used for any future research and will be safely destroyed at the end of the project.

What will happen if I do not carry on with the study?
If you decide that you no longer want to take part in the study, all the information and data collected from you, to date, will be destroyed. You will continue to observe the children and support their learning as a normal part of your role but any interactions which involve yourself will not be included for the purpose of this study.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the study will be published as part of my Doctor of Education thesis (a long report that I need to complete as part of my degree). This report will include details of the observations of the children, quotes from children talking while they play and some examples of children's work. I will use this data to write about my experiences of using 'planning-in-the-moment' to support children's independence and learning and to develop my understanding of how children, teachers and the environment interact to support learning. The report will be written in such a way that participants who took part will not be able to be identified. Your name (or any other identifying information) will not appear in any report or presentation arising from this research. I may also talk about the findings of the study at research conferences and within journal articles. These results can be made available to you, should you wish to see them. I will provide a summary of the findings at a stay and play session within the reception year. I will also provide you with the opportunity to takeaway more detailed information about the results of the project.

Who has reviewed this research project?
This study has been reviewed by Manchester Metropolitan University Supervisors: Dr Steph Ainsworth and Dr Dominic Griffiths as well as the Manchester Metropolitan University Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?
If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you could speak to Miss Turnbull, who will do her best to answer your questions. You are also free to contact my university supervisors: Dr Steph Ainsworth, s.ainsworth@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2344 and Dr Dominic Griffiths, dominic.griffiths@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2077. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through contacting the Faculty of Education Ethics team: FOE-Ethics@mmu.ac.uk. The Chair of the Faculty

Ethics Committee is Professor Ricardo Nemirovsky, R.Nemirovsky@mmu.ac.uk, 0161 247 2023.

Contact details of the researcher:
Researcher Name: Chloe Turnbull
Researcher Email: chloe-amelia.turnbull@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Appendix C - Social Story - 'I don't like that' - for participants explaining the reasoning for carrying out such research.

You're going to eat an apple for snack,

You're going to play with the train track today,

But Miss, I just want to play!

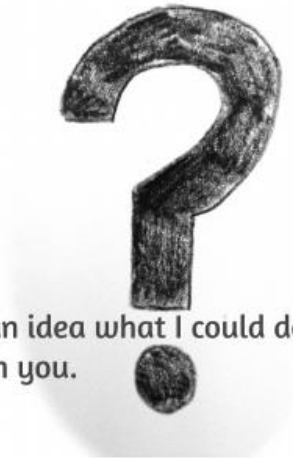
You're going to go and play outside,
But Miss, I just want to play inside!

You're going to go and play in the sand,

But Miss, I don't like the feel of it on my hands!

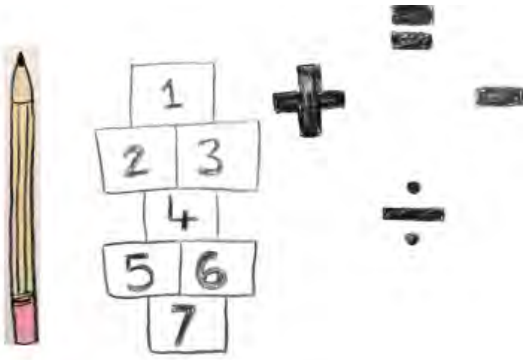
Go and play with the play dough,
But Miss, I don't want to do that
though!

Oh dear, I don't know what to do,
I thought you would have wanted to.



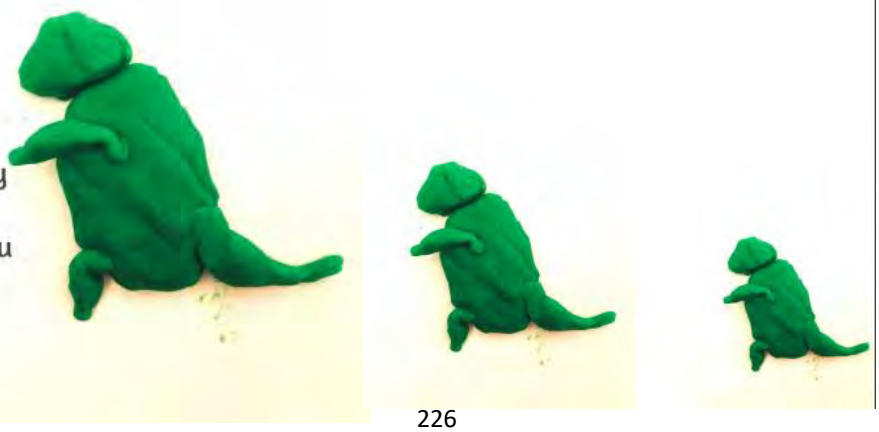
I know, I have an idea what I could do,
If it Is okay with you.

I could watch you while you play,

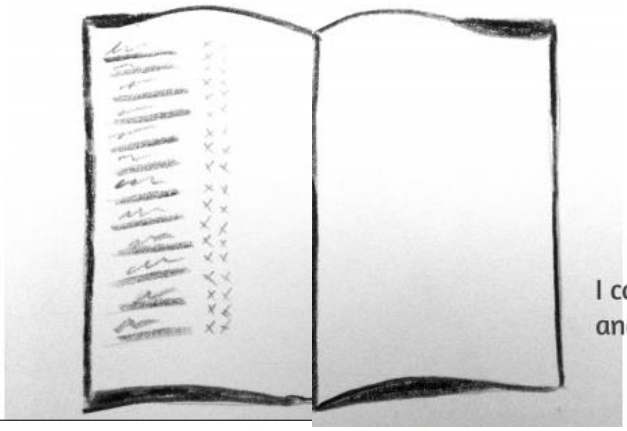


And see what you get up to in
your day.

I could use my
eyes to see,
The things you
like to play
with when
your free.



And when I've noticed what you like,



I could write it up and keep it tight.

This way, I'll know what you find fun,
So we can make nursery fun for everyone!

Appendix D – An extract from my personal journal

26th September 2018

After trying to convince the Senior Leadership team that Nursery does not need 'working book's', we have now got books for each child, to show off their learning in Nursery. This book contains teacher-led work and requires marking with their current levels and ability. This goes completely against the needs of 'planning-in-the-moment' and focuses purely on the expectations from management. Group work so far has shown lots of discussion and I have decided to base a lot of the work inside this book on talking activities and writing lots of post-it notes of direct speech whilst they are carrying out the work. I have also decided to allow children to follow their own direction during the activity and allow them to control what will happen during the discussion.

12th November 2018

During an activity on weighing objects today LC-J said 'Can I go and play now?'. This really struck a chord with me. This little boy is supposed to be here to play and learn through experience. I felt like I had failed him. He didn't want to learning weighing objects, he wanted to get back inside the sand pit. My dilemma here, is how do I satisfy the needs of the curriculum and the needs of hierarchy, as well as let the children 'go and play'.

What made me question my position more, was that when I called the next group over, E-RH also asked 'Can I go and play now?'. If the children don't understand the value in their learning experience, I question myself, what are they really learning? How could I have made this experience any better?

27th November 2018

I was watching CS in the mud kitchen outside for 20 minutes. He was scrubbing the plates in the sink using the scrubbing brush, singing to himself, preparing tea by placing the plates on the table for all to eat and completely immersed in his learning experience. He didn't even hear me shout the children to come inside to wash hands and have snack. It took a further 10 minutes to turn around and notice that all the other children had left the outdoor area and had gone inside. His face looked in shock when he froze, thinking, 'I'm gonna be in trouble now'. When he turned his back, he saw me stood at the door and I told him to carry on with

his busy job. He continued for a short while and then placed all the items back where they would be placed in a kitchen. He then decided to come in and have snack with the other children.

This was an AMAZING experience to be a part of. The other staff were confused that I had afforded him this extra time in his play but what I was witnessing felt like a 'blossoming' moment in his own learning. The amount of areas in which this met within his curriculum requirements was huge and this was all down to his own play. No teachers interrupted this experience and it was clear he was showing extremely high levels of involvement. For me now, it is important for other children to experience this too.

Appendix E - Vignettes in the Action Research Cycle

VIGNETTE ONE: AT THE DOCTORS OBSERVATION

PLAN	The plan was to create a doctor's role play which related to the current topic of 'ourselves' and 'our bodies'.
OBSERVE	The children had broken the leg off the large human-sized plastic skeleton when they were playing with it.
REFLECT	The doctor's observation took place within a predetermined environment using 'construed symbols…learned though social interaction' (Holland et al, 1998:6), in other words objects which were placed there to be used in a very specific way by the children.
REFLEX	I felt annoyed and upset that our brand new toy had been broken. I, therefore, spoke to the children about how we look after our toys.
PLAN	I planned to leave the human-sized plastic skeleton in the role play area even though it was broken. The leg was left next to the skeleton.
OBSERVE	I observed one little boy take the leg of the skeleton and begin to fix the leg back on to the body using the surgical tools and equipment within the role play area.
REFLECT	This activity drew my attention to the fact that often it is the unplanned activities instigated by the children that allow them to use their imaginations, moving beyond what the teacher might have imagined themselves. What I viewed as a problem, turned out to be a perfect opportunity to develop their play experiences as they began to figure a way to find a way to fix the bone of the body. The children have made the skeleton bones a proxy for a whole 'flesh and blood' person's body demonstrating how they have had to refigure this object in order to creatively respond to it. This shows how there is a place for some subject-specific artifacts being placed within the classroom in order to broaden the children's knowledge and linguistic repertoire about a specific subject, as it is possible for children to creatively and imaginatively respond to the artifacts even if it subject-specific.
REFLEX	The figured world of a doctors surgery which I had created and developed was perceived by me as now being broken and pointless after the skeleton's leg had fallen off. However, the children saw this as an opportunity to become 'real' doctors within a doctors surgery, providing enhanced possibilities for them to engage with this figured world. This observation, created a space of re-authoring for myself as a teacher and the expectations I hold within the classroom. It has made me aware that I must remain open to the limitless possibilities within creating an environment that promotes learning and development and that the things that go 'wrong' may actually be created as a space for authoring for others. It has made me mindful to take a less rigid approach to my teaching method and try to experience a broader approach to planning, provision and allowing flexibility in how children use the environment and seek out their own pathways to learning. This observation has offered opportunities for authoring of the self for both the children and myself – as the teacher.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' opportunity occurred through the children's need to 'fix' the broken leg.

OBSERVE	At the beginning of the observation Michael announced, *'I'm the doctor'*. In the is way Michael immediately asserted his role of doctor within the role play and took on this figurative identity
REFLECT	Michael was a very quiet little boy who would not normally take the lead in group situations but within this new role of the 'doctor' in which he has identified, he has found a voice and is figuring his new identity in which he was able to author himself as a different person. He becomes confident and skilled within his role of 'doctor' and is able to give medical advice he has come across within his previous experiences.
REFLEX	Michael is confident within his role and is able to clarify to others how he knows that his patient is still alive. His understanding of the doctor's job allows Michael to use his previous knowledge, experiences and understandings of the world to influence his current role of doctor. This is his history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) intertwining within his current figured world. His previous experiences have led him to believe that a plaster will fix the problem. This shows the extent of his current knowledge and he is able to apply these understandings to the problem within this imaginary play world.
PLAN	Continuing the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach.
OBSERVE	I observed Michael say to his friend *'His heart is beating Doctor.'* Michael has now referred to the other child as 'doctor'. Although Michael has remained within the position of power throughout the role play, he is now assuming neutral territory in which both children are doctors and both have an important role to play within this scenario.
REFLECT	The children's figurative identities at this point are beginning to reform and develop into positions of shared power. I noted, however, that it was Michael's decision to allow this neutral territory to form and was not instigated by – or provoked by – the other child.
REFLEX	This observation shows how the two children confirmed their figurative and positional identities, as well as found a space for authoring 'in-the-moment' through the mediation of the cultural resources, tools and artifacts that the doctors surgery could offer. The cultural artifact of the skeleton is used in this environment in order to assist the children's performances as actors in their world (Holland et al, 1998), mediating what is culturally significant. They are forming in practice – by becoming the doctor and nurse in their role play – using the cultural resource of the skeleton to author themselves in the moment (Holland and Lave, 2009). The skeleton became a mediating device in which the children were able to enter the world of a doctor, interact, build the 'self' in relation to a medical professional and continue a 'flow' within their play, through language and prior knowledge around 'the body', to help in the mediation of their positional identity. Teachers leave such artifacts in the environment in the hope that children will learn about it through social interaction in their play (Holland et al, 1998). The cultural artifacts that teachers use in order to enhance the environment with the current theme or topic are then used within the child's figured world in order to mediate positional identity in the social world to recognise 'self' and 'position individuals with respect to those worlds' (Holland et al, 1998:63).

VIGNETTE TWO: WATER PLAY OBSERVATION

PLAN	The plan was for the child to complete a teacher-led activity.
OBSERVE	On collecting the child to complete the teacher-led activity, I noticed this child (and a group of other children) surrounding the water area (which had already been enhanced with water, powder paint and different equipment).
REFLECT	This child was already showing high levels of engagement and involvement with their activity and so I decided to let the child (and the group of friends continue their activity).
REFLEX	The action to allow the child to continue their activity was an uncomfortable decision as a teacher as this went against the expectations of the school.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' approach was initiated by allowing the children to continue their water play activity and for me to go over to them.
OBSERVE	Jim noticed me within this space and began to explain what he was doing. *'Miss I'm filling the water up and pouring it down. I moved that thing cos it's supposed to catch it!'* Jim was clearly very confident and excited about how he was catching the water each time he poured it down the pipes. Showing high levels of concentration, involvement and fascination, he turned to the teacher to receive praise for his work. '*What if we move that out the way and swap this?' He asked. 'Good Idea.' I said, validating his decision.*
REFLECT	The 'gaze' of the observer was noticed and the children began to try to impress the teacher. Jim had included me within his learning by asking me a question to which I was invited to confirm or decline his idea. The 'we' within this question has significant importance for the observation as it confirms that Jim has included me within his independent play, shifting my position from 'complete observer' to the 'researcher-as-participant' (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Jim is asking for confirmation as to whether it would be a good idea to swap the pipe and he reaches out to the teacher to confirm his decision. On receiving recognition that his idea was a 'good idea', Jim gained the approval that he required.
REFLEX	Within this example, Jim appears to be acting out of a desire to impress myself as his class teacher. The gaze becomes part of the performative system and is used not only to regulate teachers, but also the children working within their space. Jim aware of the 'gaze' of the teacher as the visible principle of power, however he is unsure 'when he is being looked at, at any one moment' (Foucault, 1977:201) as discussed in Foucault's (1977:201-202) explanation of the Panopticon, which 'is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad'. Jim generates conversation with the teacher to explain the process of his construction in order to receive praise for a job well done. Although Jim appears content with the hierarchical 'gaze' looking on to his activity, he appears to create a mediating ground where both teacher and child are at equal power. He delegates to his 'employees' and then returns to his teacher to have brief conversations. Jim has internalised the adult discourse within his pretend play and therefore, his employees do not challenge his 'adult' word outwardly, as they are part of the 'contact zone' (Cohen, 2009:338).
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – Izzy couldn't reach high enough to pour the water into the tubes.

OBSERVE	Izzy went off and got herself a stepping stone to stand on. *'But, we need to move it over more so that we catch the water!'* said Jim. *'Oh, so what can you do?'* I asked. *'Izzy, please can you get down so we can move it?'* Jim said.
REFLECT	Although Izzy had acted in a way which helped her achieve her goal of being able to reach the tube to pour the water in, Jim is proving his positional identity by asking Izzy to get down so it can be moved to a position which he prefers it. Jim does say 'please' to Izzy and is showing respect to his friends using his manners, but quickly ensures he is dominating the play experience by moving the equipment to his desired location.
REFLEX	Although I am part of the play I begin to see my changing role from participant to researcher/teacher. I begin the 'planning-in-the-moment' action research cycle once more and begin to ask problem solving questions during the play (which I am apart of and feel equal within), such as 'Oh, so what can you do?'. Although I have initiated the 'in-the-moment' approach once more in order to extend the children's play, it makes me question my motives with the probing questions. I wonder whether I am encouraging Jim to become an even better engineer as he changes the pipes and height of the stepping stones or manipulating the interaction towards fulfilment of the Development Matters (2012) criteria.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – using crates to allow the children to build steps to each the top of the tubes.
OBSERVE	*'Let's get crates to make it bigger and hold it up!'* Said Jim. Izzy went straight off to get the crates. The children all helped to stack them. *'Not that way! Sideways! Noooo the other way!'* Jim explained.
REFLECT	Here we see Jim has now gained control of the area and he is in charge of the water play engineering and construction. He gives requests out to the children in which he is able to confirm whether they did it right or wrong. He holds a position of power within the play and shows high levels of involvement on the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003).
REFLEX	Using Foucault's (1977:217) idea of the panoptic gaze – as per Bentham's panopticon (2008, initially 1787), he watches over his engineers and can assess whether they are doing the job correctly. He shows power and confidence in his conviction as he says 'Not that way! Sideways!'. He is shouting at the children to get the crates the correct way round. Jim's positional identity has been assured as this point and his figured identity of the 'Chief Engineer' has been established. He has developed the ability to become a part of an imaginary world by mediating a particular response, to shift into the frame of a different world. Vygotsky recognises this as "pivoting" (Holland, et al, 1998:50). His identity and sense of agency are linked collaboratively in his role as Chief Engineer, and correspondingly, so are those of the other children accepting the roles of his 'assistants'. He uses artifacts as a means to mediate his positional identity and has been able to find a space for authoring at the expense of the other children whom are carrying out his duties for him. Interestingly these children seem to have willingly accepted their respective roles and adhere to his requests. He has managed to dictate what he wants to happen and has become the leader within his role. I find their complicity

	interesting: they are so implicated with this figured world that they conform as they would with rules in their classroom.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – children are moving the crates into the correct position as requested by Jim.
OBSERVE	*'Jason, help move the rest of the crates away!'* asked Jim. *'Miss, are they hurting you? Let me move them off you.'* Said Jim.
REFLECT	Again, Jim's powerful stance has enforced Jason to move the rest of the crates. He shows dominance and leadership. He has successfully figured his identity in his role (Holland et al, 1998). However, he continues with *'Miss, are they hurting you? Let me move them off you.'* This surprised me. He showed authority and leadership to the engineers he had employed in his play, yet showed his kindness and helpfulness towards me suggesting within this example, kindness and authority are mutually exclusive. I was once an engineer he had employed. I was part of the 'we' from the beginning, however he does not control or dictate instructions to me, he shows care and consideration.
REFLEX	The presence of myself may still be within the field of his figured world. He could be aware of the hierarchy and I may be causing the panoptic gaze on to him and his workmanship. It may have been my presence that had created Jim to behave as he did and so he was figuring his identity in relation to my presence in the role. His authoring of the self (Holland et al, 1998) may have occurred through the presence of the hierarchical gaze (Foucault, 1977). However, his response could be down to the caring person he is and this manner of respect is how he treats others.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' is initiated once again when the engineering had been finished.
OBSERVE	*'I know. Take these two off and move that little green one.' Said Jim.* *'Yeeeeee we did it! Shouted Jason* *'Noooo the water needs to go that way!' explained Jim.* *'Yeeeeee we did it! Shouted Jason* *'Let's make it bigger.' Said Jim*
REFLECT	Jim's figured identity as an engineer is confirmed as he demonstrates his expertise by saying 'Noooo the water needs to go that way!'. He then went on explain that the tube needed to be raised up by putting more crates underneath it. He was sure that it would make the water go the right way. When he tests his idea, he was correct and instead of assuming he had reached his goal which was to make the water go the right way, he said 'Let's make it bigger.' Jason is extremely proud of himself for completing the water pipes, however Jim does not see this an end goal. He only wishes for the water pipes to be made even better. Jim shows determination and sees limitless possibilities in the water pipe construction he is making. He strives for more and quickly shuts Jason's comment down by saying 'It can be made bigger'.
REFLEX	His previous knowledge and experiences of working with the water has encouraged him to build something even better. His history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) generated new discoveries, new knowledge and new ways of knowing using the artifacts (water, crates and tubes). The artifacts are a mediator between his identity construction and his new learning experience

	of the engineering construct he has made. Once the water pipe construction is finished, Jim may find it difficult to retain his positional identity and therefore, it might be that he encourages the children to continue with the work and explains it could be bigger, in order to retain his employees and retain his position of power. He does not celebrate with Jason that the job has been completed, he merely orders the water play to be made bigger. We also see children not only interacting with their peers, but interacting with everyday tools such as tubs, buckets, guttering and water pipes, in order for children to understand the purpose of these objects and build their own symbolic understandings (Holland et al, 1998:272). For example, the crates were placed at the side of the water play area as 'loose parts' to be used throughout any area within the outdoor playground. The children used these crates to explore their water play further by placing the guttering at a steeper angle. The use of open-ended objects led to the children becoming motivated and fascinated with their activity (Laevers, 2003). When Jim came to the end of the water play construction he had built he decided to *'make it bigger.'* He did not want this activity to end as he was totally immersed in it, reaching level 5 Involvement (Laevers, 2003).
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – continuing making the construction bigger as per Jim's request.
OBSERVE	*'Miss do you know this word? Confident.' Asked Jim.* *'Ooo what does that mean?' I asked.* *'My dad told me I am confident. I can do this.' Said Jim.*
REFLECT	Although Jim will not celebrate the water play construction with his 'employees', he will celebrate his successes with me. Through reflecting on this observation and Jim's initial comment where he views us both as 'equal' through the use of the word 'we', I am able to assume that Jim sees himself as a teacher like me – as though 'we' are the same or that 'we' are capable of the same things or that 'we' have power over others. He has figured his positional identity as equal to mine. He wants me to know what confidence means as he knows he has this ability. It could be showing that Jim wants me to be proud of him and wants approval from myself as the authority figure.
REFLEX	Through the orchestration of voices (Holland et al, 1998) – in this case, his Dad's voice – he is 'confident' in his ability to be an engineer and knows that what he is doing is right. He has referred back to a comment in which his Dad has told him he is confident and recalled the feeling he felt when his Dad called him this word. This recalled 'feeling' relates to his history-in-person as returns to a state where he knows he was ''confident'. Through the orchestration of voices, he knows that what he is doing is going well and he is also 'confident' in this activity too. He doesn't require gratification from his 'employees' for a job done well but refers to me – his 'equal' – to confirm that he has done well with the construction he has made and is striving for similar praise as he received last time.

VIGNETTE THREE: JIGSAW OBSERVATION

PLAN	The plan was for the child to complete a teacher-led activity where they were counting objects.
OBSERVE	Through observation, the child was playing with another child with a jigsaw and I noticed that the child was struggling to complete it.
REFLECT	The child was already showing levels of involvement with their learning and so I decided to let the child continue with their activity. Izzy is confident that she can complete this puzzle and then continues to model how the jigsaw should be put together to her friend. It is in these initial stages of the observation that we begin to see Izzy positioning herself as the person of power within this relationship. She is figuring her identity as the teacher and Myleene as the child who is learning. The jigsaw is being used as the mediating tool which is allowing Izzy to gain a positional identity. This would suggest that the educational context and classroom is an important factor to consider when analysing observations as the objects in which we have placed within the space are becoming mediating tools children are using to represent themselves.
REFLEX	The action to allow the child to continue their activity was an uncomfortable decision as a teacher as this went against the expectations of the school.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' approach was initiated by allowing the children to continue their jigsaw and for me to go over to them.
OBSERVE	Children were working together to put the jigsaw pieces in the correct places. The child noticed myself – as the teacher/researcher - and said "this one fits!".
REFLECT	The 'gaze' of the observer was noticed and the children began to try to impress the teacher.
REFLEX	Foucault describes 'self-regulation' as the institutional 'panopticism' (Foucault, 1977:217), which is based on Bentham's panopticon. This is where the "object of inspection" would learn to feel the gaze of the inspector, who may or may not be watching over them at any particular time. Within this example, the children appear to be acting out of a desire to impress the teacher. The gaze becomes part of the performative system and is used not only to regulate teachers, but also the children working within their space.
PLAN	'Plan-in-the-moment' – I decided to offer advice to the children which was to find all the straight edges first. Without this prior knowledge given by the teacher or peer, she was unable to complete the puzzle. The Zone of Proximal Development as discussed by Vygotsky was an essential part of this child's learning, as without the collective experience and knowledge from others of the best method to complete the puzzle, she may have lost motivation and possibly, not enjoy such activity in the future.
OBSERVE	The children took my advice and began to sort the straight edged pieces. "Look Myleene. I've done this. This is the straight one and it goes with that."
REFLECT	Children were engaged and on task showing level 5 involvement on the Leuven scale. They followed the advice of the observer and now children were working (and talking) together to finish the jigsaw. The issue with the observer became less prominent as the children used the advice and helped each other to finish the jigsaw. Myleene again reaches out for confirmation of a 'job well done', but this time she is not speaking to the teacher for clarification, she turns to her friend who is assuming the position of teacher. Myleene conforms to Izzy's

	requests as Izzy is acting the role of the teacher, she looks to Izzy for similar praise that she previously had experienced from her class teacher to help be considered as 'the good child' (MacLure et al, 2012). Myleene has figured herself within this relationship as the child being taught and is behaving in a way that a child would respond when they have done something good.
REFLEX	The children have followed the advice from me, as their teacher, and now a positional identity has shifted Izzy begins her powerful role in dictating what will happen within their play.
PLAN	"Plan-in-the-moment" – The children were asked to tidy up the classroom ready for our music lesson but Izzy and Myleene were allowed to continue their activity.
OBSERVE	Children were able to complete their activity in the extra time. They were happy and excited to share their good news with their friends who came to see their work. Interestingly, they continued with their jigsaw and almost 'smirked' at the other children that had been asked to tidy up, suggesting that the girls gained had come to identify themselves as actors of more privilege and power in the worlds formed through day-to-day activities (Holland et al, 1998:60).
REFLECT	Although the children did complete the puzzle it was unfair on the other children who had to continue with tidying rather than playing. This choice demonstrated my power within my role as teacher and how I was able to make this decision although this meant other children were not receiving equal fairness.
REFLEX	My power as a practitioner can allow me to give or take away choices from children. I had asked the class to tidy away and get ready for carpet-time but Izzy and Myleene asked if they could continue with their activity to which I allowed them to continue. When making the decision about whether to allow the girls to continue, I felt a tension between my role as teacher and role as researcher. I would not have been happy for other children to continue their play so why was I letting them? Was this due to me as a teacher wanting them to appreciate their jigsaw that they had taken time to make? Or was my decision driven by my desire as a researcher to gain further data? These conflicting identities must have caused considerable amounts of confusion for the children who had to tidy up and watch these two children continue in their play. Although this observation has offered a space for authoring with 'in-the-moment' planning, it has shown how agency and autonomy is monitored, accepted and achieved through the gaze of the hierarchical figure of the teacher. This hierarchical power and control which my position of teacher affords me, enables me to grant or remove children's autonomy to/from each child. This makes me question how children become 'the chosen one' – the child which the teacher may favour in that moment – and to what lengths children would need to go, in order to become 'the chosen one'. By allowing the girls to continue their jigsaw, it went against the structures in place and places focus on the "structure-in-practice" created as part of the "field", in relation to the children interacting within my space (Holland et al,1998:58).

VIGNETTE FOUR: VOLCANO OBSERVATION

PLAN	The construction area was continually being used to build a train track or a tower with the blocks. I decided to implement an 'in-the-moment' approach within this particular area of the classroom by leaving a mixture of open-ended objects to encourage the children to become a little more imaginative with the resources they had.
OBSERVE	A cardboard cone-shaped construction object was the initial inspiration for these young boys to create a world which included a volcano erupting. I observed Jim placing ice cubes (from our current classroom topic) inside the volcano and I listened to him explaining to his friends that he would be making the volcano erupt.
REFLECT	It became clear that he was leading this role and had identified himself with the position of leader within his play experience.
REFLEX	He was authoring himself 'in-the-moment' using cultural resources and tools to mediate his position whilst his friends watched what he was doing. From hearing the use of ice cubes being added to the volcano, it probed me to question his understanding of the volcano.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – I decided to ask Jim *'is the lava hot or cold?'*
OBSERVE	Jim responded to my question with *'Cold'.* Chase heard Jim's response and answered '*No, it's really, really hot. It can burn you.'* Jim's current understanding of the world would have offered incorrect information. His friends were able to offer correct knowledge about the situation moving him through the zone of proximal development in a collective experience.
REFLECT	The mediating artifact of the cardboard cone-shaped construction piece had now changed the leading roles within this role play experience and Chase took on a new position of leader and from this point Chase began to direct the play. Within this observation, 'Knowledge is power'. Chase was seen as the powerful provider of information and Jim's role of 'leader' had quickly changed into the 'follower'. Children with experiences less favoured by English systems may not have access to these conversations, videos and books to allow children to grasp a wider understanding of such a specific topic of volcanos. As Bernstein argues, the curriculum may potentially 'privilege some learners over others' (Power, 2019). Through knowing another person who had knowledge about volcanoes, the observation became a transformational relationship of social and cultural capital (Huang, 2019). Learning was being scaffolded by the children within that space.
REFLEX	Positional identity can change quickly within these play experiences. This observation demonstrates the continual forming and reforming of 'self'. It has illuminated the importance in the mediation of cultural artifacts as a way for people to recreate their positions in their space of authoring.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – I decided to ask Jim *'What will you need to do to save the people then?* I asked Jim to encourage his problem solving skills. *'Go in the boat. Let's make one' said Jim.*
OBSERVE	Jim replied to my question by replying *'Go in the boat. Let's make one' said Jim.* Jim was able to reclaim his position of power and was able to figure himself in many different roles including 'the engineer' and 'the life-saver'.

REFLECT	Jim's new understanding of the lava being hot had instantly affected his emotional response to the role play situation as he developed concerns for the safety of the small world people within his figured world. This response shows how Jim is experiencing level 5 involvement on the Leuven Scale (Laevers, 2003) as he begins to show his emotion towards the toy figures within the activity and responds quickly in order to save them from the lava. I was aware that there were high levels of engagement due to the children's fascination, motivation and total implication with the activity (Laevers, 2003) offering the children to experience deep levels of learning. Although Jim loses his positional identity and this is reclaimed by Chase at this point in their play, Jim remains involved (Laevers, 2003) and attempts to win back this position by emotionally responding to the role play by responding with… *'But that will mean the people aren't safe!'.* Jim uses his 'cultural tool kit' (Holland et al., 2001: 65) to access 'emotion' as a way to regain control by creating a sense of urgency within the play and encouraging them to follow his ideas, to help regain his positional identity.
REFLEX	Through reflection of my own actions within this play experience, I wonder to what extent I was manipulating this observation for the evidence required for the Development Matters (2012) curriculum. Did my ulterior motive of every child having the correct knowledge and understanding of the world appear more important than the child developing knowledge through interactions in their play and how would I have changed this? Again, this has made me question the extent to which children are working within the constraints of the performative discourses. I am figuring my professional identity as a teacher and fulfilling the expectations of the teachers standards. I am working within the constraints of the performative discourse and I am showing – within this example – how I am conforming to these pressures.
PLAN	Once Jim suggested he would build a boat, I instantly responded with; *'What material are you using?' 'I'm using wood that is covered in a special material so it won't melt.' Jim told me.*
OBSERVE	Jim replied '*that is covered in a special material so it won't melt.'*
REFLECT	What I found interesting about the choice of word 'melt', was that it related to our 'winter and ice' topic which we had been learning during our topic. He understood the meaning of 'melting' and related it to his play experience. Considering that the current topic was related to winter and ice, it is interesting that this observation relied heavily on heat and volcanoes. This topic was not part of the continuous provision activities which had been placed in the room by the teacher as the current enhancements in the room all related to the topic of winter and ice.
REFLEX	This makes me consider the environment itself and the extent to which it allows children to follow interests outside of the predetermined class topic. The environment in which children are working within is created by the teacher/practitioner.
PLAN	'Plan-in-the-moment' – to allow children time to follow their learning now they have found out that the lava is hot and that the small world people need saving.

OBSERVE	The boys the spent time finding ways to save the small world people from the lava. *They began to use expression for the voices of the people and began to work together to help recover all the people from the lava.*
REFLECT	The boys at this point are able to orchestrate the voices of others (of the small world people) through understanding this experience themselves. Although they have never touched lava, their understanding and of the words 'heat' and 'hot' helps them to imagine and act out the voices of others. They are engaging in dialogue and making appropriate actions in their role play.
REFLEX	We see that these boys are heteroglossic as the self is represented through a collective language, with the attempt to control or modify self behaviour (Bakhtin, 1981). They have reached deep levels of engagement, even when the teacher is asking probing questions throughout their role play. Jim's 'authorial stance' (Holland et al, 1998:182) changed as he used his emotional response as part of his 'internally persuasive discourses' (Holland et al, 1998: 182) that have been married to his own beliefs in the creation of his positional identity. Jim is dialogically formulating his identity as discussed by Bakhtin, in order to reinstate his positional identity (Holland et al, 1998). Using the resources available in his play and language about the safety of the small world people, he is able to express his identity and shape the 'self' as 'it is dialogized, figured against other possible positions, other possible worlds' (Holland et al, 1998: 238). A combination of 'history-in-person' (knowing that heat can burn) with that of dialogism (addressing and answering stimuli), has enabled Jim to refigure his identity from 'follower' to 'leader' in a heteroglossic way (Holland et al, 1998).

VIGNETTE FIVE: IN THE KITCHEN OBSERVATION

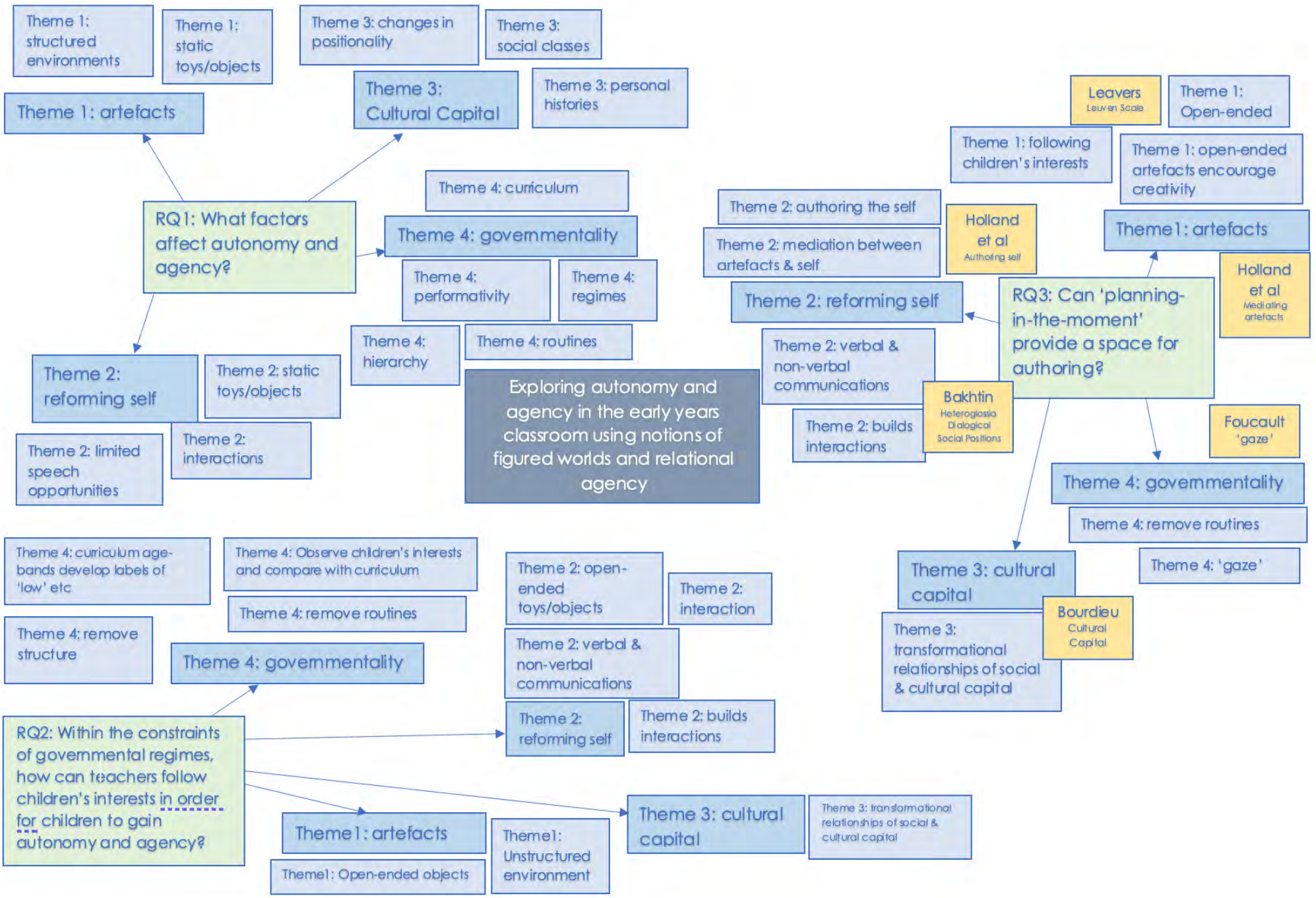
PLAN	Corey had spent his morning in the mud kitchen in the nursery outdoor area. He was immersed within his independent play and was showing intense concentration and persistence with his activity (Laevers, 2003) as he decided to act out his understandings of what happens within the 'kitchen' environment. His level of engagement encouraged me to follow an 'in-the-moment' approach.
OBSERVE	*He put the brush inside the cup of clean water and began scrubbing the sink until it was clean and shiny. He then looked under the sink and began to clean again, noticing it wasn't quite as clean just yet. He showed determination in getting it as clean as possible before he continued his play by pouring the cup of water down the sink (as it was a little muddy from all the cleaning) and re-poured fresh water down the teapot into his cup.* Corey could not continue his activity of making a cup of tea until he had ensured his kitchen was clean. Again, his history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) has enabled his understandings to ensure his area is clean before adding the fresh water to his teapot. *He pretended to drink from the cup and gave an expression as if it must have tasted delicious. He then cleaned up the cup in the sink and placed it on the drying rack.*
REFLECT	Corey is demonstrating the typical expectations of keeping a kitchen clean as well as showing behaviours of what you would find within the kitchen area. Due to the lack of spoken language within this observation, it is difficult to get a full sense of what the child was thinking, but it was clear from his facial expressions and actions that he was highly involved in his figured world. As Corey was independently interacting with his activity, it was hard to capture his thoughts, feelings and emotions as he was not communicating them to anyone and his position during play meant we could only see his back. However, through his actions and mediation through objects, it almost provided an "inner speaking" through 'sign-image' (Holland et al, 1998:37) of what is expected to happen in the space of the kitchen. He was experiencing another world and figuring his identity through mediating devices.
REFLEX	In the initial stages of Corey's play, he was figuring his identity through learned previous experiences which he is relating to this figured world of the 'kitchen'. His history-in-person (Holland and Lave, 2009) has led him to believe that there should not be mud inside the kitchen and it should be a clean space to work in, so he decided to clean up the sink using the brush as it was clogged up with mud. As the practitioner, I had created a 'socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others' (Holland et al, 1998:52). By constructing the classroom in this way, I am providing children with opportunities to engage with activities relevant to everyday life and begin to learn the expectations ready for the 'real world'. These artifacts have been placed in this area by the practitioner to create mini-worlds for the children to learn within as part of the 'planning-in-the-moment' approach where children can use their imagination in order to allow the artifact to develop into something which interests them. This

	allowed children 'to manipulate their worlds and themselves by means of symbols' as per Vygotsky's (1978) paper (Holland et al, 1998:49) and 'through habitual use these cultural tools become resources available for personal use, mnemonics of the activities they facilitate, and finally constitutive of thought, emotion, and behaviour' (Holland et al, 1998:50).
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – Corey did not hear the teacher ask everyone to tidy away.
OBSERVE	Through observation, the child was so involved with his learning that he did not hear what was going on around him. I decided to allow Corey additional time to continue his activity.
REFLECT	Corey was already showing levels of involvement with their learning and so I decided to let the child continue with their activity. Corey was in a deep sense of 'flow' (Csikzentmihalyi, 1979) – so absorbed in his play that he did not hear the request to come inside. He was so immersed with his activity that his perception of time was distorted and his attention was solely focused on the task he had at hand. This sense of 'deep level learning' shows Corey – in this instance – is gaining autonomy and agency as he is making choices for himself and is taking control of himself). Corey has learned to detach himself from his reactions to his 'immediate surroundings, to enter a play world – and to react to the imagined objects and events of that world' (Holland et al, 1998:50).
REFLEX	The action to allow the child to continue their activity was an uncomfortable decision as a teacher as this went against the expectations of the school.
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – His friend stands behind him asking him to come inside.
OBSERVE	Corey's friend was telling him to come inside but Corey didn't hear him as he was still immersed in his activity.
REFLECT	Afraid of not conforming, his friend then came in, as initially instructed by the teacher, leaving Corey outside in the kitchen.
REFLEX	His friend becomes an important addition to this observation as it is almost like he was afraid of being the 'bad' child (MacLure, 2012) that he conformed to the expected rules and routines as instructed by the teacher. It may be seen as this little boy not wanting to become a 'subject' and therefore left his friend to 'get in trouble'. The power structure that he is naturally apart of may have governed his identity through vigilance of a well-informed subject (MacLure, 2012).
PLAN	'Planning-in-the-moment' – Allowing Corey additional time to play.
OBSERVE	*Corey continued playing for a further 10 minutes before he noticed all of his peers had gone. He quickly turned around, noticed I was stood at the door to nursery, waited a short while, put all his kitchen tools down and ran towards the door. I explained to Corey that he could continue in the kitchen if he wanted to, but he carried on inside to wash his hands ready for snack.*
REFLECT	This seems to suggest that Corey could be entangled in the disciplinary nature of education as he would normally follow routines as requested by the adults and is regulating his behaviour to fit with his nursery experience. Corey seemed shocked that he hadn't heard the request to come inside for snack. The fact that he listens to the advice of the teacher and tries to continue playing but then runs inside suggests that he feels uncomfortable with the idea

	of not conforming to the regular rules and routines. His behaviour suggests that perhaps he feels he has pushed the boundaries and disregarded the rules. He is in a situation where he does not want to get into trouble and conforms to the usual routine immediately even when the teacher has told him he can continue.
REFLEX	It is possible that he is aware of the 'gaze' of the teacher as Foucault (1977:217) discusses and relates to Bentham's panopticon. This was used for disciplinary purposes and to enforce self-regulation. For Corey, the pressure to conform took precedence over his Level 5 involvement (Laevers, 2003) which he was experiencing with his activity. He was offered freedom but he appeared to be uncomfortable under the constraints of not abiding by the rules. Social expectations encourage 'personal order' and identities that govern and discipline individuals in order to serve the wider economic and political interests of neoliberalism. Therefore, subjectification and governmentality are aligned in identity construction (Taylor, 2015). I also consider my own decision to allow him to continue in his play and struggle to understand why it would be okay for him to continue playing but everyone else had to tidy their toys away. I have allowed him to extend his learning through play and have granted his play as a valuable experience but have not done the same for the other children. I am essentially allowing his autonomy and agency in the environment. He is 'the chosen one'. Again, this resonate with vignette 1 in the jigsaw observation where Izzy was able to continue her activity whilst the rest of the class had to tidy up. I have become to realise that I am able to give and remove children's autonomy and agency as I am governed by the routines in place within the nursery setting. This shows the hierarchical pressure that I am working within, as I have limited ability to change the daily routines of carpet-time, snack time and toilet time for example.

Appendix F - Mind Map

I looked at the key themes which arose in the observations using the literature and the theoretical framework in order to respond to the research questions. I created a mind map in order to organise and communicate this analytic process and to support me in making sense of my emerging findings. This mind map (as presented below) enabled me to connect my research data with the research questions. I used the three research questions as an initial starting point for the mind map and then explored these questions in relation to the themes which arose through this study. Using these themes as well as the preceding analysis of my data, the implications, limitations and contributions to knowledge were built into another mind map in order to make sense of my research data.


Exploring autonomy and agency in the early years classroom using notions of figured worlds and relational agency
RQ1: What factors affect autonomy and agency?
Theme 1: artefacts
Theme 1: structured environments
Theme 1: static toys/objects
Theme 3: Cultural Capital
Theme 3: changes in positionality
Theme 3: social classes
Theme 3: personal histories
Theme 4: governmentality
Theme 4: curriculum
Theme 4: performativity
Theme 4: regimes
Theme 4: routines
Theme 4: hierarchy
Theme 2: reforming self
Theme 2: static toys/objects
Theme 2: interactions
Theme 2: limited speech opportunities
RQ3: Can 'planning-in-the-moment' provide a space for authoring?
Theme 2: reforming self
Theme 2: authoring the self
Theme 2: mediation between artefacts & self
Holland et al
Authoring self
Theme 2: verbal & non-verbal communications
Theme 2: builds interactions
Bakhtin
Heteroglossia
Dialogical
Social Positions
Theme1: artefacts
Leavers
Leuven Scale
Theme 1: Open-ended
Theme 1: following children's interests
Theme 1: open-ended artefacts encourage creativity
Holland et al
Mediating artefacts
Foucault 'gaze'
Theme 4: governmentality
Theme 4: remove routines
Theme 4: 'gaze'
Theme 3: cultural capital
Bourdieu
Cultural Capital
Theme 3: transformational relationships of social & cultural capital
RQ2: Within the constraints of governmental regimes, how can teachers follow children's interests in order for children to gain autonomy and agency?
Theme 4: governmentality
Theme 4: curriculum age-bands develop labels of 'low' etc
Theme 4: Observe children's interests and compare with curriculum
Theme 4: remove routines
Theme 4: remove structure
Theme 2: reforming self
Theme 2: open-ended toys/objects
Theme 2: interaction
Theme 2: verbal & non-verbal communications
Theme 2: builds interactions
Theme1: artefacts
Theme1: Open-ended objects
Theme1: Unstructured environment
Theme 3: cultural capital
Theme 3: transformational relationships of social & cultural capital