

Independent Study

How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting through effective mentoring?

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Abstract

As early years practitioners we hold critical knowledge, insights that are often dismissed, overshadowed by policy and prescribed outcomes designed by greater powers. Yet we are the experts, working daily alongside children and families. We need to stand up and be counted, dare to be different, take control and have confidence in who we are and what we do.

This study follows the journey of a small rural setting and its engagement as research partners in collaborative research. Designed to nurture, empower and inspire early years practitioners we consider how we best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting. Taking a praxeological approach we explore the topics of reflective practice, mentoring and distributed leadership and it's place in early years.

My hope for this independent study is to provoke thought into the way the early years sector addresses continuous professional development, to consider reflection, emotional connectedness and emotional intelligence as life-long skills, bringing personal self to the forefront. Findings are my interpretation so take from it what you will. I just ask you be brave, take courage and be comfortable to be uncomfortable as we take back our rightful place as practitioner researchers and experts in our field.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

As a leader of a rural pre-school setting I recognise I am perfectly placed to make a difference to the children, families and practitioners within my care through practitioner research. My daily interactions allowing me a window into the lived experiences of many of my stakeholders. My university journey has illuminated that research should not be an elitist activity (Solvason, 2013) but accessible to all, capturing everyday thinking opposed to striving to uncover an elusive mystery. This realisation has formed the very foundation of my independent study, empowerment of others remaining key throughout. This narrative of my research journey depicts the momentum that can build from curiosity, my previous year's work on the needs of a changing early years workforce igniting further questions to be explored. A curiosity which when nurtured both on a personal level and as a wider group can provide powerful learnings, impacting both personal and professional growth (Hanson and Appleby, 2015).

Empowering and inspiring practitioners is an underlying driving force in my leadership role, as McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p.5) so eloquently capture, 'encouraging people to develop confidence in their own independence of mind and spirit, to play with new ideas, to challenge me, and to resist all efforts by others in social contexts to bring their thinking to closure'. The formulation of my research question has come from a desire to bring others on my journey, having gained personally and professionally from engagement with reflective practice throughout my studies I wanted to impart this to others. As early years practitioners we hold critical knowledge, insights that are often dismissed, overshadowed by policy and prescribed outcomes designed by greater powers. In order to change culturally embedded perceptions about the early years workforce we need to dare to be different (Conkbayir, 2019) take control and have confidence in who we are and what we do. My role as a leader is to facilitate an environment where supportive networks can embrace such change, whilst navigating the potential pitfalls power imbalance can bring.

Despite the frustrations early years policy can evoke I am not such a maverick to dismiss these requirements, instead I seek ways to embrace and mould sensitively to meet often opposing needs. Continuous professional development is such a requirement, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2017, p.21) requiring me to 'foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement', yet there is little advice on how best to achieve this. The dreaded 'peer observations' is a term used across early years and despite my attempts to 'toe the line' and do as expected I find the very idea of a peer observation goes against everything I stand for. I am lucky to work on the floor with my team on a daily basis, I know my practitioners well and support them 'in the moment', as scenarios arise. To take on a role as observer, judgmentally writing down everything that is said does not have a place in my setting, 'the discomfort of the observed in the silent co-presence of the observer taking notes in his/her supposedly unobtrusive corner' (Bloor, 2010, p.19). However, nurturing my team, building upon their strengths and empowering them does.

A couple of years ago I was approached by a senior lecturer asking if I mentored practitioners as this was a study she was in the process of developing, I instantly replied that yes, I was a mentor for my team, but instantaneously a 'niggle' emerged in my mind. Surprisingly this niggle has remained with me for some time, raising the uncomfortable notion that I had adopted such a term without fully understanding what mentoring looks like in practice. I was quietly relieved when I was questioned no more, but this stayed with me. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p.36) speak of such pivotal moments, "...the moments that stand out from the general flow' often create 'niggles', which, for the action researcher, spark their questions and their research to answer them". My theoretical framework is formed from all of these experiences, some subtle, some less so, my embarrassment as I acknowledge my naivety of mentoring, my motivation to share the life changing tool of reflective thought, a curiosity ignited by previous research, all leading to my research question; ***'How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting through effective mentoring'.***

My question has come from my passion to improve practice through my own self-improvement whilst keeping the practitioners within my team, at the heart of the study, however this causes a potential ethical dilemma, the role of researcher and

leader inextricably linked. I will in effect be studying my own development as a leader through studying the development of those I lead, hoping to draw conclusions about myself. As I surrender my driving seat to become the passenger on this journey I foresee myself as a driving instructor, my role to relinquish control, allowing others to take the wheel, steering the process at a speed they are comfortable with. My intention to distribute power will allow all involved to 'actively have voice in the research process and contribute equitably and appropriately' EECERA (2015, p.3). Yet as an instructor I must protect them from harm. This study will aim to uncover this conundrum, recognising the anxieties and emotions surrounding this delicate balance.

This study supports collaborative learning, respectful relationships, sensitivity and humility, ethics therefore threading through the entirety of the process, (Solvason, 2017). I am not naive enough to expect an answer to my research but I do anticipate a journey of discovery, unplanned stops along the way. I wish to embrace this wholeheartedly and take learnings throughout the process. Bloor (2010) speaks of bringing about small goods throughout the entire duration of a research project, not just the grand gesture at the finale. This has been the case for me already, in planning my research model, my reflections, (appendice 9: 10 February 2019) initiating the concept of the 'focus practitioner' (appendice 7). This has already proved a valuable tool coming out of my research before I have begun, and as with any journey a profound moment where true learning has occurred which will potentially improve future practice and ultimately the child experience.

'knowing becomes a holistic practice; the boundaries between theory and practice dissolve and fade away, because theory is lived in practice and practice becomes a form of living theory' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002, p.35).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Development of the early years workforce is widely acknowledged as a crucial investment to provide children with the best experience in their earliest and formative years. Through conducting this literature review it is clear that thinking around this issue is unanimous, the vision of a strong, well qualified, resilient, skilful workforce with the capacity for reflective practice being the ultimate goal, (Tickell Report, 2011). In a period of political uncertainty, austerity measures have depleted services and, in a sector where it is recognised that qualification alone does not prepare the workforce for the job in hand, (Early years workforce strategy, Department for Education, 2017) it seems we have no investor or infrastructure to support this, threatening the sustainability of the early years workforce (Kalitowski, 2016).

The challenges faced are not unique to the UK, CORE (2011) was a European study exploring competencies of early years professionals. This study positioned the argument that quality is not about individual competencies but how these interact in the 'competent system', the right environment where critical thinking, and reflection are enabled by time, team collaboration and pedagogical support. I would like to reframe this as an 'enabling environment' one where practitioners can nurture and be nurtured, an environment conducive to growth personally and professionally.

This literature review will explore how I as a leader can cultivate an enabling environment where collaboration and reflective thought are promoted through supportive networks. Focusing on the key areas of leadership, reflective practice and mentoring I aim to enrich my knowledge, gaining a better understanding of the current thinking on the subject matter and how this can transfer to daily practice. Mindful of this being a small-scale research project and the broadness of the areas chosen for exploration I will funnel my findings to my current context (Walker and Brodie, 2019). I therefore acknowledge this is not a technical analysis of literature but a thorough look at literature available and its implication in the development of the UK early years workforce.

Early Years Leadership

Ofsted (Department for Education, 2013, p.5) state, effective leaders build teams through regular rigorous performance management and are not afraid to lose staff through poor performance, they depict a leader who is visionary and 'absolutely determined to get it right first time'. A powerful statement which I professionally challenge. In a profession which supposedly values reflectiveness I would suggest that 'getting it right first time' is not conducive to reflective practice, the threatening tone of this statement does not inspire me to take time to think deeply (Spielman, 2018) but instils panic, a notion that there is a 'right way' opposed to a unique journey to be embarked upon. My recruitment process identifies skill gaps in my team, giving me clarity on the competences needed to fill this deficiency. My approach considering the whole setting as living and breathing, needing nutriment to survive (Goleman, 1999). It is not quite as simple as Ofsted suggest that we merely 'lose' staff, instilling fear in the workforce we hope to inspire, finding ourselves at the mercy of an employment tribunal.

Inspirational leadership is about recognising the complex strands that individuals bring and weaving them together (Robins and Callan, 2009) it is an equilibrium where without practitioners, leadership cannot function and without leadership, practitioners have no coherent vision. This sensitive balance requires an attentive reciprocal relationship based on trust with a commitment to embrace uniqueness whilst fulfilling wider goals. Rose and Rogers, (2012) suggest practitioners consider their role in terms of who they are, not what they can do. This is an interesting perspective, illuminating the possibility that emotional competence sometimes regarded as a 'soft skill' (Goleman, 1999) may override the technical competences required for the role. However, navigating through such an emotional landscape requires attunement and discipline.

Leadership in practice presents the dilemma, of 'facilitator' or 'member'. Early years literature warns leadership should keep a level of detachment with a clear view of the process, involving others but keeping your eye on the goal (Lindon, 2012) however I argue, this could potentially stifle learning, the agenda steering the process, participants interpreting with closed minds to fulfil a goal. Mc Dowall Clark and

Bayliss (2010) suggest a more cautious approach, treading the line between professional objectivity whilst maintaining a principled stance, but I question, who designs these principles, the group or the individual? It may be simpler to see early years leadership as a two-part role, to 'manage' and to 'lead'. Whilst respecting these two different entities in parallel (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2006) we can maybe position ourselves as both facilitator and member, fluidly adapting to the context we are in.

This leads to the concept of distributed leadership, (Reed, 2016) fostering collective responsibility, drawing on collective expertise and empowering people over time to a path of effective collaboration. My literature search found little on this subject matter, literature heavily weighted to the school sector. However, a New Zealand study on distributed leadership, (Denee and Thornton, 2018) suggests the importance of relational trust, mentoring and opportunity to develop expertise, through leading enquiry and innovation. Lack of literature would suggest this is an area to further explore, however characteristically, a practitioner with expertise in a specific area demonstrates commitment, readiness to invest time and energy. Reed (2016) suggests this passion builds a momentum which can contribute to the collective energy of the team. Captured and nurtured this can be the catalyst of change with the potential to produce more leaders (Couros, 2013).

Early years leadership is seemingly a government oversight. A recent study into the quality of early years (Department for Education, 2017) failing to mention leadership, similarly the proposed revised early years foundation stage (Department for Education, 2018) omits leadership from policy. Localised support reflects a similar image with leadership training only accessible to schools, early years mentors only available to settings below the 'good' rating, leaving the leadership of many settings to chance. Nevertheless, with such challenge comes possibility, an opportunity to design our own leadership framework outside the constraints of government policy.

Reflective practice in the Early years

Having completed a thorough search of early years policy and government documentation (Department for Education, 2012; 2013; 2017; 2018) I was astounded

to find little reference to reflective practice, a term that I have become highly accustomed to. My initiation into the power of reflection at a University of Worcester (2016) conference, formed the base of much of my subsequent work and I soon became adept at using this new language in academic study and practice. Considering this lack of reference to reflective practice in national policy, I contemplate if reflection is indeed a higher-level skill, am I naive in my ambition to promote reflection as part of the learning culture I hope to create and do I have the capacity or the ethical competence to do so.

Higher skill

John Dewey (1910) is arguably one of the most influential philosophers and educators in the twentieth century, advocating the promotion of skills for reflection in education, encouraging engagement in intelligent thought and action, opposed to routine thinking. This can be a rigorous process, making sense of oneself requires a level of commitment, honesty and emotional stamina, a personal journey which takes time, space and a want to uncover truths, depth of reflection 'characterised by the ability to frame and reframe internal and external experience with openness and flexibility'. (Moon, 2013. p.100). Appleby and Andrews (2012) describe a reflective practitioner as intuitive and instinctive, emotionally playful and intellectually involved, like components of an engine, as we place these individuals together, it becomes the leaders role to 'lubricate the mechanisms of the group mind' (Goleman, 1999, p.204). By cultivating relationships, investing in personal capital and developing the interpersonal chemistry we can begin to foster a state of internal harmony, the perfect conditions for reflective practice to blossom, embed and become a natural way of being, (Hanson and Appleby (2015).

Brookfield (2017, p.115) suggests 'critical reflection is best practised as a collective endeavour'. The sharing of experiences helping to analyse problems, breaking down isolation as we come to realise others may feel the same. Although we must consider the possibility that people's views and beliefs may not be in synergy with our own, causing disharmony, this contrasting lens offers an inclusivity (Appleby and Andrews, 2012). Handled sensitively this may bring new meanings, giving us opportunity to critically analyse, unlocking the complexities, avoiding the move from diagnosis to solution. Done correctly the knowledge gained can be prolific, (Bolton, 2018). When considering reflection as a higher-level skill I am brought back to John

Dewey (1910) who proposed four attributes needed to engage in reflective thinking; open mindedness, responsibility, directedness and whole heartedness, competences that are learned through life experience. I propose these are higher-level skills, due to the potential to transform lives, but this is not for the elite few, these skills are accessible to all, through patience, understanding and a honest and wholesome environment we can learn and develop these throughout a lifetime (Goleman,1999).

Reflective Learning culture

The term 'culture' can be defined as the customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time, a cohesive structure, working meticulously in synchrony. Yet the fundamental basics of reflection is the development of a personal philosophy. Johnston (2010, p.54) offers some guidance suggesting, 'a shared philosophy does not mean that everyone concerned should think alike, but that individual philosophies are coherent and shared, so that there is a common thread and vision for collaboration'. Exploring and acknowledging preconceived ideas honestly and without judgement assists our understanding of differing interpretations, vital to the progression of practice. Wood (2016) supports this exploration, recognising the impact differing values and beliefs can have on provision. Using the example of child assessment in the context of free play, her research uncovered a number of interpretations formed from single scenarios, practitioners drawing on different forms of knowledge to make judgements, leaving reliability of assessments at risk of inconsistency. I observe this in daily practice, some practitioners stepping in too quickly, not allowing the child time to express oneself and demonstrate their competence in this skill. This can cause underlying frustrations tainting the emotional tone of the setting, nevertheless it can also be eye opening to other perspectives, resulting in growth as we come to know ourselves better. Through reciprocal dialogue looking critically at practice without being destructive or overly negative we can develop a way forward through mutual understanding and 'a judicious blend of sensitive support and constructive challenge.' (Ghaye, 2011, p.23).

Appleby and Andrews (2012), visualise a weave concept to represent reflexive awareness and self-identity in the context of practice. My own interpretation is that of a crochet blanket, as we interweave our personal philosophies together, we grow, becoming stronger, helping us as a community to envision, nourish and imagine, (Ghaye, 2011). Hanson (2011) warns when developing a reflective learning culture

that the transition from being informed, to developing our own perspective on relevant issues can potentially cause disequilibrium. My ambition to develop a reflective learning culture can be realised, providing I have no destination in mind, I am supple in my approach and recognise this as a life skill. Developing a learning culture with reflective practice at its core requires significant thought and time to embed, yet this investment can reap great reward with the potential to 'transform and empower individuals and professional communities' (Hanson and Appleby, 2015, p.25).

Competence

As a leader it is my duty to consider the ethical considerations surrounding the development of a reflective learning culture. Bolton (2018) suggests there is a cost to reflectiveness, past experiences effecting people in ways they don't yet realise. Hayes et al (2014, p.25) suggests we need grit and determination with the right mindset to be inquisitive, warning reflection has the potential to 'promote discord and an entrenchment of negative views as they challenge the issues of power and control'. Literature voices caution and I would be naïve to not consider the implications of mishandling such a sensitive subject. As participants embark on a journey of self-discovery, they need the ability to navigate through previous life experience and it is my role to subtly guide with a moral compass, as the cost of emotional ineptitude can be devastating.

Relinquishing control takes courage, Raelin (2002) suggests a reflective culture makes it possible for people to constantly challenge without fear of retaliation, however, warns the questioning of assumptions can be difficult to tolerate, requiring people in control to lose their grip on the status quo. This causes me to consider that maybe the term 'challenge' should not be used in this context as this depicts a contest where there must be a winner, alternatively, I would advocate the encouragement of inquisitiveness, a process more fitting to growth. I also professionally challenge Raelin's suggestion of immunity to retaliation within a reflective culture, no matter how resilient one may be, any form of criticism or indeed questioning can evoke feeling. Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterback (2014) write about the unconscious communication between people, the transference of emotion through subtle nuances. I need to read these tacit clues, hear the texture in a message, tuning in to the emotional channel, (Goleman, 1999).

Mentoring in the Early Years

Ofsted (Department for education, 2018, p.30) judge the effectiveness of leadership by evaluating to what extent the leader improves staff practice, '...through effective systems for supervision, rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development'. The term 'supervise' as defined by the Collins English dictionary (2019) is to ensure an activity is done correctly or that the person is doing a task or behaving correctly. This illustrates limitations of supervision, a leadership controlled task, blind to possibility, restrained by the supposed correct way, opposed to looking at practice in depth, having time to reflect and think (Rice, 2017). Mentoring therefore offers an alternative, an individual self-directed approach, where reciprocal, spontaneous learning could take place.

My review of literature has revealed an amalgamation of the terms coaching and mentoring. Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, (2018) acknowledge although coaching and mentoring are essentially similar in nature, their meaning is a changing dynamic, coaching aligned more with sporting activities, mentoring focused on relationships, explorations of oneself. Much literature focused on corporate functions of mentoring, authors presenting complex mentoring models requiring training, opposed to others who suggest mentoring as nothing more than a purposeful dialogue. My literature search, focusing on mentoring in the early years in the UK, proved unfruitful, interestingly the most significant piece of literature a University of Worcester case study, introducing a mentoring scheme, integrating the practitioner, setting and college's perspectives through a professional critical friend, (Murray, 2006) however this used external mentors and was not in the same context as my mentoring ambition. The lack of literature on this subject, indicates a knowledge gap despite government recommendations from the 'Nutbrown Review', (Department for Education, 2012) to ensure all early years staff had access to mentoring, their trusting to the sector to consider where the mentoring comes from, failing to be realised.

Mentoring requires emotional connection, a relationship between two people, where learning is the core function, however relationships can instil the best and worst in us, they can be 'potentially messy', (Garvey, 2014) especially so when that relationship has different functions. My parallel roles as leader and mentor, require

cautious approach, enabling me to retain control yet give myself fully to this experience. Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018, p.121), urge us to give way to 'greater autonomy, experimentation, exploration and the genuine facilitation of learning as a process that adds value'. This move from directive to indirective learning however can be a barrier to mentoring warns Parsloe, (2009) habitual leadership styles difficult to discard. Although these barriers exist, we must not be alienated from this opportunity, we need to take courage. Emotion is a malleable, responsive construct requiring sensitive touch, yet a natural concept we cannot ignore, 'emotional bonds are crucial to morale, effectiveness and the units very survival' (Goleman, 1999, p.212). Acknowledging the role emotion plays in our learning allows us to connect and grow together, through honesty and authentic intent we can shape the environment that allows emotion to be recognised whilst regulated both individually and collectively.

Many prescribed training courses fail to consider the unique perspective and skills, practitioners have. Hanson and Appleby (2015) suggest prescriptive frameworks can discourage a curious mind, mentoring therefore offers opportunity to bring the unique self to the forefront with the potential to have far reaching benefits both individually and collectively. To do this, the participant needs to want to do this, we need their buy in. Goleman, (1999) identifies 4 levels of readiness, varying from obliviousness through to ripeness to formulate a plan and readiness to take action. These stages link to the concept of the 'conscious competence ladder' (Edmond and Price, 2012) attributed to Abraham Maslow who proposed four stages of competence, from not being conscious of knowledge we don't yet know, through a process which enables us to unconscious competence, where we just know what to do in the moment, a natural innate response. I would challenge this is not a simple process, self-doubt and emotion potentially impacting the progress through these competences. We need to be honest about the emotions likely to surface, offering stability and 'respond flexibly to the changing needs/wishes/emotions of others' (Georgeson and Campbell-Barr, 2014, p.11).

Much literature portrays mentoring as a skilled profession, using a range of approaches, many mentors receiving supervision themselves, allowing time for reflection and sharing emotional burden. I therefore consider whether mentoring can work in such a small team. Clutterbuck (1991) raises the contentious issue of the

relative positions of mentor and protegee, suggesting these relationships should be outside normal working hierarchy to allow space to breath, entanglements of day to day practice working against openness and candour of true mentoring. These arguments are valid but with no infrastructure to support this we need to adapt to the context we find ourselves in, I would also question the thinking around hierarchal structures in working environments may have changed in the past 27 years, but that is for exploration another time.

Concluding thoughts

Brookfield, (2017, p.171) suggests reading of literature can help us 'investigate the hunches, instincts and tacit knowledge' that we hold. This review of literature although challenging due to the broadness of the areas consulted, has enabled me to shape my research. Lack of literature on the topic of mentoring, specific to early years raises the question, have wider powers fallen into the same trap as I did, adopting the term mentoring tokenistically, oblivious to its true meaning. Distributed leadership similarly lacked a solid literature base warranting further exploration into how this can enhance early years practice and leadership. The lack of guidance from government policy although worrying can be seen as liberating, with a lack of investment and infrastructure I can be creative in my responses.

A significant learning from my reading was the inspirational work of Goleman, (1999) and the concept of emotional intelligence, this has been life changing for me and a book I needed to read at this time in my career. As I move forward I do so with excitement, and a confidence that my research question holds value within the early years landscape. Feelings of trepidation now behind me as I plunge into the unknown.

Chapter 3

Methodology

My research design has been created to nurture, empower and inspire early years practitioners within my team. Finding creative ways to support this has underpinned this methodology, a balance required to seek authentic voice whilst protecting participants from harm (BERA, 2018). Data collection tools were chosen that are curious yet non-invasive of time or emotional burden, allowing me to balance the reasonable emotional responses that may come from the study, enabling the participants to explore this emotional landscape safely. Consideration of my own emotional well-being also needed thought, this study is about my own growth and development through the study of others, research may unveil truths about me that may be hidden (Johari window, HR Squared, 2014). Therefore, after obtaining ethical approval (appendice 1, 2 and 4) and committee consent to conduct this research my first action was to employ a critical friend. This relationship enabled a safe place in which to explore such complexities, renegotiating terms whilst remaining vigilant to ethical considerations throughout the entirety of the process (Solvason, 2017).

The purpose of this methodology is to explore the concept of mentoring in an early years context, considering if this is a better fit than the controlling nature of supervision. Mentoring requires a level of self-reflection and I wanted to probe deeper into how to develop the wholesome environment required to facilitate reflective thought, both individually and collectively. Secondly, I wanted to document the research journey to uncover threads that may support the notion of distributed leadership, understanding this better within the context of my setting. Pointed in the direction of praxeological research by my supervisor I immediately found a connection. Pascal and Bertram (2012, p.484) state praxeological research seeks to empower people through social transformation, to give voice to those often absent from decision making opportunities, it allow us to construct our own knowledge unique to our context, capturing 'the reality of its 'messiness' and 'chaos' in a systematic and rigorous way'.

Developing a research methodology is a complexity in itself and so it is here I visualise how praxeology fits into a paradigm that is flexible, and multi-layered (Denscombe, 2008) unique to my research objectives (figure 1). Taking an interpretivist stance enables me to embrace my role as insider to the research. Denscombe (2014, p.2) suggests interpretivists must always be 'insiders' 'part and parcel of the social reality', but with this comes risk, subtle manipulations leaving research open to critique (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Interpretation of qualitative data will come from my own reflection therefore researcher bias is inevitable, '...background, knowledge and prejudices' influencing understandings (Walsham, 1995, p.321.) Yet through developing my capacity to recognise bias, predicting how this may infiltrate conclusions made, I can explore confidently the lived experience of others, making sense of the world through different lens and the meanings ascribed to experiences and phenomena (Walker and Solvason, 2014).

Adopting a praxeological approach within this framework gives me freedom and opportunity to innovate, go beyond conventional methods, facilitating enabling environments for participants to tell their story through a variety of means. Qualitative data tools chosen enabled multiple levels of engagement, revealing richer, authentic knowledge, expressed and represented uniquely. By truly listening and respecting individuals in a fully inclusive environment, participants became research partners, collaborators throughout the research process. (Pascal and Bertram, 2012).

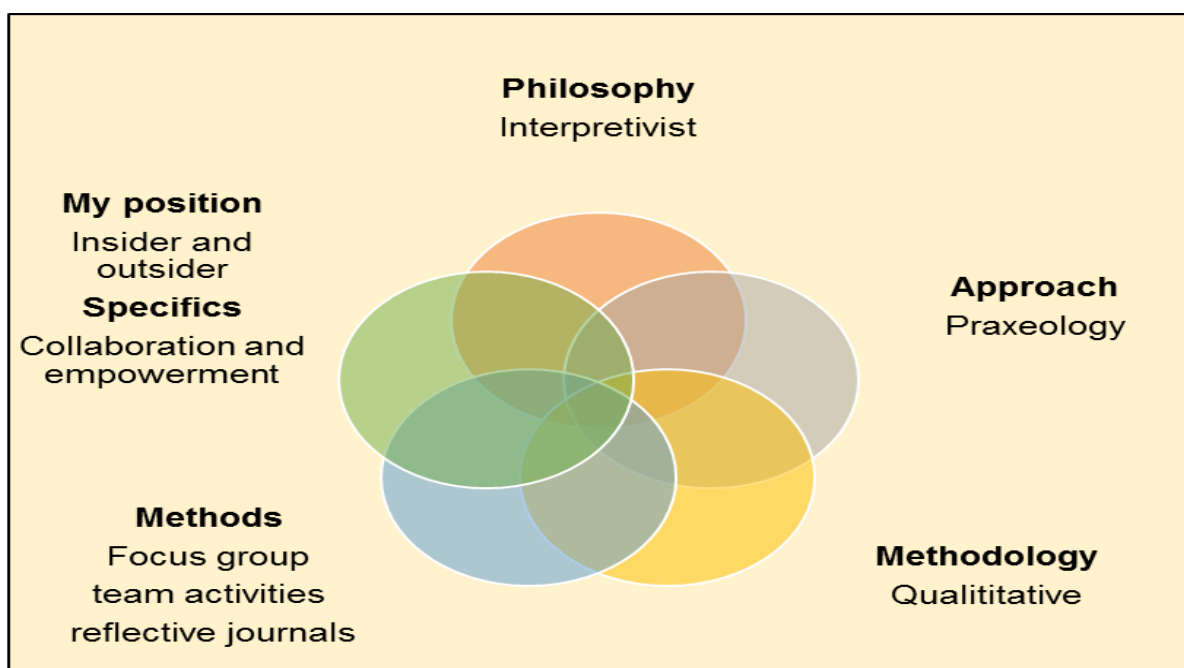


Figure 1 Research Paradigm

Collaboration and empowerment were key messages used in the recruitment of research partners, the research introduced through the mediums of staff newsletters, daily dialogue and more formally as information sheets and consent letters (appendice 2). Methods were designed and research completed in distinct stages ensuring inclusivity and accessibility, giving control to research partners as to levels of involvement whilst keeping disruption to the setting to a minimum. Consent was renegotiated at each stage to ensure partners were happy to continue, activities where possible incorporated into daily practice to demonstrate research as a normal activity, an organic cyclical process, born from reflective practice with the objective to make a positive difference (Mc Niff and Whitehead, 2002).

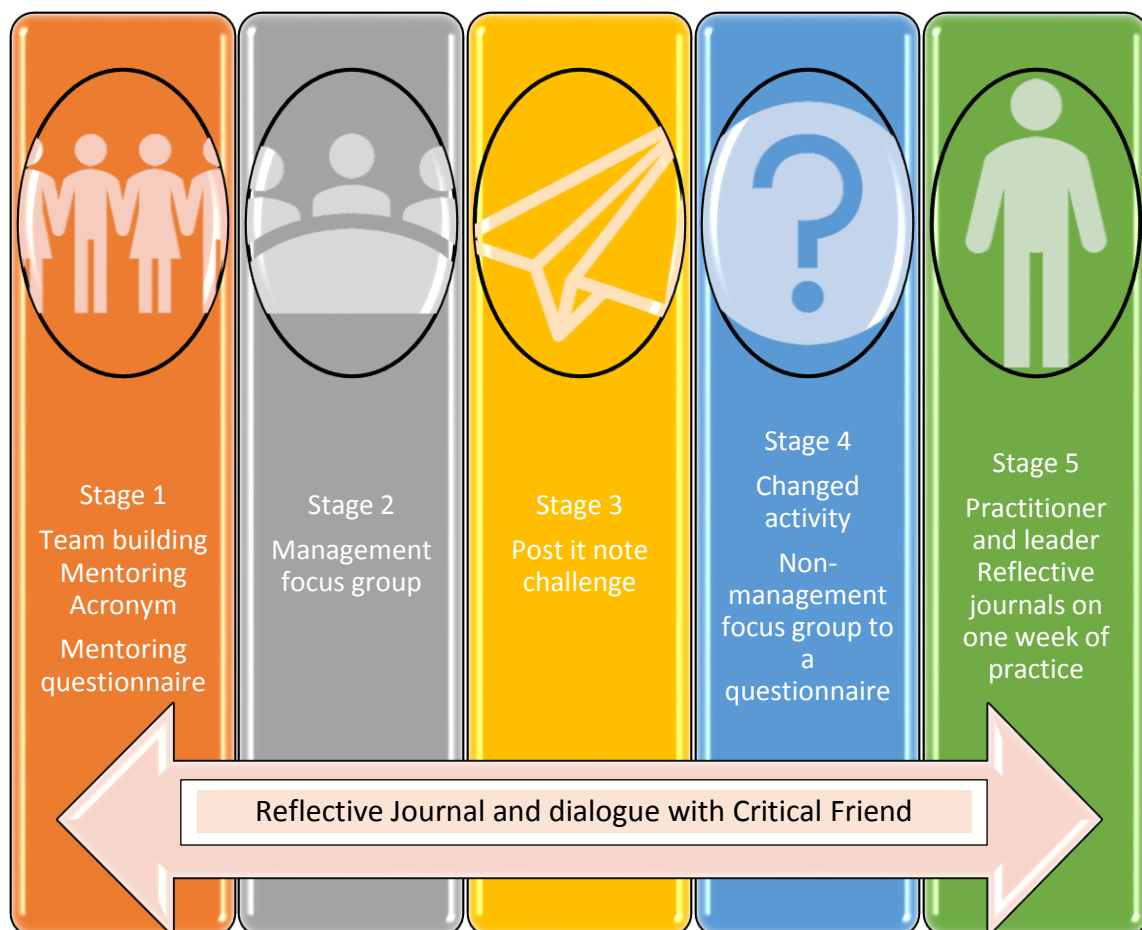


Figure 2 Stages of Research

Pascal and Bertram (2012, p.489) suggest 'expressive activity enriches the research and provides complexity and depth, thus allowing a richer vein of knowledge and understandings to be made visible'. Stage one of my research encapsulates this, stepping aside I challenged the team to two tasks designed for collaboration and reflection in a scheduled team building session. An acronym for the term mentoring

and then on suggestion from my supervisor a questionnaire designed for my response on the topic of mentoring. This twist evoked anxious emotions, worries about capabilities of the team to understand this challenge, Bolton (2018) suggests we embrace the uncomfortableness of uncertainty, be brave until the excitement of discovery takes hold. This was certainly my experience, my worries soon proven unfounded. (appendice 9: 27 February 2019).

I chose a management focus group for the second stage of the research process as I have used this successfully in a previous study. Allowing time and space for research partners to explore topics more naturally, builds a momentum of dialogue, carefully designed questions, gradually prompting deeper levels of thought (appendice 3). Denscombe (2014) suggests the success of focus groups depends on establishing a climate of trust where participants can express themselves freely, I therefore chose to run the group off site and during the working day, removing some of the unnecessary 'bureaucratic burden', associated with research (BERA, 2018 p.20:38). Having chosen to remove myself from the focus group due to potential influence on data I handed over to a responsible other, reassured the ethical code to listen and respect others was prioritised. To capture this data, I chose to audio record the discussion, aware that this may cause some initial inhibitions but hoping the group would relax into the process. Limitations to audio recording maybe the missing of non-verbal communications, the subtleties (Denscombe, 2014) yet the alternative to video record felt too intrusive. Audio recorded data was then transcribed by myself and I felt reassured I had taken reasonable precautions to limit my influence on data.

Traditionally, focus groups have been viewed as a formal approach to data collection, groups often formed of strangers. This study is about a team of practitioners, who know each other well, some even classed as friends outside of work, such familiarity can influence group dynamics and the willingness to disclose or withhold information. This is considered by Jones et al (2018, p.109.) their study suggesting friendship groups may offer more honest discussion due to the 'comfort level among the participants', providing an innovative alternative for collecting group-level qualitative data. By completing the focus group in work time, I was confident although interpersonal relationships would impact the process, the research partners would complete this within an unspoken professional framework. Unfortunately, the

secondary focus group proved logistically impossible, a questionnaire adopting the same questions utilised instead (appendice 10). This was a disappointment however the needs of the setting had to override my needs as a researcher. Further disappointment from the omitting of a key question within the focus group provoked a creative response, revisited in a management meeting through a post it challenge, adding originality to the data collection.

Throughout the research process I have committed to a reflective journal (appendice 9) to capture my thinking and how this has evolved. Documenting both frustrations and pivotal moments in my journey, I realised 'journals can provide inspiration and motivation to students who use them purposefully' (Lindroth, 2015, p.70.). Yet as I approached stage five of the research process, conflicting thoughts arose as to the purpose and ethicality of practitioner reflective journals, handling such personal views felt uncomfortably intimate, yet this was the crux of the research. A discussion with my critical friend (appendice 8) relayed these fears, realisation that emotional commitment was inevitable, but could be safeguarded through recruiting research partners who visualise the importance of their contribution and how this fits to the development of the setting, practice and ultimately their experience.

Reflective journaling was presented to research partners as completely open-ended, no prompts given or frameworks to follow, my reasoning to ensure I did not influence this part of the research in any way. Lindroth (2015) reminds us reflective journals are open ended, promoting autonomy and confidence through placing value on the subjects thoughts. Journals can create further questions, providing an opportunity to create dialogue with oneself or used more critically as a self-assessment tool. It was therefore important for research partners to interpret this in their own way, at a personal level they were comfortable with. My questioning over the ethicality in evaluating these journals caused me much discomfort, feeling misplaced to form judgements on the material the journals produced. It was here I recognised an opportunity to develop an additional journal in line with my research partners, based on a week of practice (appendice 11). Sharing this with my critical friend (appendice 12) would place the emphasis more on my own use of reflection, practitioners contributions giving more of an oversight, a more delicate approach, whilst adding an interesting angle to the research.

Designing my research paradigm and methodology has been an exciting part of my study, the various data collection tools carefully chosen to provide 'contrast and comparison...to give credibility and robustness' (Walker and Solvason, 2014, p.63.). Taking a praxeologist approach, I can safely acknowledge my role as an insider, embrace the reality of research and the unpredictability's that may occur, recognising this as all part of the journey.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research Partners

I was overwhelmed with the commitment research partners gave this study, 8/10 members joining team building activities, professional dialogue resulting in some creative responses. Stage 4 was less successful with 3/6 invited partners completing the questionnaire, disappointingly I was unable to allow time in the working day as per my original plan due to the needs of the children, a possible factor in non-completion. All other stages were completed as planned however an underlying question of practitioner confidence seeped through the process. Research partners requested assurances they were completing tasks correctly and despite leaving tasks open ended, comments suggested a want to please, depicting me still as the driver of the process.

‘so, within a week of reflection you might not get anything from it because they might reflect on things that are not quite as important to what you’re looking for’ (appendice 11: 26 March 2019).

This raises questions on the soundness of the data. The relational aspect of the practitioner role can often extend beyond the professional within a team, signifying a deeper aspect to my insider position, a more intimate connection. Taylor (2011, p.18) states research within this context must acknowledge such influences which ‘cannot be prescribed, measured, calculated, estimated or anticipated prior to the engagement’. I have yet to discover if the assurances needed were attributed to self-doubt, or a need to please, however I can surmise some research partners may not have recognised their own value in this process, something I must address in my dissemination. Despite this, insider knowledge enables me to draw upon shared understandings and trust to navigate the complexity of insider research, to justify meaningful progress to the setting whilst meeting the needs of academic research (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). It is therefore imperative I acknowledge my findings as unique to my setting and the context in which I am situated.

The Process

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) warn data analysis is not about managing or manipulating data, but using ideas to make sense of data, playing with this, allowing the data to breathe, generating and developing new ideas. This requires a complexity of skills, a systematic mind in planning data collection processes, a unequivocal commitment to the project, a level of scepticism allowing us to dig deeper into hidden insights, avoiding taking data at face value, and most importantly the ability to both immerse and detach from data (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012). These multitude of skills require time and patience, a significant challenge for any student with deadlines looming but one that has far reaching benefits to the research process. As a researcher I approached this stage open minded, relaxing into the impetus of the research and trusting when the momentum changed tempo. This took courage but was critical to the data analysis process.

Collating all information into one document became my first task, depicting the natural progression of the study and visualising this as a whole data representation (appendice 13). I read this intermittently throughout an entire week, re-reading at differing times of the day, possibly in different frames of mind or emotional state allowing total submergence, avoiding temptation to cram or force evidence before me (Walker and Solvason, 2014). Patience proved powerful, this movement back and forth gave time and freedom to explore thinking and give clarity to thought. These thoughts built momentum and links started to emerge, my next step to piece the data back together in an intelligible and systematic way. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

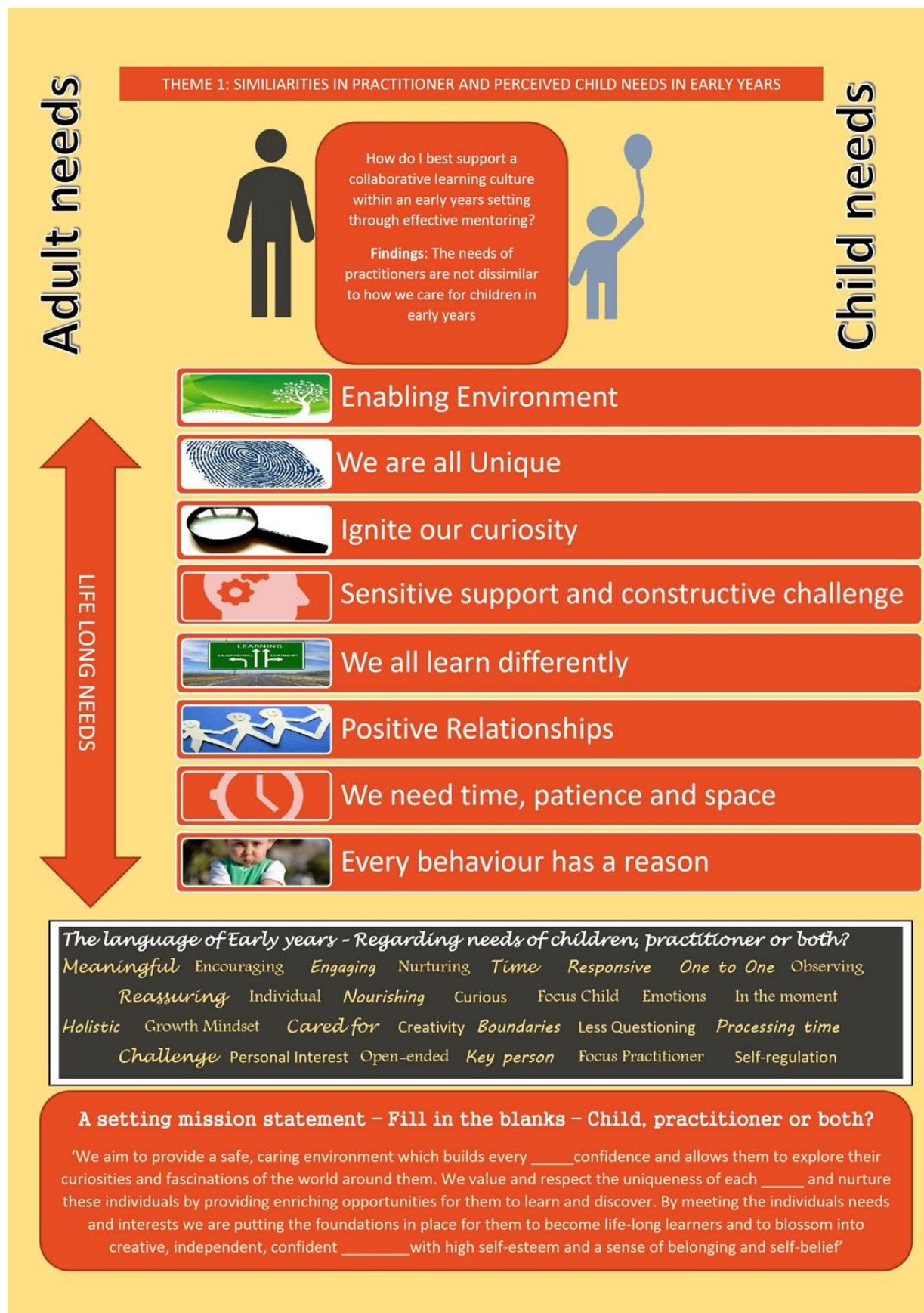
Data reduction proved a laborious task, 'reducing complexity without violating it' (Cohen et al, 2018, p.643) took careful consideration. As insider to the research I had to acknowledge my interpretation was just one of many, my obvious interest in emotional intelligence acknowledged in the literature review lending itself to potential bias. To counteract possible threats to the validity of my research I triangulated my data (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs 2010) through a data reduction grid (appendice 14). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) warn when triangulating data, we must refrain from being overly optimistic, a naivety that data will form a complete picture, once again I

had to trust the process and let go of any assumptions, walking the 'narrow line between objectivity and bias' Anderson and Shattuck (2012, p.18).

Findings

Data collection produced an overwhelming abundance of data correlating to three significant themes, this vastness of data challenged me in how I present this. Pascal and Bertram (2012) ask praxeological researchers to be creative, have courage to innovate and experiment. I have therefore produced visual representations capturing data findings for the key themes which will then be discussed, this method ensuring I capture valuable insights within the parameters of the study's criteria. The original source of data found in the data reduction grid (appendice 14).

Figure 3 Theme 1: Visual representation



Discussion Theme 1: Similarities in practitioner and perceived child needs in the Early years

The development of the focus practitioner (appendice 7) at the very beginning of this study lay the foundations of thought into the similarities of practitioner and child needs. The reframing of the 'competent system' (CORE, 2011) to an 'enabling environment in the early stages of my literature review, supporting this notion. This line of enquiry introduced new literature to the study, Development matters (The British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2012) guidance suggesting development is not an automatic process but a result of the interactions between the unique child, and positive relationships within an enabling environment. The levels and types of engagement recognised as the characteristics of effective learning determine the effectiveness and motivation of the learner. My findings suggest significant links in how these key areas are as important to practitioners as to children.

Literature reviewed, valued the practitioner role in terms of who they are and what they bring, asking us to embrace uniqueness whilst fulfilling wider goals (Robins and Callan, 2009). This links strongly to the concept of the unique child, celebrating and valuing individuality, understanding them, to best support development. Similarities emerged from my reflective journal, over my question 'was I seeing a practitioner holistically as I would a child?'. Further entries regarding the focus practitioner tool, documented my evolved thinking 'this isn't about changing who they are but helping them develop skills, capturing their uniqueness and building from strengths'.

Research partners described effective mentors as patient, honest and supportive showing understanding and 'wanting the best for you', taking a 'personal interest', the qualities we expect of any early years practitioner in forming positive relationships.

Positive and negative relationships impact us throughout our lifetime, the focus group expressing a range of experiences of school, 'they went above and beyond...I just felt they cared' others struggling to recall positive memories. What was significant was the correlation between positive stories and how the adult understood them. One research partner speaking of an inspirational teacher who taught her 'even if you think you can't do something, there are ways to find your qualities to achieve'. Research partners explored learning styles, unanimously agreeing the need for time to process thoughts and an intense dislike for being 'put on the spot'.

Again, a link emerges, the characteristics of effective learning for children a potential tool for practitioners as displayed below, research partners responses seamlessly positioned within this framework.

Characteristics of Effective Learning : Responses to; 'What motivates you as a learner?'		
Playing and Exploring	Active learning	Creating and thinking critically
'If you make me curious about something I am going to dig deep and try to discover more'	'Challenge but not so big the goal is to far away'	'Seeing a problem and being able to solve it'
'Gaining new knowledge'	'Quiet recognition that is meaningful'	'Using new found knowledge'
	'Praise'	
	'Excitement to learn more'	

Figure 4 What motivates you as a learner?

Considering my review of literature at this stage in the study highlights further links, Appleby and Andrews (2012) asking us to hold onto curiosity and nurture this through a lifetime. Ghaye (2011) suggesting an approach of sensitive support and constructive challenge, exactly how we would approach a child's learning, reachable goals focused on the process not the end result. Focus group discussions on negative experiences explored how our human behaviour is a result of an underlying cause, 'there's always a reason why you are at that place, or why you are doing that', these skills we use instinctly with children to understand behaviour, may help us to understand ourselves and others better. Language used around early years as depicted in figure 3 could arguably be used for either practitioners or children, there were multiple links and I predict more will reveal themselves. Children require time, patience and space and I advocate the same for practitioners, captured beautifully by a research partners reflective journal 'if I had a superpower it would be to give....my eyes, thoughts, and insight of the world around me as a tool ...to engage, embrace and encourage'.

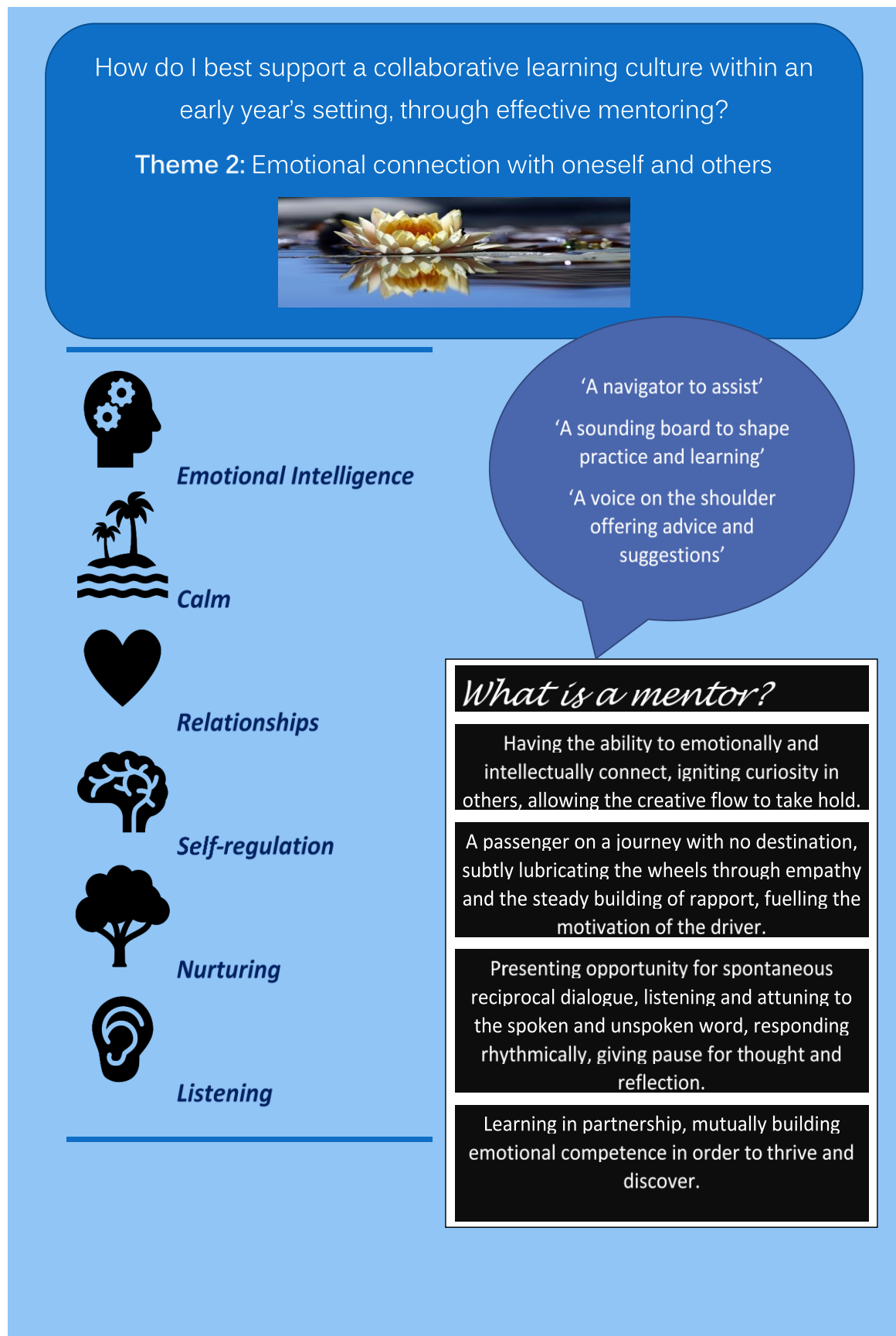


Figure 5 Theme 2: Visual representation

Discussion Theme 2: Emotional connection with oneself and others

Emotional connection was a commonality across all three subject areas explored in my literature review, emotional competence suggested as an important leadership skill. Examples of emotional intelligence and reflection emerged from the focus group discussions as the group reflected on the process, 'I guess it all links back to the first question' linking memories to who they have become, 'it made me think of life differently'. The acknowledgement of 'emotional subtleties' causing a 'underlying atmosphere' in my reflective journal suggests emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1999) as a worthy topic for future exploration, an important life skill enabling us to explore the complexities of emotion sensitively and ethically both inside and outside the parameters of leadership.

Exploration into reflective practice as a higher level skill brought about my own apprehension regarding the relevance of reflective journals, yet these provided an interesting insight into reflective practice, partners using this tool to explore frustrations, solutions, areas for growth, honest accounts of their feelings at that time. Some deeper level reflections made connections between personal and professional development, consideration of different perceptions, recognition for the learning process, and acknowledging progress made, 'I am making mistakes but doing my best to learn from them'. There was a distinct difference in approaches to reflection, some focusing on what had been achieved personally and professionally, others focused on what was not achieved, criticality of self. My insider position supports my understanding as to why this may be and I surmise comments regarding the pressures of workload, 'I was starting to feel that I hadn't accomplished anything' may hold the key to why deep reflection evaded them, the lack of mind space and calm.

Calm was a theme running through this study, my initial thoughts on supervision as a 'rushed unproductive process' instigating this interest as apparent in my responses to the mentoring questionnaire, prioritising 'time to breath, to consider ourselves', my approach to mentoring described as 'giving you time and space to develop personally and professionally'. Furthermore, personal journal entries valued calm, 'I lay down on the floor looking at the clouds, for a wonderful 5 minutes the children join me, calm and still'. Research partners similarly acknowledged the importance of

slowing down, 'allowing more time to listen to the children helps me understand more', demonstrating calm as a potential life line to improve practice and our capacity to reflect. Hanson and Appleby (2015) suggest fostering a state of internal harmony through interpersonal chemistry, provides the perfect conditions for reflective practice, yet I argue harmony is not a constant, it is malleable, vulnerable to internal and external factors. My intuition directs me instead to the fostering of internal calm, through emotionally connecting with ourselves, we are better equipped to connect with others.

In my dual position as researcher and leader one of the most rewarding moments throughout this process was when a chance conversation with my critical friend created a moment of epiphany, potentially providing the key to supporting the emotional needs of others. This went deeper than acknowledgement of emotions but allowing the child time to explore these feelings without interruption, supporting them to self-regulate (Conkbayir, 2019). This strategy requires the adult to relinquish control, as proposed by my critical friend, 'be comfortable to be uncomfortable'. As adults we can feel judged if a child is upset, sometimes intervening to quickly through distraction or even subtle bribery, disempowering the child to learn from emotion. I suggest the same is true for adult emotion, we need to take courage and be comfortable to be uncomfortable as we progress through this emotional landscape.

Data analysis uncovered more traditional threads linked to emotion, the focus group exploring the importance of belonging, 'it's all about trust in the workforce and your relationship within the workplace'. My mentoring goal 'for us to grow together, be supportive and connect', supporting the notion of a nurturing environment in which to be ourselves. Interestingly one of the simpler responses to the questionnaire provoked deep thought, 'if I was younger I would have higher expectations', this supported my thinking on the skills we are teaching our workforce, emotional intelligence and reflection are higher level skills but life skills, irrelevant to age. Positioned with an additional response, 'I have to be interested in the subject I'm learning about' implies a change in direction from prescribed training courses to a focus on self is required for both personal and professional growth. (Hanson and Appleby, 2015).

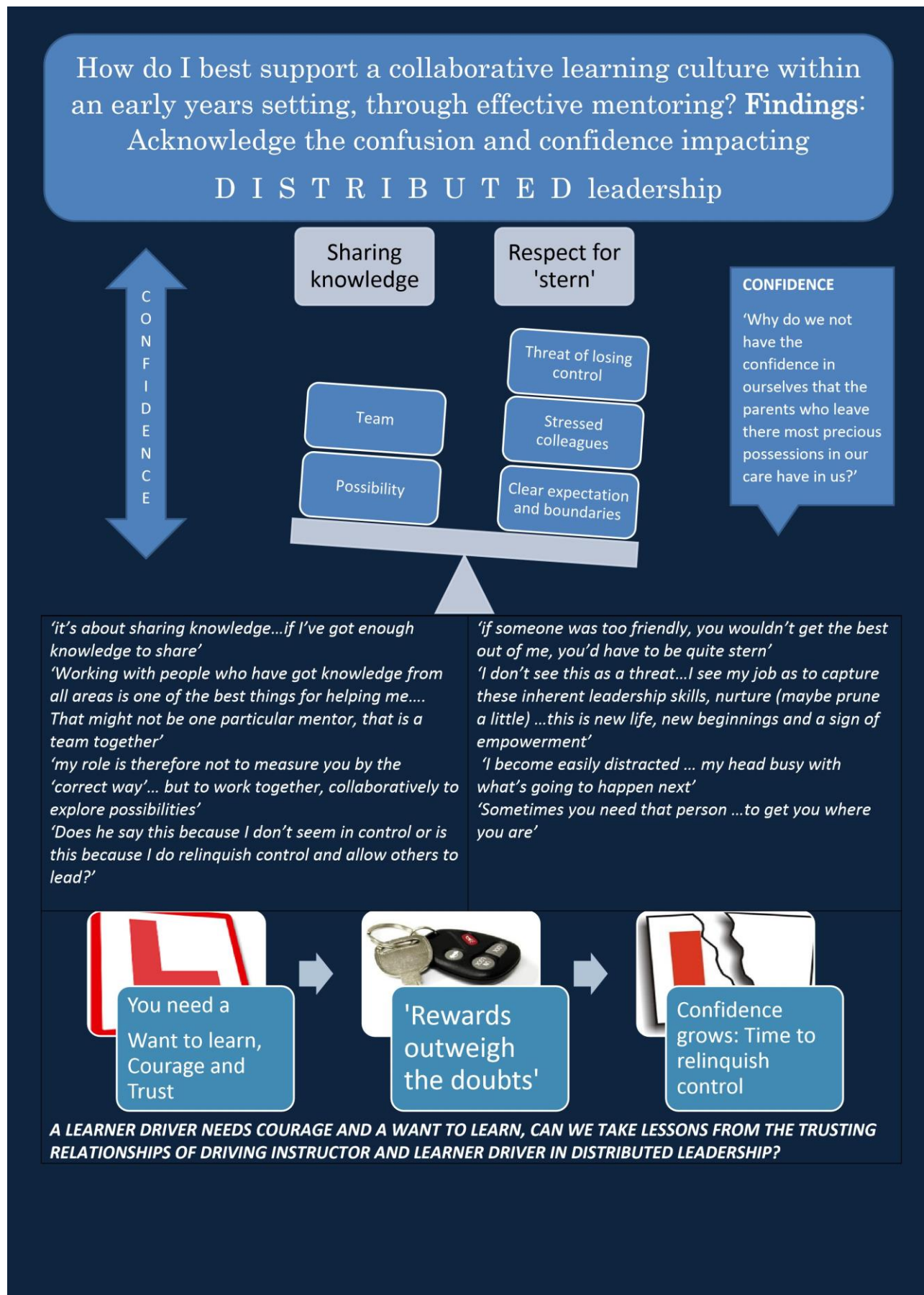


Figure 6 Theme 3: Visual representation

Discussion Theme 3: Confusion and confidence impacting distributed leadership

My visual representation (figure 6) depicts the confusion data analysis has unveiled raising the question of practitioner confidence within the framework of distributed leadership. Research partners explored honest, authentic accounts of self-doubt, 'I'm very critical actually of myself' yet demonstrated surprise in lack of confidence in others '...it's an inward thing'. The team however was portrayed as strong, the research partners fully supportive of one another, suggesting through collective endeavour we can break down isolation (Brookfield, 2017). My personal journal entries explored confidence, demonstrating contrasting experiences, strength of determination and inquisitiveness (Hayes et al, 2014) in exploring alternatives to 'getting it right first time', opposed to deep accounts of damaged confidence, suggesting leadership resilience as a potential future topic to explore.

Alongside confidence, it was clear demands of the role impacted on distributed leadership, instigating thought into how I foster collective responsibility (Reed, 2016), without pushing my workload on to others. My reflective journal (appendice 11:27 March) captures this when a friend of the setting comments, 'I forget she's the boss'. After much reflection I took this as positive, supporting Lindon and Beckley (2016) analysis that effective teams have no obvious leader, visualising my position as a director, casting for specific roles, stepping aside if someone may be better suited or could utilise opportunities to enhance development. Yet further data suggested whilst we need a 'voice on the shoulder', 'a navigator to assist' we also respect authority. The vocabulary 'stern', often associated with strictness and discipline was used by a number of research partners describing influential people in their youth. Potentially an archaic view, true within the historical context, however I must not disregard this. Research partners asked for honesty, 'share everything with me', clear expectations to achieve goals, an acceptance 'sometimes you have to have that upset to be able to achieve'. The role of mentor and leader intertwined causing much confusion as portrayed in literature reviewed (Clutterbuck, 1991).

During the formulation of this research I considered my role similar to that of a driving instructor. Figure 7 illustrates the potential power of standing back, the team formulating a mentoring questionnaire for my response as a team building activity,

'relinquishing control was very empowering, they steered the process by working collaboratively and did not need me at the wheel'. Through providing clear rules, expectations, and respect for the hazards, I can hope to instil confidence in others which will allow them the freedom to drive both personal and professional development, individually and collectively. As the driving instructor, I am there to hold them safely, supportively encouraging with an element of authority as I sensitively use dual controls not as a punitive measure (Miller and Stacey, 2013) but to keep them and others safe.

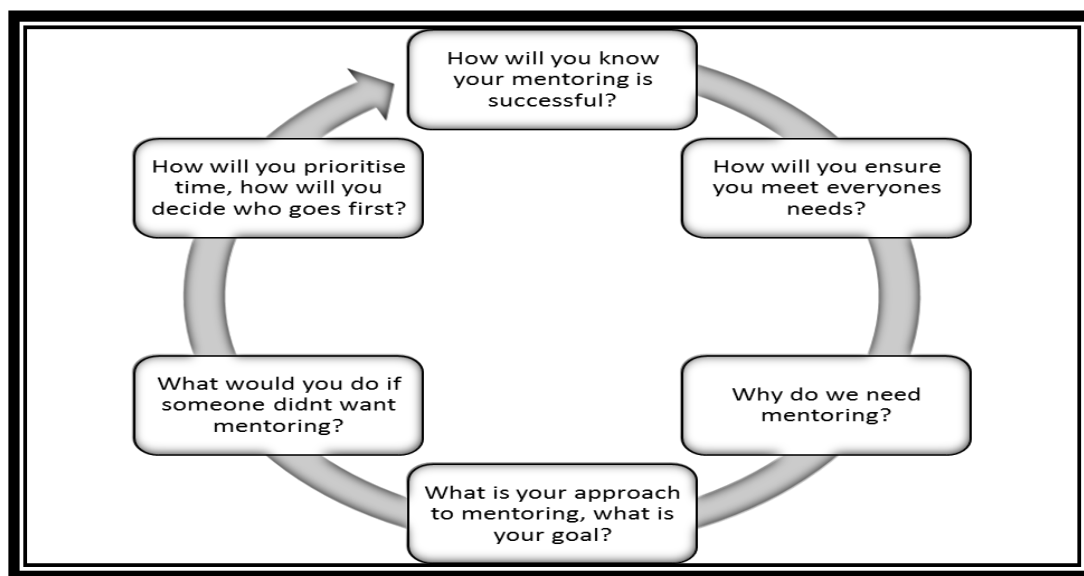


Figure 7 Team building: Research partners questionnaire for my response

Despite confusion this process has allowed me to explore personal, possibly hidden feelings (Johari window, HR Squared, 2014) on distributed leadership and I conclude I do not see this as a threat, maybe it needs to be better contained or moulded but this is an opportunity to create my own framework in which distributed leadership can empower and support. Reed (2016) suggests we draw on collective expertise, empowering over time, building momentum as confidence becomes infectious. Practitioner confidence will therefore begin the new chapter of my research, my critical friend implying reflection as key to this, 'we have a special talent, again we are not able to see this until we reflect as in the heat of it, it just feels like we are under pressure'. As I conclude I visualise a calm space in which reflection can flourish, confidence buds and we are comfortable to be uncomfortable, in the words of a research partner 'I can achieve what I want if I don't complicate things'.

Chapter 5

Dissemination

Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010, p.7) suggest the challenge of small scale insider research, is 'set in the demanding context of having to justify achievement and progress to critical partners in the wider profession and the less familiar world of academe'. This independent study was not purely designed to fulfil a module assessment but to make a difference, to add to current research in the early years field, improving the experience of children, families, practitioners and potentially the wider early years sector. Gaps in literature regarding mentoring and distributed leadership specific to early years, placed with a lack of reference to reflective practice in government policy demonstrated a need for this study and although this remains my interpretation unique to my context, lessons can be taken from both the approach and findings. As I reach the dissemination stage, I acknowledge personal interpretations can vary immensely, like the elusive lyrics of a song, people draw differing meanings, based on lived experience and emotional state. It was therefore important for me to disseminate throughout the process, broadening my understanding through dialogue with research partners, building momentum, as we explored together further opportunities, one research partner now focusing on 'growth mindset' as a potential tool for children and practitioners.

More formal ways have been used ensuring information does not get lost in dialogue, the settings focused improvement plan incorporating 'emotional health' as a priority, mindfulness an area of interest to explore. The publishing of my responses to the mentoring questionnaire (appendice 6) starts my mentoring ambition whilst reflection forms part of the focus practitioner sessions, time used sensitively supporting individual and collective reflection. I chose not to publish my journals as originally planned, concerned this may intimidate or suggest a right way to reflect. Reflection is personal, a life-long skill, the subtle assurances required throughout the research process signified the need for partners to explore this alone whilst they gain confidence in their abilities. My priority to capture as much data as possible led to the visual representations (figures 3, 5 and 6), proving a helpful tool in the dissemination process, making research more tangible, keeping the audience in mind, avoiding alienation through academic language. Potentially instigating curiosity to learn more.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Reflection

Walker and Solvason, (2014, p.109) state 'research is an on-going process of investigation and challenge to existing thinking', my hopes for this independent study is to provoke thought into the way the early years sector addresses continuous professional development, to question the appropriateness of the traditional practice of supervision and explore the concept of mentoring as a personal and professional development tool. History proves how subtle niggles and doubts can influence thinking, instigating change, the practice of the 'naughty chair' swiftly changed to the 'reflection chair' now obsolete in many settings, proving how our beliefs and practice are constantly evolving. This empowered me to take courage, dare to be different (Conkbayir, 2019) and find creative ways to meet the true needs of my team whilst negotiating government policy and guidance.

At the start of this process I acknowledged I may not find the answer to my question, indeed I gained more than I could have imagined, the empowerment of my team the biggest reward, honest, authentic insights into lived experience, enabling me to fully immerse in the study. Findings have given me an insight into possibilities, the link between similarities of practitioner and child needs providing a simplicity to how I best support collaborative learning. Reflection has evolved from an abstract concept to a more tangible activity instilling calm, and emotional connections. As we recognise our impact to others, confidence builds accumulating collective energy, momentum building as research partners now drive forward with their own areas of interest, growth mindset and self-regulation topics currently being explored. As I continue my own journey I take forward my interests of promoting calm, practitioner confidence and leadership resilience into my other modules work. Distributed leadership however remains problematic, my findings from both literature and data unearthing confusion over how this presents in an early years setting, logistics and infrastructure leaving this concept vulnerable. This requires careful thought to ensure empowerment does not compromise the well-being of others, due to work load pressures.

My research ambition was to impart my learning, bringing others on the journey with me, encouraging independence of mind and spirit (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). Taking a praxeological approach allowed me freedom to achieve this motivation, celebrating my position as insider opposed to apologising for this was truly liberating. Making my approaches transparent supported the studies credibility to, 'bring a depth that an outsider could never achieve' (Walker and Solvason, 2014, p.94). Early in the process I questioned my ethical competence yet as an intimate insider (Taylor, 2011) ethics became part of me, research partners remaining my priority throughout, decisions to omit personal reflections despite holding consents promoted me from the selfish researcher that I may have been before to a true research partner. Recognising the value of collaborative research, I began to think more long-term, not wishing to stifle potential future projects.

This study was not without its frustrations, time constraints from balancing work, life and study commitments was a significant challenge, at times I longed to study without these distractions, yet it was at these times that thoughts would come to me, chance conversations with research partners, reflections at inopportune moments, realisations as I awake each morning. I now realise this forms the research process and possibly had I not been distracted my findings and interpretation may well be different. As I conclude my work I feel a reluctance to let my study go, the process like a relationship instilling a range of emotions. Anxieties have emerged through the stages, worries over how visual representation may take the academic rigour away from my study, concerns my writing style is not academic enough. Yet I have developed courage, left behind my doubts, now proud of what I have achieved. Signposted by my supervisor to the work of Stephen Kemmis (2013) I feel content in my position, Kemmis advocates for both the researching practitioner and the practicing researcher, holding value to insider research. Research partners commitment to the study demonstrated an intellectual curiosity (Dewey, 1910). It is now my role to stoke this, for them to stand up and be counted, acknowledge their knowledge, reclaiming research as central to early years practice (Solvason, 2013).

Word count: 9857

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Appendice 1



Application for Ethical Approval (Student except PGR students)

To be completed by students proposing to undertake ANY research involving humans [that is research with living human beings; human beings who have died (cadavers, human remains and body parts); embryos and fetuses, human tissue, DNA and bodily fluids; data and records relating to humans; human burial sites] or animals.

Section A: Researcher and Project Details

Student:	Zoe Corfield
Email:	CORZ1_13@WORC.AC.UK
Institute:	Other
Student Status:	Undergraduate
Supervisor/Tutor	Stuart Gallagher
Course:	Integrated working with Children and Families
Module:	3002
Project Title:	How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting through effective mentoring?

Section B: Checklist

		Yes	No
1.	Does your proposed research involve the collection of data from living humans?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Does your proposed research require access to secondary data or documentary material of a sensitive or confidential nature from other organisations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.	Does your proposed research involve the use of data or documentary material which (a) is not anonymised and (b) is of a sensitive or confidential nature and (c) relates to the living or recently deceased?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.	Does your proposed research involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.	Will your proposed research require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6.	Will financial inducements be offered to participants in your proposed research beyond reasonable expenses and/or compensation for time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.	Will your proposed research involve collection of data relating to sensitive topics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8.	Will your proposed research involve collection of security-sensitive materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9.	Is pain or discomfort likely to result from your proposed research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10.	Could your proposed research induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11.	Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your proposed research without their knowledge and consent at the time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12.	Does your proposed research involve deception?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13.	Will your proposed research require the gathering of information about unlawful activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14.	Will invasive procedures be part of your proposed research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15.	Will your proposed research involve prolonged, high intensity or repetitive testing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16.	Does your proposed research involve the testing or observation of animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17.	Does your proposed research involve the significant destruction of invertebrates?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18.	Does your proposed research involve collection of DNA, cells, tissues or other samples from humans or animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19.	Does your proposed research involve human remains?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
20.	Does your proposed research involve human burial sites?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
21.	Will the proposed data collection in part or in whole be undertaken outside the UK?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
22.	Does your proposed research involve NHS staff or premises?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
23.	Does your proposed research involve NHS patients?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If the answers to any of these questions change during the course of your research, you must alert your Supervisor/Tutor immediately.

Signatures

By signing below, we declare that we have answered the questions above honestly and to the best of our knowledge:

Student:	Zoe Corfield	Date:	29/10/2018
-----		-----	
Supervisor / Tutor		Date:	
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If you have answered **NO** to all questions you should now submit this form to your Institute Ethics Coordinator.

If you have answered **YES** to one or more questions you must now complete **Section C** (below) and submit to your Supervisor / Tutor.

Section C: Full Application

Details of the research

Rationale

My research question has evolved naturally from my work last year where I explored, 'what are the professional development needs of a changing early years workforce?' This original research came from my desire to address the gap in knowledge of child development within my team, however as with most research my journey took an unexpected path and led me to consider how I as a leader could understand better the needs of the changing workforce. By recognising my team as unique individuals with differing values and beliefs, born into different generational time frames, I could then support their continuous professional development through a more personal tailored approach, rather than an off the peg training program.

My main learnings from this research was the power of empowerment, professional discussions became the root of where the research grew, growing practitioner confidence and allowing me as the insider researcher to truly listen, 'Developing the ability to stand back and see things more clearly', (Goodfellow, 2010). My concluding thoughts acknowledged my desire to facilitate professional discussion to a wider audience, to benefit all practitioners working together as a community of practice (Wenger, 2000). These findings alongside my learnings from the 'reflective module' I undertook, as part of the foundation degree have ignited a passion within me to share this powerful tool that we all have, a curiosity which when nurtured both on a personal level and as a wider group can provide powerful learnings impacting both personal and professional growth. 'Practitioners need to actively nurture their own and others curiosity' (Hanson and Appleby, 2015).

When considering my question for this year's independent study my question came relatively easy to me, I knew I wanted to explore further how I as a leader can empower my team and engage them in reflective practice at a deeper level, however I did not want this to be self-indulgent, I recognised I could alienate practitioners by speaking of my journey, this process needed to be about them. So here the framework from which my question would be based emerged, how do I recognise, develop and deliver those skills to facilitate a collaborative learning environment? How do I ensure I am not the driver in this process but the passenger allowing them to take the wheel, to explore the emotional landscape that reflection brings whilst protecting them from unnecessary harm?

It was here that I considered the role of the mentor, as a Pre-School leader I have a duty to my team to support their continuous professional development ensuring, 'they offer quality learning and development experiences for children that continually improves' (Department for Education, 2017) The Early Years Statutory Guidance (2017), also requires me to 'foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement'. Despite these strong statements there is little advice on how best to achieve this, the dreaded 'peer observations' is a term used across early years and despite my attempts to 'toe the line' and do as expected I find the very idea of a peer observation goes against everything I stand for. I am lucky I work on the floor with my small team on a daily basis, I know my practitioners well and support them 'in the moment', as scenarios arise, to take on a role of as purely an observer, judgmentally writing down everything that is said does not have a place in my setting. However, nurturing my team, building upon their strengths and empowering them does.

A couple of years ago I was approached by a senior lecturer asking if I mentored practitioners as this was a study she was in the process of developing, I instantly replied that yes, I was a mentor for my team, but instantaneously a 'niggle' emerged in my mind, is what I do on a daily basis, mentoring? Reflecting honestly about this I realised I had adopted this term, knowing very little about what effective mentoring looks like through both the mentor and student lens, yes, I support my team as best I can, but I am somewhat finding my way in the dark.

All of these experiences have brought me to my independent study which is ultimately about me and how I can improve my understanding to impact practice positively. Therefore, my question will be;

'How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting, through effective mentoring?'

Where will the research take place?

The research will take place within the early years setting that I lead, it is a committee run, charity Pre-School located in a rural area, offering care from 2-12 years old from 7.45am – 6pm term time only. We run from the local memorial hall and although the main user do have to occasionally pack away.

I currently employ 12 practitioners 6 of which work predominantly within early years with ages ranging from 18 months to 4 years old, it is these practitioners on which the independent study

will be focused. I also hope to engage my human resources manager in the study as her insight on developing practitioners both on a personal and professional level, could be a valuable contribution.

Due to the nature of the study, which may involve a level of self-reflection for participants I will be seeking support from my critical friend from within the setting to ensure my participants best interests remain at the heart of the study, I will also consult with my university supervisor to continually review ethical considerations

What research approach will I be using?

My question has come from my passion to improve practice through my own self-improvement whilst keeping the practitioners within my team, at the heart of the study, however this causes a potential ethical dilemma, the role of the researcher and leader are inextricably linked I will in effect be studying my own development as a leader through studying the development of those I lead, hoping to draw conclusions about myself. For this to work well my participants need to feel empowered to work collaboratively within the process, prioritising honesty in their responses, to give authenticity to the research, opposed to telling me what I want to hear as their leader.

It is here I am led to a praxeological approach, an approach grounded in real life situations, acknowledging the potential dangers of insider bias, by researching 'with' rather than 'on' participants it can be a powerful tool to support our understanding of why we do things that we do, allowing the setting as a whole to develop and grow, building upon our current thinking. Pascal and Bertram (2012), state praxeological research seeks to empower people through social transformation, to give voice to those often absent from decision making opportunities, it allow us to construct our own knowledge unique to our context, acknowledging the complexities that may be present, capturing the reality of its 'messiness' and 'chaos' is a systematic and rigorous way.

'At its heart is a process of critical self-evaluation, reflection and action (praxis) with the guiding purpose of advancing practice and supporting practitioners to develop a more profound understanding of their work, and therefore, a more effective delivery of services to children and families' Pascal and Bertram cited in Walker and Solvason (2014). p.3.;

A praxeological approach is open ended, Pascal and Bertram (2012), suggest the praxeologist needs to have courage to innovate and experiment as a researcher, going beyond the traditional orthodox methods, providing the correct environment for participants to tell their story through a

variety of mediums. Through inviting multiple levels of engagement, we can reveal richer, authentic knowledge, expressed and represented uniquely, truly listening and respecting individuals in a fully inclusive environment, moving away from participants to collaborators.

Developing a research paradigm is a complexity in itself so it is here I will try to picture how a praxeology approach fits into this framework.

Philosophy – Interpretivist

Approach - Praxeologist

Methodology - Qualitative

Methods – Focus group, reflective journals, team building activities,

My position – insider, collaborator, in the moment.

My research will be adopting a qualitative approach as it is my intention to discover the 'practitioner' experience, by seeking to find the true opinions of each individual, and by truly listening to my participants voice I can ensure I take an interpretivists stance (Walker and Solvason, 2014). This will give weight and if done correctly give value to my project.

Methods

Focus Group

Last year the focus group was aimed at participants from the management team, this was because I felt 'safer' knowing that this particular grouping were experienced in professional discussion and have an understanding of listening and being respectful to each other. I had chosen not to lead the focus group as I felt my presence may influence the data, by removing myself from this situation I needed to be confident that ethics were threaded through the focus group activity, in my absence. The data from the focus group was powerful and so after discussion with my critical friend I have decided to hold two separate focus groups following the same agenda, one group with the management team held during the normal weekly management meeting slot, and the other involving other practitioners, taking place in the setting during the weekly allocated time we have scheduled for mentoring sessions. My decision to split the focus groups are due to the logistics of staffing a busy Pre-School, but also to allow freedom of speech, participants speaking in groupings they are comfortable with. To safeguard the ethical considerations, my critical friend, with her consent will chair the focus groups which will

be audio recorded and then transcribed, anonymising participants responses. The focus group discussion will consist of 6 questions starting off broadly and then becoming more specific lines of enquiry.

Team building activities

As a group activity, within a scheduled half termly team building session, I will use the concept of mentoring as a basis to discuss, asking the team to design an acronym for the word mentoring. We will then develop this further by inviting the team to work collaboratively to design their own questionnaire on mentoring, leadership and collaboration to present to myself to complete. These responses giving another element to my reflections as the questions have not come from myself but from another source, giving credibility to the research, and avoiding a superficial approach to the study.

My Personal Reflective journal

In addition to the above I will also keep a reflective journal to document my thinking and how this evolves throughout the study. This research is ultimately to help me improve my own skills, so I will use this tool to scribe my own journey and identify key points along the way. To add validity to my interpretation of experience I will share my reflective journal with my critical friend for them to add any further comments, maybe giving a differing perspective.

Participant Reflections

In addition, I will also ask for collaborative partners to keep a reflective journal for a week of practice, identifying key moments from their practice. I did consider streamlining this with prompts of what to focus on, but I feel this will be too structured and not conducive to the praxeological approach, where I want to see the world through the participants lens not a prescribed outcome formed from my own agenda. Requesting such a personal view into the participants experience is an ethical consideration, however, to truly bring my team on this research journey with me an emotional commitment is inevitable. By acknowledging this from the outset I hope to demonstrate integrity and recruit participants who visualise the importance of their contribution and how this fits to the development of the setting and practice and ultimately their experience.

How will I feedback data?

This research is ultimately about developing my own skills in recognising, developing and delivering a collaborative learning culture and understanding what effective mentoring looks like through both the mentor and student lens. As a leader who prioritises empowerment of the team I will consult with the team regarding any changes that may come from the findings, opening up discussion on how this looks in practice. As this study is ultimately about me developing my own skills, I feel confident to share my reflections and learnings with the team, which I propose to do through the weekly staff newsletter. Through this tool I will disseminate my personal findings, through publishing extracts from my reflective journal, inviting others to do the same should they feel comfortable.

Who are your participants/subjects?

Critical friend
Early years practitioners
Early years management team
Human resources/office manager

How do you intend to recruit your participants?

As this research will be based in my own setting, I have a limited number of potential participants I can invite to take part. This can have both negative and positive impact to the study, on the positive argument, the participants hopefully will recognise they have an opportunity to make a difference, this is about their setting and their experience. On the negative side I need to ensure they do not feel coerced into joining the study and should they not wish to participate my data could be somewhat limited. In this situation I would respect their wishes not to participate and may have to widen my research to managers from other early years settings.

My first step to recruit participants will be to gain consent from my research partners, the registered person of the setting, I need to reassure them that the research is focused on my own self-improvement to further benefit the setting and will not be disruptive to the setting. I have already discussed my research outline with my critical friend to ensure this is the case and I will meet with her at regular intervals throughout the study to ensure this study is managed effectively, ethically and evolves from the practitioner experience not from my own agenda.

I will then gauge interest from the team through informal dialogue about what the research is based upon and how this could potentially benefit the setting, again the emphasis will be on my own self-improvement and not a criticism of others, however with an emphasis that collaborative working is what drives this study and how we would be equal partners within the research, learning and growing together. I will then contact potential participants on a more formal basis in the format of a letter of invitation, outlining the intentions of the research, stages of the project and what their role could potentially be in this, there will be opportunities to ask questions about the study before consents are signed. There will be no financial incentives or compensations paid and it will be made clear that, not participating will not affect their position or my opinion of them in any way.

I am very aware of how my position within the setting can influence participants, I need to ensure all participants are fully comfortable taking part and ensure they understand they have a choice, they need to feel valued and listened to and have the power to withdraw at any time. I am privileged to know my potential participants well, so I will ensure I read body language and listen sensitively to any concerns, ensuring the team are fully supported and remain my priority throughout.

How will you gain informed consent/assent?

As all participants are adults I will use written consent forms accompanied with a participant information sheet which details clearly the; purposes of the study; how it may benefit the setting; the participant role; potential risks; the handling of data and the withdrawal procedure. The withdrawal procedure will specifically state the right to withdraw from the study at any time and the right to withdraw data at a later date, recognising that informed consent is sought throughout the research process and is not a single event.

When researching ethics, I came across a journal by Carla Solvason (2017), this really resonated with me, and made me consider how ethics is more than a consent form completed correctly, it is about how we carry ourselves, our behaviour to others and our practice, it is fundamentally everything we do and how we are perceived by others. The acknowledgement that ethical practice has a causal link with quality has empowered me to consider ethicality at a deeper level and will thread through my independent study.

Confidentiality, anonymity, data storage and disposal

Focus group

Ensuring anonymity in a focus group is not possible, attendance clearly demonstrating participants involvement in the project, I therefore need to be transparent about this from the start, ensuring all participants respect the normal confidentiality agreements we have in place, following an ethical code to listen and respect other opinions in the capacity of a professional. Although I will not be chairing the focus groups, when transcribing the dialogue, I will be able to recognise the voices of participants so there is a risk here of my own interpretations influencing the data. These potential pitfalls however are outweighed by the depth of knowledge we can source from focus groups, and there are precautions I can take to manage these dilemmas. My transcription of the focus groups will be anonymised, using colour coding of text, so I am able to see how threads of dialogue interlink. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded using an iPad, this will be removed from the setting and I will store in a locked filing cabinet at home until the recording is transcribed. Once the dialogue has been transcribed the recording will be deleted. The transcription will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within my home and will be shredded immediately after I have received my assignment grading.

Group activity and Questionnaire formulation

These activities will take place in a normal half termly team building meeting, so anonymity does not have a place here. As with all our team building meetings, practitioners are encouraged to participate to gain the most out of these activities, following an ethical code of respecting each other and listening, we are able to work collaboratively to professionally discuss dilemmas, practice and formulate new ideas. As with the focus group transcripts all documentation from these activities will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within my home and then shredded immediately after I have secured an assignment grading.

Writing up Research

New legislation in regard to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has initiated a change in my settings policies to give people more control over their personal data, by ensuring it is only ever collected, stored and utilised with specific consent. Risk assessments are a tool in which we review how data is collected, processed, stored, shared and deleted and help identify potential risk. As an employee of the setting I have a duty to adhere to policies and procedures, which include the use of risk assessment. I recognise that whilst writing up my research I will have data

on my person and so extra precautions will be taken to ensure this data remains secure throughout the study. Such precautions will be password protected software and extra care taken when using my laptop in differing locations.

Potential risks to participants/subjects

The data I am seeking is about the practitioner experience and will involve a level of self-reflection, I need to be mindful that reflection of oneself can sometimes unveil uncomfortable feelings. After consulting with my independent study supervisor, and reiterating the focus on my own self development, I feel better equipped to balance the reasonable emotional responses that may come from the study and the ability to hold these responses safely and gently, enabling the participants to explore the emotional landscape safely at work.

In regard to research methods I have a duty to ensure these are designed with the participants in mind, to not cause confusion by using unfamiliar language or complicated rating systems. I also need to ensure I do not disrupt the setting through my research, consulting with my management team as to the logistics of the research.

I must not underestimate the risk to myself as researcher, this study is about my own growth and development and research may unveil truths about me that may well be hidden (Johari Window). I need to 'let go' of any preconceived ideas and let the participants ultimately drive the research and go with them on this journey.

Other ethical issues

As the manager of the setting and an 'insider' (Walker and Solvason, 2014) to the research I need to ensure my position as researcher is clarified, considering the potential for researcher bias. I need to acknowledge that my position could potentially influence the research at many levels and explore how I might mitigate this.

Pressure to partake in research – My information sheet and consent forms need to be clear on how participants can withdraw from the research at any time, but more importantly I need to ensure I am open to answer any questions about the research honestly and ensure the research process is transparent to all involved. Encouraging potential participants to question and challenge research at this early stage will help to ensure I retain participants commitment to the research process once consent is given.

Power relations – By steering one of the focus group towards the non-management team I am hoping to gain a different insight to my subject matter, and by removing myself from the chairing

of this focus group discussion I am mitigating some of the influence I may have over the team, which could potentially affect their comments. However, to safeguard the ethicality around professional discussion, my critical friend, who is part of the management team will chair this group, I have to expect that this too could affect responses given however feel this is a better solution to ensure I am out of the equation. In preparation for the focus group I will speak to my critical friend and share with her literature on the characteristics of effective moderators taken from Kruegar, R. and Casey, M.A. (2000) Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research.

Logistics

The timing of the focus group and team building meeting will be in the normal schedule so should not greatly impact practitioners, I will however welcome participants to utilise their allocated continuous professional development time for their reflective journal should they so wish.

Safeguarding

Policies and procedures will be adhered to at all times and should any concerns arise in regard to safeguarding, normal procedures will be followed, regardless of the anonymity of participants.

Published ethical guidelines to be followed

BERA (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, London: BERA
 The British Association for Early Childhood Education Code of Ethics (2011)
 EECERA Code of Ethics (2014) European Early Childhood Education Research Association
 Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics
 SERA (2005) Scottish Educational Research Association
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Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/135050840072002>

Accessed [01 December 2017]

Document Checklist

Please tick boxes below to identify which documents are sent with this application:

Participant Information Sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consent Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Data Collection Tool	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other documents (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student Declaration

I have read the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant codes of practice or guidelines and I have identified and addressed the ethical issues in my research honestly and to the best of my knowledge and by signing this I confirm that I have a data management plan in place in accordance with the policy for the effective management of research data.

Signature: Zoe Corfield **Date:** 26/01/2019

Supervisor / Tutor / Module Leader Declaration

(Tick as applicable)

☐ I am satisfied that the student has identified and addressed the ethical issues and grant ethical approval for this research.

☐ I refer this Application for Ethical Approval to the Institute Ethics Panel.

Signature: Stuart Gallagher (signed electronically) **Date:** 30.1.2019

Appendice 2

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project; How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting, through effective mentoring?’

Dear potential participant,

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to consider your involvement in my independent study which forms part of my Integrated working with Children and Families BA degree. This information sheet has been devised to help you better understand the reasons behind my area of study and the role of the participant during the project.

The purpose of the research project

This independent study is focused upon my own personal and professional development and how I as a leader can support a collaborative learning environment for practitioners within the setting. However, the approach I am taking for this study is one of collaboration and empowerment of the team, my vision to research together, learning from each other to benefit practice and grow professionally and personally. I visualise a shared responsibility, and balance of power as we navigate this research question together, acknowledging throughout the course of research the question may evolve, new developments in thinking inevitable and even sought.

How will this study benefit the setting?

This research is not a criticism on current practice, it is focused on how I can improve my own skills to better support practitioners within the setting. Through collaborative working we can ensure all participants voices are heard, empowering the wider team and potentially build practitioner confidence and morale, benefiting individuals, the wider team and ultimately improve the service we provide to children and families.

What does participation involve?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and is not a job requirement, participation or non-participation will not be judged and will not affect your working relationships. Should you agree to participate, the process will involve a commitment to share thoughts and experience in professional discussion with your peers,

attendance at the next scheduled team building meeting to complete group activities and an invitation to keep a reflective journal on practice for 5 consecutive days. To avoid disruption the majority of these tasks will be completed within normal working hours.

Risks to the participant and rights to withdraw

As a participant you have the right to withdraw consent at any time as well as the right not to answer questions, with an assurance that this will not adversely affect your working relationships. Consent will be sought throughout the process and reviewed regularly to ensure participants are happy to continue. Should you wish to withdraw, at any stage of the study, please email Zoe Corfield on zoekirbycorfield@hotmail.co.uk, you do not have to give reasons for this.

I foresee minimal risks to this research other than time commitments and so where possible responses will be captured within normal working hours and not impact personal time.

Handling of data

All information you provide will be anonymised and treated confidentially, if you request confidentiality, beyond anonymised quotes, information you provide will be treated only as a source of background information, alongside literature-based research. The information gained from this research will only be used for the above objectives, and will not be used for any other purpose, all data will be handled with upmost care and destroyed ethically once the research project is finalised. Further information can be sought by researcher, Zoe Corfield (07510 608 774) or in person.

Participant Consent Form

Research Project; How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting, through effective mentoring?’

Researcher details;

Zoe Corfield

Contact no - 07510 608 774. Email – zoekirbycorfield@hotmail.co.uk

To be completed by participant;

Statement	Initials of participant
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, received satisfactory answers and have received enough information about this research project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	
I understand that my research data may be used for a further project in anonymous form, but I am able to opt out of this if I so wish, by ticking here. <input type="checkbox"/>	

Additional information to be completed by focus group participants;

Statement	Initials of participant
I agree to the focus group to be audio recorded.	
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	

To be completed by all participants;

I agree to participate in this research project.	
Signed (participant)	Date
Name in block letters	
Signature of researcher	Date

Committee Consent Form

Research Project; How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting, through effective mentoring?’

Researcher details;

Zoe Corfield

Contact no - 07510 608 774. Email – zoekirbycorfield@hotmail.co.uk

To be completed on behalf of the registered person;

Statement	Initials of participant
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions, received satisfactory answers and have received enough information about this research project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	
I understand that my research data may be used for a further project in anonymous form, but I am able to opt out of this if I so wish, by ticking here. <input type="checkbox"/>	

Additional information to be completed by focus group participants;

Statement	Initials of participant
I agree to the focus group to be audio recorded.	
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	

To be completed by all participants;

I agree to participate in this research project.	
Signed (participant)	Date
Name in block letters	
Signature of researcher	Date

Appendice 3

Data Collection Tools - Sample Focus Group Statements for Discussion

Mac Lachlan's (2005) paper, 'Focus Group Methodology and its Usefulness in Early Childhood Research' identifies the value of focus groups, providing a safe environment to bounce ideas off each other, resulting in new ideas and a sense of shared responsibility which can build momentum after the group session, benefiting the practice as a whole.

Mac Lachlan identifies five different types of questions that can be use in a focus group, suggesting the questions gradually develop to gain more detailed responses as the group becomes more confident in their involvement.

Below are a sample of questions I will be using to structure the focus group.

Opening question – What are your memories of school/college education?

Introductory questions – Looking back were there any influential people who inspired you through your time at school/college?

Transition questions – What motivates you as a learner?

Key Questions – What is your understanding of your role in your own continuous professional development? What are your expectations of a mentor in supporting your continuous professional development?

Ending questions – What do you feel are the qualities of an effective mentor?

Is there anything else we have not discussed that you feel is relevant to this study; 'How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting, through effective mentoring?

As the leader of my setting I have chosen to not chair the focus group, as I feel this may have a detrimental effect on data, I want my participants to feel comfortable to speak freely and honestly to give true value to my study, with no influence from myself. For this reason, I have asked my critical friend to lead proceedings and will brief them on the above questions and some guidelines on how to manage a focus group effectively.

Below are guidelines taken from my readings of Kruegar, R. and Casey, M.A. (2000) in Focus Groups: a practical guide for applied research 3rd edition. London: Sage Publications

Characteristics of effective moderators;

- ✓ Looks at participants when they are talking.
- ✓ Demonstrates active listening techniques.
- ✓ Uses non-verbal communication techniques.
- ✓ Demonstrates empathy and positive regard for participants.
- ✓ Has working knowledge on the topic.
- ✓ Restrains from expressing personal views.
- ✓ One way that a moderator can communicate respect and encourage participation is through the use of an effective introductory statement. The introduction should communicate the purpose for which the group has been assembled, why the participants were selected, the ground rules for participation, and the opening question.
- ✓ Most importantly, the introduction should make the participants feel comfortable and welcome.

Appendice 4

How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting through effective mentoring?

Dear Zoe,

Thanks for sending through your draft literature review and also your updated application for ethical approval.

I have not yet read through the literature review draft and will reply about that early next week.

Good news elsewhere, though: your application for ethical approval is approved.

You've sketched out your theoretical framework and methodology chapters in the form and the can now be fleshed out into fully formed chapters for your study - well done! I am confident that the care you have taken to communicate your position to the reader and the efforts you have made to clarify your expectations of the study and of your staff's potential contribution to it will ensure your study develops and unfolds well, allowing you to reflect on a rich study.

Just one thing about the application. (You'll see I've highlighted it in bright yellow.) You mention participants' data being used in future research. Do you mean you'll hold on to their data and use it for future writing plans? If so, how might this fit with your plans to shred data in the summer? I'm also not sure if data collected for the purposes of this study are easily imported into a study that may be about quite different things but which may still use the original data. So, although I am approving your study, I would appreciate you letting me know what exactly you had in mind here!

Oh, and one more thing. I know it'll seem really obvious to you, but it still isn't completely obvious to me. You mention that the focus groups can take place during scheduled hours and so won't impact on practitioners day-to-day jobs. In my head, they are caring for children in their day-to-day jobs, and taking part in focus groups will inevitably take them away from that work. That's how it reads to me. Again, can you clarify whether or not I'm mistaken, as I obviously don't want to approve a study while assuming that staff will be taken away from their primary duty of caring for other people's children!

If you could clarify those two niggles, I'd really appreciate it.

I've saved the approved application as two files. The PDF file captures the approved version, so we don't confuse it with the earlier, original application. And the MS Word file is there so you can attach it to the end of your Independent Study as a mandatory appendix. Don't also forget to include a copy of this email in that appendix, either by cutting and pasting it or using a screen grab. This email, which highlights your application's approval, stands in place of my handwritten signature on the form itself.

Finally, you did mention about the possibility of meeting up to look at writing and methodology:

"If I can, I would like to book in some time with you soon to help me organise my writing better, also looking at methodology as this was my nemesis last year! Are you free at all on Saturday?"

Not sure I can address both those concerns at a lunch break at this weekend's conference, but can certainly look at booking time in our schedules to meet midweek?

(Your writing is fantastic, by the way, so not sure where exactly I can contribute ... !)

See you soon,

Stuart

Stuart Gallagher

Senior Lecturer | BB098 (St John's Campus) | T 01905 855052 | [WWW](#)

LEADING CULTURE CHANGE IN SAFEGUARDING (PGCert) From September 2019. [Further information.](#)

COLLABORATIVE WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES (FdA) [Further information.](#)

Zoe Corfield
Thu 31/01/2019 00:27
Hi Stuart,

Thanks for your reply. I will just remove the paragraph about keeping data for further projects this has been taken from my last year's form so has no use here!

Secondly to ease your concerns regarding focus groups. I have a set time 8-9 on a Tuesday morning for mentoring (non-contact time) as breakfast club is run by a different team, so this is the time I will use for the non-management team. For the management team we will use our normal meeting time on a Wednesday afternoon (again this is non-contact time as the after-school club team run this session). The team building meeting will also be utilised for research activities and this is an evening activity as per our normal termly schedule. I hope that clears up your concerns.

Many Thanks
Zoe

Sent from my iPad

Stuart Gallagher <s.gallagher@worc.ac.uk>
Thu 31/01/2019 09:30

Concerns entirely cleared up 😊

Thanks Zoe. No harm in mentioning those details - evidence of your courteous and ethical planning and practice - in your methodology so that your assessor doesn't ask the same questions!

Thanks again, Zoe. I'm sure it's going to be a great project for your team.

Appendice 5

In a recent team building after introducing my research project I asked the team to create an acronym for the term 'Mentoring'. The team split into two groups and the results are shown below;

	Team 1	Team 2
M	Meaningful	Managing and Morale
E	Encouraging	Engaging
N	Nurturing	Nurturing
T	Time	Time
O	Observing	One to one
R	Reflecting	Responsive and Reassuring
I	Individuality	Individual and Informative
N	Nourishing	Neutral
G	Goals and generosity	Growth and Goals

Appendice 6

In a recent team building meeting I asked the team to work collectively to create a questionnaire around the subject of 'Mentoring'. This was to consist of 6 questions and be aimed at myself to answer at a later date. My responses are below.

1. How will you know your mentoring is successful?

Intuition – My experiences of leadership and the many relationships a leader is required to navigate has over time improved my skills of intuition and reflection. This allows me to read people better, observing the subtleties that may present such as the uncomfortable practitioner or the practitioner keen to tell me what they think I may want to hear. By attuning to these skills, I hope to read how successful the mentoring is for practitioners. I don't believe there is a one package fits all and I predict that different practitioners will gain different levels of helpfulness from the mentoring process dependent on their own life experiences, motivations and level of reflection they are willing and able to delve into. It is my role therefore to acknowledge starting points, supporting and nurturing their capacity to engage in the process at a level that you are comfortable with.

Practice – The main purpose of mentoring is to support practitioners in developing both professionally and personally. I acknowledge that this is a slow process and from my own experiences of reflective practice recognise this is quite a journey to partake in, however the rewards can be life changing. As practitioners begin to understand themselves better I would predict confidence levels may rise. Confidence can be infectious and can effect the morale of the setting positively, therefore the main impact of successful mentoring for me, would be the building momentum of positive energy created through empowered practitioners who hold a confidence in their abilities of which they are proud.

2. How will you ensure you meet everyone's individual needs?

This question is one that I have already asked myself, instigating much thought. From this I have developed a new concept, 'The Focus Practitioner', as communicated to the team through the staff Newsletter on 23rd February 2019. To explain this better please find a personal reflection describing how this came to fruition;

As it reaches the end of term and my juggle of the many demands as early years leader, home life and university study starts to unravel I realise peer supervisions have yet again come around with a week left to go of term. This realisation causing me feelings of exasperation and a sense of failure as once again this has become bottom of my list and now requires a somewhat speedy pace to get through, forming a tokenistic view of supervision opposed to the powerful tool it could be.

As I reflect on this I recognise I am failing my team and myself and a better way must

be sought to encapture the benefits of supervision to practice. The current way of doing is focused more on the emotional aspects of practitioners, their well-being and although this holds great importance I now recognise where there is personal growth there lacks professional growth and a balance must be negotiated. I need to be supportive but with a progressive focus, realigning my commitment to professional practice opposed to a 6 weekly counselling session.

It was through much soul searching that I had a pivotal moment, a realisation that once again as has been the pattern throughout my university journey, there is a distinct link between how we support children to how we can potentially support practitioners. Recently I have adopted a 'in the moment' approach to my planning as part of this we have a focus child, this involves the key person speaking with the child's family to create a plan for the week for that child based around their interests and current motivations, this knowledge is then used in practice to support the child's development and next steps. This has been a huge success with key persons focus able to really get to know the child, of course they still interact with other children but their primary focus is to utilise spare time by supporting the focus child.

My thinking has led me to the concept of the focus practitioner, each week my focus directed on one member of the team, meaning any spare time I have is used positively with my focus practitioner 'in the moment'. The process begins with a professional discussion led by the focus practitioner to identify areas for exploration and development, this discussion is then scribed onto a document with clear joint tasks for the week, this maybe simple exercises around values, observing the practitioner in action or professional discussion, at the end of the week a joint reflection will end the weeks focus with clear areas for further thought. By focusing on one practitioner I hope for this time to be seen as a much better approach to supervision than the rushed, unproductive process that came before.

3. Why do we need mentoring?

I think ultimately you deserve it. In a profession where we are secondary caregivers to many children from different families, backgrounds and with differing needs, there is an emotional cost we all pay as we try our very best to meet these needs. This requires skill to fluidly adapt and self-regulate our own emotions as we meet those of others, including our own colleagues. Mentoring allows us time to breathe, to consider ourselves, to recognise where we may need a helping hand, and to recognise the positive impact we have on the families and children in our care. By nurturing ourselves, we can then be better prepared to nurture others.

4. What is your approach to mentoring, and what is your goal?

My approach is very much a practitioner led approach. This is about you the individual, so it is my role to relinquish control and let you steer the process at a speed and pace you are comfortable with. For me mentoring is giving you time and

space to develop personally and professionally, I have no set agenda of what I am trying to achieve, this is your journey.

My goal is for us to grow together, be supportive, and connect. In a busy work environment where the children or family's needs are required to come first we need opportunity to come together, mentoring therefore will strengthen those connections both individually and as a team. Finally, I hope to be innovative in the mentoring process, I recognise we all learn in different ways and so will with your help discover new ways in which we can promote reflective thought.

I must acknowledge here I have no training in 'mentoring', however I am in a position where I understand the context in which you are working and can therefore relate to your experiences.

5. What would you do if somebody felt they didn't need/want mentoring?

That's a great question that has instigated some thought around this. Continuous professional development is a requirement of your role, supervision a requirement of the EYFS. Mentoring is just another approach to the supervision process as detailed in the reflection in response to question 2. However, if you were uncomfortable with mentoring, we would explore the aspects of this to which you had concerns.

I have to acknowledge in my research the term 'mentoring' is very difficult to define, ranging from a profession in itself requiring specific training to a friend at the end of a phone. In comparison the term 'supervise' as defined by the Collins English dictionary, is to make sure that an activity is done correctly or that the person is doing a task or behaving correctly. I personally find this draconian. In early years we are learning on the spot, every child and circumstance unique requiring flexibility in our approaches. My role is therefore not to measure you by the 'correct way' of doing things but to work together, collaboratively to explore possibilities.

To help your understanding in what I believe mentoring to be I have described below my personal view on what a mentor is;

'Having the ability to emotionally and intellectually connect, igniting curiosity in others, allowing the creative flow to take hold. A passenger on a journey with no destination, subtly lubricating the wheels through empathy and the steady building of rapport, fuelling the motivation of the driver. Presenting opportunity for spontaneous reciprocal dialogue, listening and attuning to the spoken and unspoken word, responding rhythmically, giving pause for thought and reflection. Learning in partnership, mutually building emotional competence in order to thrive and discover.'

6. How will you prioritise your time for mentoring and how will you decide who you are going to mentor first?

As discussed in my response to question 2, mentoring will be on a 6-weekly cycle, each member of the team a focus for 1 week. By focusing on one practitioner, I can ensure my time is directed at them. I am very lucky to work with the team on the floor each day so much of the work we do together will in fact be 'in the moment,' grasping opportunities as they arise each day; for instance, if a practitioner has asked for support in extending play opportunities, I am there to support, prompt, role model and facilitate this.

In terms of who goes first? I will use my intuition as to who I feel could best utilise my support at that time. Although it will run on a 6-week cycle there will be no tight schedule, it will be fluid to meet the needs of everyone.

Appendice 7

Focus Practitioner

The focus practitioner concept has come from a desire to utilise supervision better to ensure both professional and personal growth. Led by the practitioner the process will begin with a professional discussion where we will establish areas for growth. Throughout the following week time will be spent with your manager to work on these areas through a range of activities, this may be discussion or practical activities. At the end of the week we will meet again to jointly reflect on the week and put ideas forward to continue to develop areas until the next cycle of focus practitioner.

Name: [REDACTED]

Date: 25th February 2019

Step 1 Professional Discussion

After a very constructive discussion [REDACTED] identified her area for growth as to better understand colleagues in the workplace, recognising 'we are not all the same'. Main points coming from this discussion were;

- Take time to think about other's strengths – what skills do they have that I don't and how can I utilise/acknowledge these?
- As a very proactive member of the team always willing to help others, take time to pause to question, am I helping or are they working on a different time scale to me? How does my helping affect the morale of others and how can I get them to achieve what I would like but, on their terms, possibly reframing how I approach this?
- Communication is key to ensure all leaders are kept in the loop of communication, allowing them to digest information and then feed down to the team.
- Set yourself realistic time frames to avoid 'burnout'.

Summary

The key point is to not change who you are but take time to reflect on why you act the way you do, what is important to you and why? By understanding yourself better you can then adapt to the many personalities within the team, considering that their priorities may be different to yours. This can be frustrating but by taking time to pause and reflect you will find ways to overcome this, developing both your personal and professional skills.

Task

Your task over the next 6 weeks is to consider the points above and take time to think and reflect. It may be helpful to write down reflections in a style you are comfortable with, using the following page. I will also spend time with you this week to work on realistic time frames and identifying the strengths of the team.

Appendice 8

Transcript – Critical friend conversation

Ok my critical friend the next stage of my study, I was going to ask staff members to do a reflective journal for a week but I now feel a little bit uncomfortable about that. Because of the focus practitioner and how that's developing, that's about their personal development and is about reflecting on themselves as well, I'm not quite sure what I am going to get out of a reflective journal?

I'm also thinking about the ethics of the time that it would take people and would they feel uncomfortable? And who am I to judge what their writing, how do I know? Because I know now that we all reflect at different levels, so I'm not quite sure what I'm going to get from a reflective journal from them, so I just wondered what your input was on that?

But your obviously getting a reflection from them at the end of their focus practitioner week aren't you? Because your having a discussion at the end of the week?

No not at the end of the week now, it was going to be the end of the week but it is now going to be the end of the six weeks because its like a cycle, so I will set them tasks and then when we meet again we will reflect on that six-week period because it was too tight a time to do it in a week, it wouldn't probably embed.

So, within a week of reflection you might find that, you might not get anything from it because they might reflect on things that are not quite as important to what your looking for, is that..?

Well no because I'm trying not to steer the evidence, I'm trying not to steer the data. The idea was I was going to, I will still do it, so I was going to do a weeks reflection based on a weeks practice to do with my professional development, that's where it is steering, and I wanted them to do the same, but I'm just now..

Why not pick three or four key people then?

Yeah I did wonder about that, but then I thought am I then streamlining the evidence to meet my needs, but then I don't know what my needs are?

No, I don't think you would be because you could get a reflection from management, a reflection from a practitioner, a reflection from an afterschool club practitioner and then a reflection from office staff. So, you would get a reflection from across the board.

Yes, that's a good idea.

But without pinpointing anybody impartial and then sort of saying to them just reflect on only what you do in the week or reflect on your experiences through the week or reflect on your progress, you know so its personal to them. Then I think you would probably get an overview of the whole setting.

Yes, that's a good idea.

So, everybody's got a bit of an input but your not having like loads and loads of work to trawl through to get your answers that you need to get.

And I don't know what those answers are, that's why its hard, because you don't know actually what your trying to achieve, I suppose that's why I'm a bit lost with it, is that...

But until you get that reflection back, there is because you can't ask them any questions because the reflection is not there.

No, its personal

And it's reflecting on what they have done that week so you can't say I want to know at the end of the week what you thought of Because you don't know what's going to come up, because we are in the moment and we are based around how things change each day.

Yes it is difficult

So then at the end of it then you can kind of go through the reflections that you have got from them.

But I suppose what I'm trying to say is that I don't even know what I'm trying to get out of it? Am I trying to get out of it how deep they reflect? Can they reflect?

Well I don't think you will be able to tell that because you will have different people and like you said earlier they all reflect differently. So, somebody might reflect a lot deeper, to somebody who just might just reflect on

Skim the surface

Yes, like skim the surface almost and someone might reflect on themselves rather than the actual experience for the child or the activity.

So, do you think it would be useful?

I think it would be very useful and then possibly what you could go on to do after you have finished your study is maybe look at putting that into the focus practitioner, type thing, so you get more of a reflection in that.

Yes, because that's what we are trying to aim for

But we can dwell on that when we've got a bit more time to work with?

Yes, okay. Well thank you very much for your help.

Appendice 9

Independent Study Reflective Journal

17th November 2018

Today I attended a session by Dr Carla Solvason on literature reviews and methodology. She raised the question in the session on how important it is to demonstrate in the ethical approval how the research question impacts the child. On reflection I don't believe I have stated this clearly in my ethical approval, I have spoken of how my own growth can impact the setting and practitioners, but I haven't explicitly stated my intentions to enhance the child experience. I am awaiting my approval back from my supervisor so will revisit this when I relook at it with fresh eyes.

Advice given at this session was to read more up to date journals around the topic as these are peer reviewed and are based on research, we also need to consider current policy. The literature review should include a minimum of 30 sources so I recognise I know have to begin this process. I will start with a library search and policy linked to my duty as an early years leader. I will then analyse this and formulate some key questions to ask of my literature review.

18th November 2018

I have just been working through yesterday's slides for module 3003 and watched the below YouTube clip which is about giving feedback. This really resonated with me as at first, I felt this would just be telling me what I already know however one of the slides speaks of kindness, not as a sign of weakness but an opportunity to build strength and growth. I recognise that most of the time I am positive within the team but sometimes I do get exasperated with some of my younger team and I deal with this taking a more negative stance, I suppose to shock them in to getting the job done. This is done purely out of my own frustration and I recognise now that I need to ensure I hold back on my emotions. Going forward I need to find strategies to empower and continue with positive feedback whilst ensuring the practitioners understand the expectations of them. Honest and transparent dialogue maybe the best way forward to achieve this.

I write this as this links to the role of the mentor, raising the question how we approach a negative in practitioner behaviour to help them achieve their goals. Am I allowed to get angry? I think of Alan Sugar in the reality show The Apprentice, does this feedback empower or disengage? This gives me food for thought whilst I begin my literature review.

Wow, I have just watched a second video which addresses my problem above, how to give critical feedback through a system called AID, the A represents the action, i.e. when you...., the I is the impact i.e. this happens.... D is for the desired result. It is about being direct, specific and not devaluing what you are saying, avoiding what I normally do such as saying, 'I understand, don't worry etc'. I recognise this makes me part of the problem. This is really empowering and I hope to trial in practice! Out

of interest I watched a further video by the same lady, regarding ensuring employee accountability, again very interesting and some very simple but useful tools to try.

2nd December 2018

I am just reading for another module about strengths-based approaches, the author suggesting we look at the person holistically. This isn't anything new to me, however for some reason today this really hit home.

I have a current issue with a member of the team that struggles to organise himself, he never looks at emails, often tells me he wasn't informed of things despite information being communicated in several different formats such as face to face, planning documents, emails, newsletters, notice boards etc. He struggles with writing observations and retaining information such as the EYFS areas of learning, despite being in role for over three years. He is an excellent practitioner in the terms of his interactions with children and his communication skills with them, less so with adults in the setting but nevertheless a great practitioner considering the positive relationships he makes with the children. Despite mentoring, training and supervision he still fails to improve his organisation. I have got to the point now of pure frustration, I question myself is this because he is a 'millennial' employee with differing priorities, is this pure laziness, or is there something more?

This morning whilst ironing! an article came on the news about dyslexia and how disabling this can be to a person, the person interviewed was a successful sportsman who went to extreme lengths to hide his condition, he would always make sure he was last to the planning meetings for the team to avoid having to do the writing on the whiteboard, he would pretend to forget things to avoid sitting at the front of the classroom. He became very strategic in how he dealt with such situations which were obviously stressors to him and through his actions built quite a reputation for being lazy and unorganised. I know that the practitioner to whom I refer in my reflection has a diagnosis of dyslexia, I give him extra time and support to manage this but as a person who has never struggled with organising, reading and writing I wonder what the world truly looks like through his lens?

I would like to think I am a positive person with a positive outlook and like to see the very best in a person. But I am now doubting my own abilities to always focus on the strengths, am I truly seeing this practitioner holistically, as I would a child in my care, or is it a case of there's a job to do, your paid to do this job, so 'man up' I don't think I am that harsh but I have to be honest I do get exasperated! By considering him holistically and focusing on strengths I could maybe make a difference? At this stage I don't know, it isn't as if this practitioner lacks confidence, in fact it's quite the contrary, he responds well to praise and is always keen to share his triumphs with us, but maybe this is how he has learned to cope with his condition.

I feel I need time to think this through and consider different ways to helping him, maybe having an open and honest dialogue about his condition and the coping mechanisms he uses. I need to sensitively unpick how the dyslexia impacts his life and how he carries out his job role, to evaluate whether I can support him better. It seems criminal to lose such a good role model to the children because he can't retain the EYFS or complete thorough observations, however I do have to maintain standards as a leader so this is dilemma I will have to face.

Its great how unexpected reflections can come about as part of your everyday occurrences!

4th December 2018

Having hit a bit of a brick wall with how to plan my literature review, today whilst driving to work ideas came flooding to me, it's almost as if I have to go through this lull to come out the other end. Anyway, my plan is now as follows:

Start with policy – Ofsted requirements for managers to develop practitioners CPD and their requirement of 'supervision' however with very little idea on how to go about this – link to lack of training on developing the team (training directory). Also, Ofsted's publication - Getting it Right first time, which on reading last year came across as almost threatening.

What is supervision – link to article I read about social workers and how supervision is about deadlines and not actually having time to reflect.

Rice, S. (2017) "The future of child protection may not be in local government", Journal of Children's Services, Vol. 12, Issue: 2-3, pp.138-143 [online]

Also link internationally – Reggio and the importance of time to reflect.

My thoughts on supervision – the title itself depicting your checking up on people – your 'supervising' observing. My experience of Ofsted inspector who told me supervisions are about peer obs and then talking this through – no room for emotional support. My viewpoint – what does everyone else think – is it too one-sided me observing them, how I started the process by asking them to observe more senior staff mainly for ethical reasons. Supervision is something I am not comfortable with hence the 'mentoring role' a collaborative approach, supportive and not judgemental.

5th December 2018

Having just received my feedback form my supervisor I am feeling somewhat overwhelmed, I need to take time to digest comments and review where my literature review is going. However, on a positive note I have decided I need to utilise the Hive which I have never been to! I managed the foundation degree using only on-line sources but I feel after taking advice from my supervisor that it will be worth the investment in time and I need all the help I can get!

7th December 2018

Thinking in the car this morning, I was reflecting on some reading I completed last night on a European Commission report about the quality of ECEC. I began to think about my position as leader and how influential my position is when developing a reflective culture, developing the competences of both the individual and facilitating these in the interaction of the 'competence system' i.e. the setting.

I have had a tough year in this role, the result being a lack of confidence in my own abilities. With levels of personal stress rising I have recognised in myself a

decreased ability to 'filter', a lack of patience with others which is not conducive to the environment I am trying to create, I feel like my vision is slipping in between my fingers. As I am mulling this over, I recognise the importance of 'leadership resilience' how can I bounce back after such an attack on my personal and professional abilities? Although supported by my management team I cannot escape the damage that has been done, and I need to rebuild slowly and methodically to be the leader I know and want to be. This brings me back to my reading and how the infrastructure around early years settings needs to promote leadership resilience as without a strong leader the rest just falls apart.

The Art of Feedback;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5m2xwVMMYI>

Giving Critical Feedback;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fz1TTUg_7r8

19th December 2018

I have continued this week to consider leadership resilience. I have tried to understand better, the process I have been engulfed in over the past year that has led to how I currently feel about my leadership role, with the ambition to re-build my strength of character and recover my position. After much soul-searching I can only conclude that I have had a bad run of luck involving some very challenging people, each chipping away at my own self-belief and confidence. A disgruntled employee, a difficult Ofsted inspector, an abusive parent, all of these people have in their own way damaged my confidence, effecting my energy levels and self-belief.

My mum who is my best supporter tells me rightly so to embrace this, use it to make you stronger but I am not yet at that point. I suppose I have had a privileged life, surrounded by a strong family and supportive people, I was not prepared for what this year brought me. Yes, I have managed challenging situations before but when I was at my best, when you begin to self-doubt these situations become far bigger and engulf who you are, taking over your professional and personal life.

As I write this, I am trying to figure out how this links to my study, but I conclude this is my story, this is where I am currently at, I would be naïve to think my own feelings will not impact the study in some shape and form and so it is better to lay bare my starting point so I am able to get the very most out of this independent study.

26th December 2018

After quite an intense end to term with the many demands of running an early years setting and with Christmas now in the background I can re-focus on my study and university demands. Today I have begun by reading about Praxeology as a research

paradigm to my study, this has been enlightening to me as it embraces the realities of the front line, it's about understanding human behaviour, seeing the social world through relationships and interactions. Using this approach will enable me to acknowledge the impact of emotion and actions through the leadership lens. I really enjoyed this quote;

p.10 Praxeology is 'always grounded in real world situations and acknowledges the unpredictability of human beings and their interactions with their world. It does not attempt to control in or out aspects or elements of reality but tries to see the complexity of a situation as a whole and to capture the reality of its 'messiness and chaos but in a systematic and rigorous way.'

My next challenge is to consider creative ways to empower practitioners join me in this research, as a collaborative team effort. But first my literature review!

16th January 2019

I have been considering my supervisors advice on a praxeological approach to the study and have been considering the creative ways I could collect data for the study. Although I see myself as a creative leader not afraid to break the rules I have found this quite difficult. My readings talk of creativity but more so when researching on children not so much researching on adults. However, I did recall a previous meeting where as a group we created an acronym for 'nurturing', this instigated great discussion, was very simple and a collective activity allowing the less confident members of the team to contribute without undue pressure. I therefore think this would be a good activity to complete in reference to the term 'mentoring', with the proviso that I remove myself from the group when they complete this, avoiding any influence I may have.

My supervisor suggested flipping the idea of a staff questionnaire and for the team to develop a questionnaire for me, seeking responses from myself as a leader. I recognise the power of this but I am a little nervous about this, unsure how I could present this to the group. I would like some more time to consider this idea.

Finally, I have been considering the role of my critical friend and although I would be happy to share my reflective journal with her I recognise this could be an onerous task. Therefore, I have decided to complete a separate journal to this one focused on a specific week of practice, we will then review this together alongside the journals of other participants with their consent. This will then be more manageable and a more cohesive process.

January 31st, 2019

My supervisor has approved my independent study so I'm already to go. As I like to tell a story in my writing I have completed a document which merges the literature review and my own theoretical framework, I now need to take this a part to form clear chapters in my study.

10th February 2019

The dreaded supervision - is there another way?

As it reaches the end of term and my juggle of the many demands as early years leader, home life and university study starts to unravel I realise peer supervisions have yet again come around with a week left to go of term. This realisation causing me feelings of exasperation and a sense of failure as once again this has become bottom of my list and now requires a somewhat speedy pace to get through, forming a tokenistic view of supervision opposed to the powerful tool it could be.

As I reflect on this I recognise I am failing my team and myself and a better way must be sought to encapture the benefits of supervision to practice. The current way of doing is focused more on the emotional aspects of practitioners, their wellbeing and although this holds great importance I now recognise where there is personal growth there lacks professional growth and a balance must be negotiated. I need to be supportive but with a progressive focus, realigning my commitment to professional practice opposed to a 6 weekly counselling session.

It was through much soul searching that I had a pivotal moment, a realisation that once again as has been the pattern throughout my university journey, there is a distinct link between how we support children to how we can potentially support practitioners. Recently I have adopted a 'in the moment' approach to my planning as part of this we have a focus child, this involves the key person speaking with the child's family to create a plan for the week for that child based around their interests and current motivations, this knowledge is then used in practice to support the child's development and next steps. This has been a huge success with key persons focus able to really get to know the child, of course they still interact with other children but their primary focus is to utilise spare time by supporting the focus child.

My thinking has led me to the concept of the focus practitioner, each week my focus directed on one member of the team, meaning any spare time I have is used positively with my focus practitioner 'in the moment'. The process begins with a professional discussion led by the focus practitioner to identify areas for exploration and development over the next six weeks, this discussion is then scribed onto a document with clear joint tasks for the week, this maybe simple exercises around values, observing the practitioner in action or professional discussion, at the end of the week a joint reflection will end the weeks focus with clear areas for further thought. By focusing on one practitioner I hope for this time to be seen as a valuable tool not a rushed tick in the box activity.

I have currently trialled this process with one practitioner and I found this very powerful and a much better use of my time, whereas previously if I had a spare half an hour I would scrabble about looking for a job, desperate to not lose time (as this is such a precious resource) now I have focus. As for the feedback from the practitioners this is very much early days but I predict this as a much better approach to supervision than the rushed, unproductive supervision process that came before.

23rd February 2019

Today I have focused my weekly Staff Newsletter on my research project, I have spoken previously about this to the team on an individual basis but felt it important to put across in the newsletter how we can all be a part of research.

*Hello everyone, I would like to share with you an exciting opportunity to partake in an Early Years research project that I am leading as part of my BA Integrated working with Children and Families; **How do I best support a collaborative learning culture within an early years setting through effective mentoring?***

My question has come from my passion to improve practice through my own self-improvement whilst keeping you, the practitioners within the team, at the heart of the study. This research takes an approach of collaboration and learning together, I want to hear your voice, and really acknowledge and use this to hopefully better my own skills which in turn could potentially improve quality across the setting. I have devised an information sheet which details more about the research processes and the commitment required, however this is minimal so I would urge you to take some time to read through and then please ask me any further questions. Collaborative research is a powerful tool, you are the experts working with children, families and colleagues every day, you hold knowledge that can be transformational, I would like to leave you with this quote;

***'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.'* Helen Keller**

27th February 2019

This evening I held the team building meeting. The team had been forewarned that part of this session would be focused on my independent study so this was a voluntary meeting, 7 participants attended. All participants had been previously given a information sheet about the research and had completed consents. In the introduction I re-emphasised that this was all about my own improvement and the important role they play in this. I then left the group with two sheets of paper to create acronyms for the term 'mentoring'. I left the room and they worked on this in two groups for approximately 5 minutes. Although I couldn't hear what was said it appeared to be a very positive activity with lots of discussion between the groups. I then returned thanked the participants and collected the papers. I did not want to discuss this further as I did not want to influence the data in any way.

I then asked the team to work together to create a questionnaire aimed at myself to answer, consisting of 6 questions. The only instruction I gave was that it was an opportunity for them to source information from me about 'mentoring'. Now I was nervous about this, unsure how they would understand this, but as I left the room the discussions began again. I asked the team to call me back in when they were finished, and I honestly was anticipating this to be very quickly. 20 minutes later I was called back in. Again, I did not want to influence the data in anyway so just collected the questionnaire, thanked the participants, telling them I will take some

time to answer their questions and feedback to them. The meeting then proceeded as normal.

When the meeting was finished I looked at the questionnaire and I was genuinely impressed with their questions, but also feeling a terrible guilt for doubting their abilities to complete this activity in such a positive and professional manner. This will definitely stay with me throughout the rest of the study and in my practice. Relinquishing control was very empowering, they steered the process by working collaboratively and did not need me at the wheel!

6th March 2019

Today is the day of the focus group. I have utilised the time normally scheduled as the weekly management meeting to facilitate this. The participants went to my home which is local to the setting and the focus group was chaired by my critical friend. I remained at the setting. On return the mood of the team was jovial, with comments made about how they enjoyed the opportunity to partake in the discussion and hoping it was what I wanted. This made me think that even without my presence, there must still be an element of them hoping to give me data that I need rather than just going with the flow of the conversation. I will be able to interpret this better once I have listened to the audio recording.

13th March 2019

I just wanted to document today as I feel this could be a milestone in my career and university journey. I have won a national competition for my work last year through SEFDEY. I was runner up last year so wanted to attend the SEFDEY conference to receive my prize and also listen to a speaker I was interested in Mine Conkbayir. I was accompanied by a lecturer for the foundation degree and we had an interesting conversation about her new study interest of mindfulness in the early years. This was of great interest to me, talking about calm and completely moving away from prescriptive activities to fulfil learning outcomes. This really resonated with me as this is also a passion of mine but I had not yet explored the topic of mindfulness. This gives me some food for thought in my future practice as I see benefits for both children and practitioners. Once my years studies are completed this is something for further thought and exploration.

Mine Conkbayir was inspirational, and what she had to say very relatable to my own personal feelings on school systems and how we support children with emotional regulation. When you hear people like this it gives you more belief in fighting for what you believe, I will definitely be taking back what I have learned to the setting. I have more confidence now to follow my instinct in how we help children self-regulate and fight my corner.

16th March 2019

It has been a busy couple of weeks with both personal and professional demands of my time. However today I am bringing everything together to plan the next collection of data. I now find myself faced with a dilemma regarding the second focus group which was aimed at non-management participants. I was so desperate to include this in this year's study but the logistics of this are proving too difficult. My original plan of using allocated time before pre-school is no longer possible due to the rise in numbers of children and their unique needs. Although I feel this data would be critical to my study and empowering to the participants, my priority has to be on the setting and the care we provide. With a heavy heart I need to change my data collection tool for the non-management team.

It is here I have decided to utilise the same 6 questions used in the first focus group but in the form of a questionnaire. This will be issued to the team and explained to the participants to ensure they are happy and give consent freely. The questionnaires will provide me with qualitative data and an insight into the participants experience.

So as not to overwhelm my participants I will await for the questionnaires to be received back before beginning the last phase of data collection – the reflective journals.

18th March 2019

Reflection focus practitioner

I had to write this reflection as I really think I'm on to something here with the Focus Practitioner concept.

I have now completed this with 3 separate members of the team and each session has been very incite-full and a time in which I could really connect with the participant. In all three cases I have made a conscious effort and relinquished control to let them lead the topic of discussion. What has been most illuminating is the fact that each person has through dialogue identified parts of their personality or practice that I had identified, and whereas previously I would have to tactfully bring this up in a supervision it is now being led by them. This takes away the critique that a supervision can sometimes create, instead it's about embracing who they are, their quirks and their values and beliefs. Holding there thinking gently. By understanding oneself better we can better understand others and why we sometimes act in the way that we do.

As a leader I feel better connected, and more appreciative of my team members. This is a very powerful tool born from trust:

Mentor – I need to trust that individuals do recognise how they present within the setting and feel safe to explore this.

The mentored – Feel trust in me to handle this sensitively and safely.

I have an excitement about this process and I hope to continue to develop and share with other early years settings once truly embedded into practice, whilst conscious there maybe pitfalls along the way. Ethics will therefore be a critical element of this to ensure participants are comfortable at all times.

18th March 2019

I have just had a conversation with a senior lecturer regarding my research in the final lecture about the independent study. I am now very excited about this research as she was the lady that instigated this with her comment a while ago when she asked me did I mentor my team? Felling motivated!

18th March 2019

I have just transcribed the focus group and there is some powerful dialogue here, I will mull this over for a couple of days and really delve into this data. I have realised a question was missed out, 'what motivates you as a learner'. Not to dwell on this too much I will ask this question in the next management meeting asking the participants to jot down on a postit note, by this not being a full dialogue I hope to capture a snippet of their thinking, whilst not impacting on time.

1st April 2019

Having tried to pull my data together in the form of a immensely big list (my family think I'm crazy) and studying this with my favourite musical soundtrack on in the background I did try and immerse but nothing really hit home until I woke in the night flooded with ideas!

Scribing these as quickly as these thoughts came I made some good links;

- I recognise now my passion for the new focus practitioner activity is actually about how I am changing as a leader, the approach taken is as more of a listener, steering the participant to make their own conclusions. This calmer approach is I now realise more my deputies' style, I do like to talk and do worry 'hear the sound of my own voice', this new style does relinquish control is mote humble I suppose. Although this is my deputies style the data suggests there is a lack of confidence in leading the focus practitioner with team members, so maybe confidence is a big issue here in distributed leadership?

Appendice 10

Thankyou for participating in this questionnaire.

I would like you to consider the following questions:

1. What are your memories of school/college education?
2. Looking back were there any influential people who inspired you through your time at school/college?
3. What motivates you as a learner?
4. What is your understanding of your role in your own continuous professional development?
5. What are your expectations of a mentor in supporting your continuous professional development?
6. What do you feel are the qualities of an effective mentor?

I have purposefully not left pre-empted spaces for your responses as I would like for you to respond as much or as little as you are comfortable with. All I ask is that you number your responses to the corresponding question.

Appendice 11

Reflective Diary Week commencing 25th March

Monday 25th March

Today is officially my day off but I have got into the habit of using a Monday morning as a time to meet with my focus practitioner so we are able to talk openly with no interruption. Today's meeting was the most difficult thus far. Previous participants have up until now been quite reflective about themselves enabling us to find some really creative ways to support their development both personally and professionally. Today's participant was less so and so I found it difficult to find more unique solutions, however on a positive note they did identify the key area for development I had also identified, proving again the power of the focus practitioner. Relinquishing control is allowing them to lead the process, moving away from leaderships constructive criticism to a more enabling role, acknowledging the practitioners position and working together to create solutions. I say solutions but this is possibly incorrect terminology as this implies there is a problem, this isn't about changing who they are but helping them develop skills, capturing their uniqueness and building from strengths.

In regard to this study I have sent a welcome email to my participants for the next stage of the study, a week's reflective journal. I really struggled to get the wording for this as I do not want to influence in any shape or form their contributions. I must have rewritten this email 5 times as every time I re-read it I felt it could imply different things i.e. how big it should be. I tried to say it needs to be their work and not to worry about spelling and grammar but then felt this might sound patronising. This really got me thinking about general communications within the setting and how words can be misinterpreted in different ways. Despite always being aware of this it is not until you try and write a specific email that you recognise the complexity of such a task. Below was my final email.

Thank you once again for agreeing to complete a reflective journal on one week of practice beginning today.

I just wanted to clarify a few points regarding this.

- *There is no format to follow, this is about you documenting reflective thoughts in a way you are comfortable with, and most importantly you have time to do (as we all know time is precious).*
- *Please don't let grammar or spellings constrain you, just write as you normally would.*
- *Reflections should be about your role within the setting, capturing key moments that have caused you to think and reflect.*
- *Please give or send me your reflective diary by Monday 1st April.*

Should you decide that you no longer wish to continue with this, please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Tuesday 26th March

I start this reflection regarding the independent study progress. Two participants, interestingly from the management team have contacted me regarding the reflective diary activity, one by email, one face to face asking me to check what they have written. I know through my focus practitioner activities that these two persons do have a confidence issue, but I was really surprised as I felt the email above was quite simply stated that this was their interpretation of reflection. This raises the question of confidence in oneself within the workplace and has started me thinking about impostorship, a term I was introduced to at a University of Worcester conference, I believe to be Brookfield's work? A feeling that we are 'blagging it', don't really know what we are doing, yet we are experts in our field, working with children on a daily basis, continuously encountering new scenarios. This disappoints me, raising the question why are we so hard on ourselves? Is this the sector we work in with limited recognition for what we do or is this a natural reaction of (dare I say it) women of a certain age?

This also reminds me of a conversation with my critical friend (appendix 9) regarding this reflective journal activity and her comment, '**so within a week of reflection you might not get anything from it because they might reflect on things that are not quite as important to what your looking for**'. Again, this implies that there is a right and wrong way to reflection, that this is used to meet higher needs rather than a tool for self-improvement, arguably linked to confidence in the workplace and I suppose on a personal level also. In response to my colleagues request I politely declined, explained that if I look or comment on their reflective journals at this stage I will influence this important data, maybe subtly but this would undoubtedly occur. Instead I asked them to have confidence in themselves and to interpret this activity in any way they wish, there is no right or wrong. I also reassured I am looking forward to receiving their journals (as I feel this is what they need at this time – reassurance) and I would feedback through the dissemination of this study, thanking them for their co-operation.

Practice

Today started well with me opening the new outdoor space and having some lovely time with a couple of children but as the group got larger there were many sharing issues. We do have a difficult group of children with some requiring high levels of support but it was particularly challenging. I tried my very hardest to be positive and upbeat, reminding children of wanted behaviours, acknowledging their feelings, in fact I dug deep into my bag of tricks to resolve these situations to no avail. Finally, I announce we need some chill time and I lay down on the floor looking at the clouds, for a wonderful 5 minutes the children join me, calm and still, commenting on the clouds and a bird they can see in the sky, it was wonderful but soon came to an end and the play continued. This reminded me of the importance of calm for children, as a setting we value outdoor play and forest school but we don't really have much calm.

I have considered why it was such a challenging day and there was definitely a underlying atmosphere within the workplace that may have played a part. I did not

quite get to the bottom of this but I do pick up on emotional subtleties within some of my colleagues, I believe these to be personal issues however I predict these atmospheres can affect both the adults and children in the setting. Maybe I was acting differently trying to navigate this emotional terrain which in effect affected the children's behaviour or maybe the children themselves picked up on this? Whichever the answer may be tomorrow will be another day and I will look for more calm.

During a helicopter stories session one child is struggling to sit appropriately and listen however this was because he was fiddling with a piece of paper. I soon realised this was more than a piece of paper to him, he had folded it to create an envelope and had placed a gold coin within it. I restrained from correcting his behaviour as I could see he was truly fascinated with this object he had created. I told my colleague I didn't want to stop him as it was obviously really special to him. After a few minutes his fidgeting was disrupting the group so I told him he would need to sit appropriately for the stories or he could go in the main room with another member of staff to play with his paper, he soon stands up and goes into the other room but then immediately returns to the group sits well and tells me he has put his special object in his drawer. I was so pleased that I had paused and observed him before commenting on his behaviour as he self-moderated which would not have been possible had I interfered. This was my main lesson today - Pause!

Wednesday 27th March

A significant event in my day today regarding being a leader was when my kitchen supervisor came to me to ask to leave early today. She was visibly shaken and I really thought she was going to tell me something awful. On speaking with her she had an appointment at the job centre to discuss her benefits and was anxious about this, she spoke of how demeaning this experience is and was extremely distressed by this. I asked her if she would like someone to go with her for support and she agreed. After some discussion my office manager attended the meeting with her. Now it may be deemed that this was over and above the role of the job but I felt it was my duty to support her as best I could and I would make this decision again to help to protect the well-being of my team.

I was concerned today whilst at lunch at school to observe a child in my care become upset as she felt another school child was laughing at her. This was not the case but I was curious to why she would think this. The child in question is a child from the Gypsy Romany traveller community who are known to be one of the most discriminated groups in the UK. My setting has an excellent relationship with this community which has taken many years to develop, but I was shocked at her interpretation of events and has caused me to think if she has developed this lack of confidence as a result of how she sees her family treated. I will continue to monitor this and try to find ways to build her self-confidence within the setting.

In general practice today my most useful tool has been the acknowledgement of feelings. Many children who become upset just require an acknowledgement for why they feel the way they do, once they recognise you understand their emotion they

are able to deal with this so much easier. This is one for the lessons I would pass on to any early years practitioner.

Something else that has made me pause to think today is a comment from a gentleman that provides and drives the minibuses to take a small group of children to the local swimming pool. This is a weekly activity, I have two members of the team attend every week and I alternate weeks with another practitioner. This gentleman is wonderful with the children and we have a great rapport with him. Today we are a bit under pressure in getting ready for the mini bus and as we are fitting car seats etc a comment is made about 'the boss' and he responds, 'I forget Zoe is the boss' causing some laughter within the team. This stayed with me all day, causing me to consider this perception, does he say this because I don't seem in control or is this because I do relinquish control and allow others to lead? Lindon and Beckley (2016) speak of effective teams where there does not appear to be one obvious person in overall charge, distributed and shared leadership empowering others to be responsible for certain areas of their work. I would like to think that this is to what he was implying, but without causing embarrassment and asking him I guess I will never know the foundations of his seemingly flippant comment.

I have always tried to empower others, build confidence in practitioners through exploring their strengths and developing these. Yet I have been criticised for this in the past, again flippant comments but I am predicting some deeper meanings underlying these. Comments such as we have more managers than staff, have struck me deep as my intentions are good, I do not wish (as some would) to be in complete control of all aspects of practice, when there are those within my team with far better skills in particular areas. I suppose I see my role more as a director on a movie set, bringing all these to the forefront, casting for specific roles and finding ways for these to complement each other, shying myself away from the leading role. I suppose I see myself as quite a humble person, I do have confidence in my skills but I will always step aside if I feel someone may be better suited for a task in hand or if I feel these opportunities would enhance their development (sensitively done of course). As I conclude my thoughts I am going to take the minibuses drivers comment with good intent, a true example of shared/distributed leadership, demonstrating my passion to empower others is moving in the right direction.

But then.. Just had another thought! I have also had concerned team members relaying their fears that one member of the team is trying to 'do your job' take over, diminishing your responsibility. I don't see this as a threat, maybe it needs to be better contained or moulded however this is positive. Good leaders produce more leaders, so these comments are maybe a subtle sign of their own insecurities. I see my job now as to capture these inherent leadership skills, nurture (maybe prune a little) so they can be as professional as they can be, but this is new life, new beginnings and a sign of empowerment.

Thursday 28th March

My reflection today is from reviewing some observations on Tapestry; This child is on our highest level of SEND support and has no speech, he communicates through action and vocalisations.

Today we have the foam circles out and some children start to make a track with these using them as stepping stones. _____ joins them but becomes very distressed when the circles do not connect together, he struggles with this for some time and despite trying to comfort him and explain they have curved edges he is determined to make them fit. We leave _____ to work this out but sit close by him to support him if needed. After a prolonged time, _____ gives up on this task and changes his play to walking across the stepping stones.

Although it was difficult to watch _____ be so upset, there was nothing we could do to make the circles fit, and by leaving him to work this out for himself he managed to self-regulate and move on in his play.

I have been recently introduced to a concept of the train analogy when dealing with upset children. This explains difficult feelings as tunnels and we are travelling through them. We have to move through the tunnel to get to the light. As adults we have to relinquish control, allow the child to go on this journey, interrupting this will only prolong the distress, if we can be confident to allow them to go through this they can come out the other side.

This makes sense to me in fact I used this strategy with my own teenager daughter who was having a particularly challenging evening becoming very upset about school. I lay beside her and just listened, not interrupting (which was difficult) but just listening, she was shouting, sobbing and very distressed. I did not speak just occasionally gave her a reassuring touch, and finally she came out of this actually laughing at something she had said herself. This was powerful.

I recognise now with this particular observed child he needed to go through his distress, there was nothing we could do as circles will not attach the way he wanted them to. He did come out of this himself which was a pivotal moment for him, I predict the start of him learning to self-regulate. I now consider another child picked up by his mum and not wanting to leave the park, the child becomes upset but immediately the parent is offering bribes, trips to the shops, sweet treats. As a parent I am not opposed to bribes! However, I now realise how quick we can be as adults to jump in before the child can properly explore their feelings. As parents we can feel judged and embarrassed by a child's behaviour, actually even as practitioners we can feel doubts if children are upset seeing this as a immediate link to our practice.

This also now links to a recent conference I attended about neuroscience and its place in early years training, this focused on understanding the development of the brain and how a child 'flips their lid' and has no control of their brain functioning when in this state. We need to teach self-regulation, giving the child the tools to explore feelings safely. But this goes even further, we need to self-regulate ourselves, as the adult. We need to have confidence to allow a child to lose control, to travel through the tunnel in order for them to develop these life skills. I spoke with my critical friend about this who happens to be the child's key person, she suggested we need to 'be

comfortable to be uncomfortable' holding back, remaining calm, and trust they can do this. Powerful words!

Friday 29th March 2019

Today has been a very chilled out morning, as a result of some of our most challenging children not being in today, the atmosphere is calm and it's like you can feel the relief in the room that we could possibly relax into the play more, something I feel is a very important aspect of our role. Unfortunately, I have to take this opportunity to fulfil my administrative tasks so was office based for the first hour. We then visited our forest school site and I did enjoy this time sitting back and observing, but not with pen and paper in hand instead I made a conscious effort to be calm and relaxed. I was delighted to observe a younger child (who can struggle with choices in the setting), manage a large shovel with care and skill, this is not what I was expecting from her so this made me think about how we are providing the right levels and type of challenge within the setting, she may be two years old but obviously capable of more than we recognise. This same child later threw a large rock at another child, thankfully missing, this instigated conversation with my colleague about schemas and exploring the fact she may just need to throw. We changed the activity to throwing grass and watched it blowing away in the breeze. Later I was pleased that a newer practitioner to the team fed back to me about the grass throwing, as a success, she hadn't got this idea from me but the original colleague I was speaking to so this made me feel good that my ideas were noted and passed on, holding some value.

In the afternoon I resumed office tasks, my only opportunity throughout the week. This was however side-lined when a casual conversation with a colleague unveiled some issues that had to be dealt with regarding their personal circumstance. I had been aware of these prior however had kind of pushed under the carpet as felt this was personal, however I then thought of the bigger connotations and felt I needed to help and try to make a difference. Supporting her then took up the rest of my afternoon and although this ate into my valuable time I felt it important I addressed these issues at that time. I am a manager as well as a leader and personal well-being of staff remains a priority.

Here ends my week of reflection, hopefully illustrating the complexities of the role, I haven't of course recorded everything but key moments that have instigated thought and learning.

Appendice 12

Your reflective diary shows you as you....a fantastic practitioner with a vast knowledge you have gained from practice and uni. You are now a naturally reflective person and you have the skill to be able to reflect positively even if not in a positive situation. I think having fellow practitioners asking your advice shows the confidence they have in your practice leadership and management skills. People's own understanding and interpretation of reflection makes us realise how different we all are and how one thing can be simple to someone and challenging to others. Reflection on our practice helps us see how we and others around us use the situations we are in to develop.

You reflect on your practice really well but sometimes I don't think you always see until you reflect how much an impact you have made, this I believe is because as practitioners we are always so busy, and it isn't until we stop that you/ we see the good we have done. Your right we do think we are blagging it but actually we are doing an amazing job that not everyone has the natural ability (or the pleasure) to be able/allowed to do. We have a special talent. Again, we are not able to see this until we reflect as in the heat of it it just feels like we are under pressure!

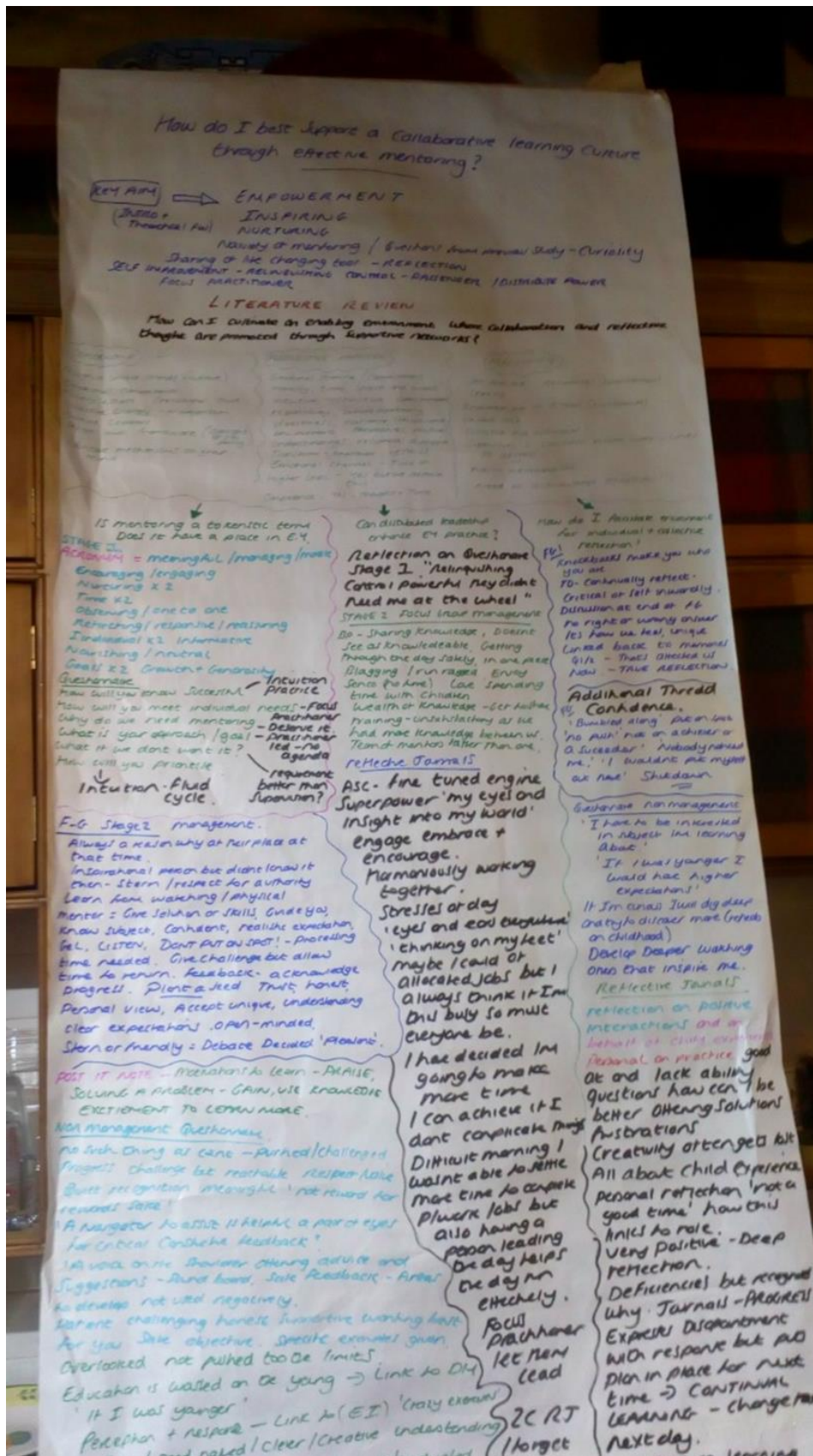
If the few years we have worked together I have seen your ability to reflect on daily practice and collaborative working improve and grow in confidence and how easy it is now for you to reflect in all areas of your work. Please continue to reflect the way you do and use your ability to encourage your/the team to do the same as I believe and feel this is how we develop the setting we have.

I hope this is some way helpful, once again confidence comes into play as we discuss this.....

why do we not have the confidence in ourselves that the parents who leave there most precious possessions in our care have in us!

Let me know if you need anything else.... good luck.

Appendice 13



Appendice 14

Data Tool	Theme 1 – Similarities in practitioner and perceived child needs in the Early Years
Literature Review	<p><u>Introduction</u> CORE 2011 Quality is not about individual competencies but how these interact in the 'competent system', the right environment where critical thinking.... are enabled by time...' I reframed this as an 'enabling environment' where practitioners can nurture and be nurtured an environment conducive to growth personally and professionally.</p> <p>Critical thinking enabled – links to Characteristics of effective learning (CofEL) 'creating and thinking critically' Additional link not in lit review; Enabling environment</p> <p><u>Development matters</u> Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership. Enabling Environments • value all people • value learning They offer • rich learning opportunities support to take risks and explore</p> <p><u>Early years leadership section</u> 'Recognising the unique strands that individuals bring' Robins and Callan (2009) Settings mission statement; <i>"At _____ we aim to provide a safe, caring environment which builds every child's confidence and allows them to explore their curiosities and fascinations of the world around them. We value and respect the uniqueness of each child and nurture these individuals by providing enriching opportunities for them to learn and discover. By meeting the individual's needs and interests we are putting the foundations in place for them to become life-long learners and to blossom into creative, independent, confident children with high self-esteem and a sense of belonging and self- belief."</i></p> <p>'embrace uniqueness whilst fulfilling wider goals' Links to unique child, <i>Development matters</i> - Every child is a unique child who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. • understand and observe development and learning, assess progress, plan for next steps • support to develop a positive sense of their own identity and culture • identify any need for additional support • keep safe • value and respect all equally</p> <p>'consider their role in terms of who they are not what they can do' Rose and Rogers (2012) – Links to my new reports based on a pen portrait of the child, a day in the life of Opposed to data led.</p> <p>Argument about keeping eye on goal (Lindon, 2012) may 'stifle learning, the agenda steering the process' Links to challenge of daily practice, letting go of perfect activities and moving to loose</p>

	<p>part, open ended resources and in the moment planning, trusting they will naturally develop skills and learning with sensitive input from an adult.</p> <p><u>Reflective Practice section</u> ‘consider the possibility that peoples views and beliefs may not be in synergy with our own, causing disharmony, this contrasting lens offers an inclusivity’ Appleby And Andrews (2012) Links to children learning to regulate emotion - EYFS Personal, Social and Emotional development. Self- regulation – a skill needed and uses throughout a lifetime?</p> <p>Appleby and Andrews (2012) describe a reflective practitioner as ‘intuitive and instinctive’ Links to Dewey – curiosity in children a natural innate instinct often lost in adulthood. We need to hold carefully this curiosity and nurture throughout a lifetime.</p> <p>‘Sensitive support and constructive challenge’ Ghaye 2011) Links to how we support a child’s development – reachable goals, Growth mindset focused on the process not the end result (CofEL) Active learning.</p> <p>Reflection requires time, patience and space – as does a child.</p> <p><u>Mentoring section</u> Mentoring offers an alternative – individual self-directed approach where reciprocal, spontaneous learning can take place. Link – children learn skills every day through interactions. Mentoring requires emotional connection – a relationship. Link to keyperson. Acknowledgement of emotion ‘through honesty and authentic intent we can shape the environment that allows emotion to be recognised whilst regulated both individually and collectively. Link to how we support children’s self - regulation. Hanson and Appleby (2015) prescriptive frameworks can discourage a curious mind. Links to EYFS if not careful our best efforts can have a negative effect on a child’s learning i.e. Pinterest, my thinking changing on the planning element of practice. Move to loose parts away from beautifully presented activities. Abraham Maslow four stages of competence links to child development also (Edmond and Price, 2012).</p>
<p>Stage 1 – Team building</p> <p>8 participants out of 10 invited.</p>	<p><u>Acronym</u> Similarities in words used in Early years in regard to children; Meaningful, encouraging, engaging, nurturing, time, observing, one to one, responsive, reassuring, individual, nourishing. <i>Limitations possibility – would similar words be picked if not an acronym?</i></p> <p><u>Questionnaire</u></p>

	<p>1. How will you know if your mentoring is successful? Intuition, observing subtleties, attuning, my role therefore to acknowledge starting points (similar to baseline) supporting and nurturing.</p> <p>2. How will you ensure you meet everyone's individual needs? Focus Practitioner – 'once again as has been the pattern throughout my university journey, there is a distinct link between how we support children to how we can potentially support practitioners. Focus child.</p> <p>3. Why do we need mentoring? Emotional cost to the role, requires skill to fluidly adapt and self-regulate our own emotions as we meet those of others. Links to how we support a child's self-regulation.</p> <p>4. What is your approach to mentoring and what is your goal? Practitioner led. I hope to be innovative, I recognise we all learn in different ways. Link to CofEL.</p> <p>5. Question 6 – How will you prioritise your time for mentoring? Much of the work we do together will in fact be 'in the moment', grasping opportunities as they arise each day. Link to 'in the moment planning'.</p>
<p>Stage 2 – Focus group</p> <p>4 participants.</p>	<p>Links to how we look at child behaviour – every behaviour has a reason. 'A bit like __does there's always a reason why you are at that place, or why your there, or why you are doing that'</p> <p>Links to CofEL we all learn differently. 'if you put me under pressure I can't do it (laughs) so I can't, you put me on a training course I just panic, I don't get much from it but if I watch you like I was saying yesterday when I do go in the room, I learn more from watching' 'I did a lot of outdoor stuff like forestry, farming, animal care, stuff like that and I did enjoy that because it was very practical, very hands on. And I enjoyed my childcare because again that was hands on and that's how I learnt, I didn't learn with books and stuff really very well' 'I guess he kind of believed in me and in lessons he made it fun and practical and I think he just got me. He knew how I learned and even if I couldn't do some of the things that the other children could do he kind of found other ways of doing things' 'The same as my driving lessons, my practical I was great, my theory 7 times I failed' In regard to training courses - 'I almost shut down in a way'</p>

	<p>'I think children are so different you can't go right 'well all children have to be dealt with like this, this and this' because it doesn't work like that. So, it's having that realistic expectation'</p> <p>Links to positive relationships (key person/ development matters)</p> <p>'if I couldn't gel with a mentor I would switch off, I would go 'lalala' and that's what I did at school. If I didn't get on with a teacher I would basically just stick my fingers in my earhole and go 'lalala'</p> <p>Links to Growth mindset (new concept introduced from colleagues training course)</p> <p>'if you kind of plant a seed or give me time to think about something I can usually come back with something to solve different problems... I kind of need someone who says, 'actually ok well you're doing that really well now' or 'ok well perhaps we need to do it a different way'</p> <p>Giving children time encouraging communication through commenting not direct questioning which can stifle natural dialogue.</p> <p>'not put people on the spot because that's when I shut down, if someone puts me on the spot, I then, I don't listen....if ever you can give a warning so you have time to plan it'</p> <p>'if you put me on the spot I do go to pieces'</p> <p>'I sort of work better because my processing skills are not great, so I need to kind of, someone give me a challenge and then I'll take it away and think about it and then be able to come back with the answers'</p> <p>General observation All participants identified memorable people as those who cared for them;</p> <p>'there were no teachers that were really very inspirational to me at school, but we were very family orientated...I looked up to my mum and my dad, they both worked they both held down good jobs, they kept the family going ...so they were inspirational to me.'</p> <p>'the only one I have that's a massive like impact is the spraining both my ankles and being carried around by the nicest PE teacher going at year 6'</p> <p>'they went above and beyond what a normal, the rest of the teachers did. So, to me I just felt they cared'</p>
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	<p>'I guess he kind of taught me that even if you think you can't do something if you, there are ways to find your qualities to achieve basically'</p>
<p>Stage 3 – Post it note challenge</p> <p>4 participants/ 3 responses one declined due to being unable to think on the spot.</p>	<p>The question what motivates you as a learner could be linked to the CofEL. Whether it be active learning, creating and thinking critically or playing and exploring.</p> <p>Answers were; <i>Praise</i> - CofEL statement 'Enjoying achieving what they set out to do' (Active learning) <i>Solving a problem</i> – CofEL statement 'Having their own ideas' (Creating and thinking critically) <i>Gaining and using new knowledge, excitement to learn more</i> – CofEL statement 'Being willing to have a go' (Playing and Exploring) (All link to Growth Mindset)</p>
<p>Stage 4 – Questionnaire</p> <p>3 received out of 6 issued</p>	<p>What motivates you as a learner? 'Challenge but not so big the goal is too far away'</p> <p>'Quiet recognition that is meaningful – seeing a genuine achievement not reward for rewards sake'</p> <p>'if you make me curious about something I am going to dig deep and try to discover more'</p> <p>What do you feel are the qualities of an effective mentor? 'patient, challenging, honest, supportive, wanting your best for you' 'understanding' 'Take a personal interest in me'</p> <p>All above link to qualities of an early years practitioner and their work with children.</p>
<p>Stage 5 – Reflective journals</p>	<p>Links to looking through the child lens; 'If I had a superpower it would be to give ...my eyes, thoughts, and insight of the world around me as a tool...to engage, embrace and encourage' 'I have lots of creativity going on in my head it is quite often lost' Link – TED TALKS Ken Robinson 'Changing Educational Paradigms', Robinson (2010) promotes 'divergent thinking', he wants to move away from the production line of teaching, he believes we are stifling creativity and the natural abilities of our children, resulting in a detrimental effect on future society (Previous year's work)</p>

	<p>Re:Focus Practitioner 'this isn't about changing who they are but helping them develop skills, capturing their uniqueness and building from strengths' (As you would a child)</p> <p>Teaching skills to self-regulate 'we need to teach self-regulation, giving the child the tools to explore feelings safely....we need to self-regulate ourselves, as the adult ...'</p> <p>18 Nov: Frustration of my exasperation 'I need to find strategies to empower and continue with positive feedback whilst ensuring the practitioners understand the expectations'</p> <p>2 Dec: Frustrations of how to support colleague; 'He became very strategic in how he dealt with situations which were obviously stressors to him' "am I truly seeing this practitioner holistically as I would a child in my care'</p>
Other	<p>If skills required of a mentor link to that of an early years practitioner working with children surely we have these skills within us?</p> <p>Link – key person? 'I personally find that working with people who have got knowledge from all areas is one of the best things for helping me with my continuous professional development and that might not be one particular mentor, that is a team of people together'.</p> <p>Would that work no with the handling of sensitive emotion?</p> <p>Boundaries – children are more confident when clear boundaries in place – can push these but know they are there – like adults.</p>

Data Tool	Theme 2 – Emotional connection with oneself and others
Literature Review	<p><u>Early years leadership section</u> My argument; It is not quite as simple as Ofsted suggest that we merely 'lose' staff, instilling fear in the workforce we hope to inspire'</p> <p>'emotional competence sometimes regarded as a 'soft skill' (Goleman, 1999) may override the technical competences required for the role. However, navigating through such an emotional landscape requires attunement and discipline'</p> <p><u>Reflective Practice section</u> 'making sense of oneself requires a level of commitment, honesty and emotional stamina, a personal journey which takes time, space and a want to uncover truths' ZC.</p>

	<p>'By cultivating relationships, investing in personal capital and developing the interpersonal chemistry we can begin to foster a state of internal harmony, the perfect conditions for reflective practice to blossom, embed and become a natural way of being' (Hanson and Appleby (2015)).</p> <p>'Dewey (1910) who proposed four attributes needed to engage in reflective thinking; open mindedness, responsibility, directedness and whole heartedness, competences that are learned through life experience. I propose these are higher-level skills, due to the potential to transform lives, but this is not for the elite few, these skills are accessible to all, through patience, understanding and a honest and wholesome environment we can learn and develop these throughout a lifetime' (Goleman,1999).</p> <p>'Exploring and acknowledging preconceived ideas honestly and without judgement assists our understanding of differing interpretations' (Wood 2016)</p> <p>'underlying frustrations tainting the emotional tone of the setting' ZC</p> <p>'My ambition to develop a reflective learning culture can be realised, providing I have no destination in mind, I am supple in my approach and recognise this as a life skill.' ZC</p> <p>'need the ability to navigate through previous life experience and it is my role to subtly guide with a moral compass, as the cost of emotional ineptitude can be devastating' ZC</p> <p>Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterback (2014) write about the unconscious communication between people, the transference of emotion through subtle nuances. I need to read these tacit clues, hear the texture in a message, tuning in to the emotional channel, (Goleman, 1999).</p> <p><u>Mentoring section</u></p> <p>My Argument that supervision is controlling: '...limitations of supervision, a leadership controlled task, blind to possibility, restrained by the supposed correct way, opposed to looking at practice in depth, having time to reflect and think' (Rice, 2017).</p> <p>'relationships can instil the best and worst in us, they can be 'potentially messy', (Garvey, 2014</p> <p>'Emotion is a malleable, responsive construct requiring sensitive touch, yet a natural concept we cannot ignore, 'emotional bonds are crucial to morale, effectiveness and the units very survival'</p>
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	<p>Goleman, 1999, p.212. Acknowledging the role emotion plays in our learning allows us to connect and grow together'</p> <p>'mentoring therefore offers opportunity to bring the unique self to the forefront'</p> <p>'We need to be honest about the emotions likely to surface, offering stability and 'respond flexibly to the changing needs/wishes/emotions of others' (Georgeson and Campbell-Barr, 2014, p.11).</p>
<p>Stage 1 – Team building</p> <p>8 participants out of 10 invited.</p>	<p><u>Acronym</u> <i>Limitations possibility – would similar words be picked if not an acronym?</i></p> <p>Words associated with emotional intelligence – nurturing, responsive, and nourishing.</p> <p><u>Questionnaire</u></p> <p><i>1. How will you know if your mentoring is successful?</i> 'building momentum of positive energy created through empowered practitioners who hold a confidence in their abilities of which they are proud' Intuition – 'allows me to read people better'</p> <p><i>2. How will you ensure you meet everyone's individual needs?</i> Focus practitioner – 'My focus directed on one member of the team' 'By focusing on one practitioner I hope for this time to be seen as a much better approach to supervision than the rushed, unproductive process that came before'</p> <p><i>3. Why do we need mentoring?</i> 'I think ultimately you deserve it' 'time to breathe, to consider ourselves, to recognise where we may need a helping hand, and to recognise the positive impact we have on the families and children in our care. By nurturing ourselves, we can then be better prepared to nurture others'</p> <p><i>4. What is your approach to mentoring and what is your goal?</i> 'giving you time and space to develop personally and professionally, I have no set agenda of what I am trying to achieve, this is your journey' 'My goal is for us to grow together, be supportive, and connect'</p>

	<p>5. What would you do if somebody felt they didn't need/want mentoring?</p> <p>my personal view on what a mentor is; <i>'Having the ability to emotionally and intellectually connect, igniting curiosity in others, allowing the creative flow to take hold. A passenger on a journey with no destination, subtly lubricating the wheels through empathy and the steady building of rapport, fuelling the motivation of the driver. Presenting opportunity for spontaneous reciprocal dialogue, listening and attuning to the spoken and unspoken word, responding rhythmically, giving pause for thought and reflection. Learning in partnership, mutually building emotional competence in order to thrive and discover.'</i></p> <p>6. Question 6 – How will you prioritise your time for mentoring?</p> <p>'I will use my intuition as to who I feel could best utilise my support at that time'</p>
<p>Stage 2 – Focus group</p> <p>4 participants.</p>	<p><i>'See I learn from my mistakes, continuously I kind of think ok, well that didn't work, what can I do to change that and make that better. I do that every single week, every single day. I do I kind of reflect, I'm very critical actually of myself, extremely...it's an inward thing'</i></p> <p>What do you feel are the qualities of a mentor?</p> <p><i>'if you feel they are listening and they are taking note and taking your and you said the trust is there, your going to help, it's going to work'</i></p> <p>What are your expectations of a mentor in supporting your continuous professional development?</p> <p><i>'it's someone there to go 'help' and they help you but also to kind of guide you the best way in doing something. But still accepting that there way might not necessarily be the best and if you have an idea they can kind of appreciate that'</i></p> <p><i>'someone who you trust to tell you the truth,it's all about trust in the workforce and your relationship within the workplace and with your colleagues....I think it's very personal isn't it?'</i></p> <p>Examples of emotional intelligence/reflection</p> <p><i>I think we have said what we all individually feel haven't we? And that's what it's been about, how do we feel about it rather than a right or wrong. Yes, because I don't think you could give a right or wrong answer, it's all individual unique kind of. It's how you take it</i></p>

	<p>Yes, and that my views are different to your views, your views are different to their views, you know everyone's views are different.</p> <p>I guess it all links back to the first question</p> <p>Memories</p> <p>Who mentored us through our school and college life and work life, yes that's the thing isn't it</p> <p>And having it right back does that actually have the impact, I don't know, maybe?</p> <p>See I had a good run, I was thinking I'm really good at this, because every job I went for I got, and I was like, oh this is easy. And then once I didn't get it, but it took a long time before I didn't. But it kind of puts you back in your place doesn't it?</p> <p>But then if you hadn't of had that knockback you might not be where you are now</p> <p>.....that's made me who I am now, it's made me the person I am now, it made me think of life differently, it changed me by making those mistakes</p>
<p>Stage 3 – Post it note challenge</p> <p>4 participants/ 3 responses one declined due to being unable to think on the spot.</p>	<p>Praise – from whom?</p> <p>Solving a problem – who's problem?</p>
<p>Stage 4 – Questionnaire</p> <p>3 received out of 6 issued</p>	<p>Q1. What are your memories of school/college education?</p> <p>'I was overlooked and not pushed to the limits'</p> <p>Q2. Looking back were there any influential people who inspired you through your time at school/college?</p> <p>Teacher 'that looked beyond report....to allow me to gain confidence and thrive'</p> <p>'he encouraged us to think, got us doing all sorts of crazy exercises, things about perception and response'</p> <p>Q3. What motivates you as a learner?</p> <p>'It's only now I am older I seem more motivated and curious on improving my life'</p> <p>Q4. What is your understanding of your role in your own continuous professional development?</p> <p>'a navigator to assist is helpful as is a pair of eyes for critical constructive feedback (seeing what I don't see about myself). LINK Driving instructor – Russell.</p> <p>Q5. What are your expectations of a mentor in supporting your continuous professional development?</p> <p>'a voice on the shoulder offering advice and suggestions'</p> <p>'a sounding board to shape practice and learning'</p>

	<p>'a giver of safe feedback'</p> <p>'if I was younger I would have higher expectations'</p> <p>"encouraging, supportive... you can rely on them to tell the truth... have my interests at heart"</p>
Stage 5 – Reflective journals	<p>General feeling from reflective journals; Reflected frustrations, solutions, linked personal and professional development, some deep reflection, consideration of different lens/perceptions, connections made, recognised areas for growth, continual learning, learning from mistakes, progression acknowledged; 'I felt that today was a good day and I haven't thought of any 'should have done that differently moments' 'I am making mistakes but doing my best to learn from them' Some reflection did skim the surface, not delving into the 'why' of what had occurred.</p> <p>Reflection on practice and how this impacts practitioners well-being; 'they choose to come and help me, great for my self-esteem' 'I feel privileged to be a part of it all' 'being part of bringing so many different aspects to the children's lives at preschool makes my job so worthwhile' 'This is an experience I really enjoy, its amazing to see the relationships forming between the generations' 'Allowing more time to listen to the children helps me understand more...watching the children explain things made me realise they are clever little people who understand a lot more than we as adults think'</p> <p>Focus group: 'I do the job for the love of the children, I do the job for the reward you get from it, you know the love you get back from these children is just amazing, you know just having a child fall asleep on you is just one of those nicest feelings in the world'</p> <p>Reflection about a challenging day 'there was definitely a underlying atmosphere within the workplace that may have played a part. I did not quite get to the bottom of this but I do pick up on emotional subtleties within some of my colleagues, I believe these to be personal issues however I predict these atmospheres can affect both the adults and children in the setting. Maybe I was acting differently trying to navigate this emotional terrain which in effect affected the children's behaviour or maybe the children themselves picked up on this?'</p> <p>'I announce we need some chill time and I lay down on the floor looking at the clouds, for a wonderful 5 minutes the children join me, calm and still'</p>

	<p>'I was so pleased that I had paused and observed him before commenting on his behaviour as he self-moderated which would not have been possible had I interfered. This was my main lesson today - Pause!'</p> <p>'I would make this decision again to protect the well-being of my team'</p> <p>'In general practice today my most useful tool has been the acknowledgement of feelings. Many children who become upset just require an acknowledgement for why they feel the way they do, once they recognise you understand their emotion they are able to deal with this so much easier. This is one for the lessons I would pass on to any early years practitioner.'</p> <p>'I have been recently introduced to a concept of the train analogy when dealing with upset children. This explains difficult feelings as tunnels and we are travelling through them. We have to move through the tunnel to get to the light. As adults we have to relinquish control, allow the child to go on this journey, interrupting this will only prolong the distress, if we can be confident to allow them to go through this they can come out the other side'</p> <p>'I spoke with my critical friend about this who happens to be the child's key person, she suggested we need to 'be comfortable to be uncomfortable' holding back, remaining calm, and trust they can do this. Powerful words!'</p> <p>'the atmosphere is calm and it's like you can feel the relief in the room that we could possibly relax into the play more'</p> <p>'I made a conscious effort to be calm and relaxed'</p> <p>18 March: Focus practitioner. 'Each session has been inciteful and a time in which I could really connect' 'I made a conscious effort and relinquished control' 'most illuminating' 'This takes away the critique that a supervision can sometimes create...it's about embracing who they are, their quirks, values and beliefs. Holding their thinking gently. By understanding oneself better we can better understand others and why we sometimes act in the way we do' 'As a leader I feel better connected'</p>
Other	EYFS – Personal social and Emotional development – not just for early years this is the foundation of further learnings.

	<p>As adults acknowledgement of wanting to be pushed to limits/stretched.</p> <p>'Teachers who really know me and challenged me to stretch myself'</p> <p>'I was overlooked and not pushed to the limits'</p> <p>'I wish I had done more and believe in the saying education is wasted on the young'</p> <p>'If I was younger I would have higher expectations' Links to CPD potentially not seen as a life-long skill whereas raising capacity for emotional intelligence impacts throughout a lifetime. Same participant 'I have to be interested in the subject I am learning about' Link – nothing more personal than the study of oneself?</p> <p>Other links;</p> <p>Growth mindset – also linked to theme 1</p> <p>Mindfulness – reflective diary – 13 March – calm, open ended, connection with nature.</p> <p>Mine Conkbayir – self regulation - adults need to regulate too – links to theme 1.</p> <p>Need to be in right frame of mind to reflect – those participants more frustrated with challenges of the day reflected less deeply, concerned more with what they hadn't achieved.</p> <p>Critical friend transcript regarding reflective journal dilemma (appendice 9);</p> <p>'I'm trying not to steer the evidence'</p> <p>'I was going to ask staff members to do a reflective journal for a week but I now feel a little bit uncomfortable about that. Because of the focus practitioner and how that's developing, that's about their personal development and is about reflecting on themselves as well, I'm not quite sure what I am going to get out of a reflective journal?</p> <p>I'm also thinking about the ethics of the time that it would take people and would they feel uncomfortable? And who am I to judge what their writing, how do I know? Because I know now that we all reflect at different levels, so I'm not quite sure what I'm going to get from a reflective journal from them'</p> <p>Driving instructor analogy – I can relinquish control but there needs to be clear rules, expectations, respect for the hazards.</p>
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Data Tool	Theme 3 – Confusion and confidence impacting distributed leadership
Literature Review	<p><u>Introduction</u> How I as a leader can cultivate an enabling environment where collaboration and reflective thought are promoted through supportive networks.</p> <p><u>Early years leadership section</u> My argument ‘they depict a leader who is visionary and absolutely determined to ‘get it right first time’. A powerful statement which I professionally challenge. ‘My recruitment process identifies skill gaps in my team, giving me clarity on the competences needed to fill this deficiency’ Robins and Callan (2009) ‘it is an equilibrium where without practitioners, leadership cannot function and without leadership, practitioners have no coherent vision’. ‘Leadership in practice presents the dilemma, of ‘facilitator’ or ‘member’. Bayliss (2010)’ suggest a more cautious approach, treading the line between professional objectivity whilst maintaining a principled stance, but I question, who designs these principles, the group or the individual?’ ‘distributed leadership, (Reed, 2016) fostering collective responsibility, drawing on collective expertise and empowering people over time to a path of effective collaboration.’ Reed (2016) suggests this passion builds a momentum which can contribute to the collective energy of the team. Captured and nurtured this can be the catalyst of change with the potential to produce more leaders (Couros, 2013).</p> <p>Leadership an oversight in early years policy however, ‘with such challenge comes possibility, an opportunity to design our own leadership framework outside the constraints of government policy’.</p> <p><u>Reflective Practice section</u> ‘as we place these individuals together, it becomes the leaders role to ‘lubricate the mechanisms of the group mind’ (Goleman, 1999, p.204).</p> <p>Brookfield (2017, p.115) suggests ‘critical reflection is best practised as a collective endeavour’. The sharing of experiences helping to analyse problems, breaking down isolation as we come to realise others may feel the same. Although we must consider the possibility that people’s views and beliefs may not be in synergy with our own, causing disharmony, this contrasting lens offers an inclusivity (Appleby and Andrews, 2012). Handled sensitively this may bring new meanings, giving us opportunity to critically analyse, unlocking the complexities</p>

	<p>Johnston (2010, p.54) offers some guidance suggesting, 'a shared philosophy does not mean that everyone concerned should think alike, but that individual philosophies are coherent and shared, so that there is a common thread and vision for collaboration'.</p> <p>Appleby and Andrews (2012), visualise a weave concept to represent reflexive awareness and self-identity in the context of practice. My own interpretation is that of a crochet blanket, as we interweave our personal philosophies together, we grow, becoming stronger, helping us as a community to envision, nourish and imagine, (Ghaye, 2011).</p> <p>the potential to 'transform and empower individuals and professional communities' (Hanson and Appleby, 2015, p.25).</p> <p>Hayes et al (2014) suggests we need grit and determination with the right mindset to be inquisitive, warning reflection has the potential to 'promote discord and an entrenchment of negative views as they challenge the issues of power and control' p.25.</p> <p>'Relinquishing control takes courage, Raelin (2002) suggests a reflective culture makes it possible for people to constantly challenge without fear of retaliation, however, warns the questioning of assumptions can be difficult to tolerate, requiring people in control to lose their grip on the status quo. This causes me to consider that maybe the term 'challenge' should not be used in this context as this depicts a contest where there must be a winner'</p> <p>'No matter how resilient one may be, any form of criticism or indeed questioning can evoke feeling's</p> <p><u>Mentoring section</u></p> <p>'My literature search, focusing on mentoring in the early years in the UK, proved unfruitful.'</p> <p>'The lack of literature on this subject, indicates a knowledge gap despite government recommendations from the 'Nutbrown Review', (Department for Education, 2012), to ensure all early years staff had access to mentoring, their trusting to the sector to consider where the mentoring comes from, failing to be realised.'</p> <p>'Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018), urge us to give way to 'greater autonomy, experimentation, exploration and the genuine facilitation of learning as a process that adds value' p.121.</p> <p>'Clutterbuck (1991) raises the contentious issue of the relative positions of mentor and protegee, suggesting these relationships should be outside normal working hierarchy to allow space to breath, entanglements of day to day practice work against openness and candour of true mentoring. These arguments are</p>
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	<p>valid but with no infrastructure to support this we need to adapt to the context we find ourselves in, I would also question the thinking around hierarchal structures in working environments may have changed in the past 27 years, but that is for exploration another time.'</p> <p>'Distributed leadership similarly lacked a solid literature base warranting further exploration into how this can enhance early years practice and leadership. The lack of guidance from government policy although worrying can be seen as liberating, with a lack of investment and infrastructure I can be creative in my responses.'</p>
<p>Stage 1 – Team building</p> <p>8 participants out of 10 invited.</p>	<p><u>Acronym</u> Words used associated with leadership and confusion around this; Managing, morale, growth and goals, neutral, informative, reflecting, generosity.</p> <p><i>Limitations possibility – would similar words be picked if not an acronym?</i></p> <p><u>Questionnaire</u></p> <p>1. How will you know if your mentoring is successful? 'Confidence can be infectious and can effect the morale of the setting positively'</p> <p>2. How will you ensure you meet everyone's individual needs? 'This realisation causing me feelings of exasperation and a sense of failure' 'I am failing my team and myself and a better way must be sought' 'I need to be supportive but with a progressive focus, realigning my commitment to professional practice'</p> <p>3. Why do we need mentoring? Nothing significant.</p> <p>4. What is your approach to mentoring and what is your goal? 'It is my role to relinquish control and let you steer the process at a speed and pace you are comfortable with' – LINK: Learner driver quotes – Russell. 'we need opportunity to come together, mentoring therefore will strengthen those connections both individually and as a team'</p> <p>5. What would you do if somebody felt they didn't need/want mentoring? 'Continuous professional development is a requirement of your role, supervision a requirement of the EYFS. Mentoring is just another approach to the supervision process... if you were uncomfortable with mentoring, we would explore the aspects of this to which you had concerns.'</p>

	<p>'the term 'supervise' as defined by the Collins English dictionary, is to make sure that an activity is done correctly or that the person is doing a task or behaving correctly. I personally find this draconian. In early years we are learning on the spot, every child and circumstance unique requiring flexibility in our approaches. My role is therefore not to measure you by the 'correct way' of doing things but to work together, collaboratively to explore possibilities.'</p> <p>6. How will you prioritise your time for mentoring?</p> <p>'it will run on a 6-week cycle there will be no tight schedule, it will be fluid to meet the needs of everyone.'</p>
<p>Stage 2 – Focus group</p> <p>4 participants.</p>	<p>'I was that really quiet person that nobody kind of noticed really'</p> <p>'I wasn't an achiever, I wasn't a succeder...there wasn't the push to give me the confidence'</p> <p>'nobody noticed me I never noticed anyone else'</p> <p>Authority link:</p> <p>'She was an inspirational person but we didn't know it at the time'</p> <p>'the two teachers that I respected were the ones that were quite stern...its funny how we both were rebellious then also respectful'</p> <p>'if they don't know what is expected, how are you supposed to achieve a goal?'</p> <p>'If someone was to friendly, you wouldn't get the best out of me, you'd have to be quite stern'</p> <p>'You do need something to make you sit up and say actually'</p> <p>'sometimes you need that person...to get you where you are'</p> <p>Confidence in current role:</p> <p>'I don't think of myself as a knowledgeable person'</p> <p>'I sometimes wonder if I'm blagging my way through'</p> <p>'I wouldn't put myself out there to know anything'</p> <p>'It's all about making you feel confident in yourself to do the role that you are doing and that's what it is all about'</p> <p>'the more confident you are the better you are, and there's your circle of success, the more confident you are, the better you are, the more you're going to do'</p> <p>'You have to be confident with your knowledge...really believe in what you're saying'</p> <p>'Sometimes you have to have that upset to be able to achieve, you cant always get on in life, you wont always achieve'</p> <p>CPD:</p> <p>'it's about sharing my knowledge...if I've got enough knowledge to share'</p> <p>'We have a great team...who have got a wealth of knowledge'</p> <p>'I see it as doing a course, getting the knowledge that way, not always thinking I could get professional development from talking to people... it's just about expanding your knowledge'</p>

	<p>'I personally find that working with people who have got knowledge from all areas is one of the best things for helping me with continuous professional development, that might not be one particular mentor, that is a team of people together'</p> <p>Stresses of role:</p> <p>'help everyone else get through the day...make sure we reach the end of the day in one piece and the children are safe and have got something from the day'</p> <p>'sometimes I feel like I'm run ragged'</p> <p>'I do need time to process, we do such a demanding job, we are all on the go everyday'</p>
<p>Stage 3 – Post it note challenge</p> <p>4 participants/ 3 responses one declined due to being unable to think on the spot.</p>	<p>The question what motivates you as a learner</p> <p>'Gaining new knowledge, using new found knowledge, excitement to learn more'</p> <p>Links to distributed leadership and sharing of knowledge as in focus group dialogue.</p>
<p>Stage 4 – Questionnaire</p> <p>3 received out of 6 issued</p>	<p>What motivates you as a learner?</p> <p>'Progress, seeing improvement, learning something new'</p> <p>'Just hearing your great, has the desire to accomplish great things'</p> <p>What are your expectations of a mentor in supporting your continuous professional development?</p> <p>'Coaching shouldn't feed performance review'</p> <p>What do you feel are the qualities of an effective mentor?</p> <p>'objective, specific examples of good practice or gaps'</p> <p>'share everything with me' – QUESTION – Can we do this if more than one mentor?</p> <p>What is your understanding of your role in your own continuous professional development?</p> <p>'To improve the job, I'm doing'</p> <p>'to develop deeper...talking and watching others that inspire me'</p> <p>Looking back were there any influential people who inspired you through your time at school/college?</p> <p>'He was everything a good teacher should be, stern at times but good natured, clever, creative, understanding and fun'</p>
<p>Stage 5 – Reflective journals</p>	<p>'Relinquishing control is allowing them to lead the process, moving away from leaderships constructive criticism to a more enabling role, acknowledging the practitioners position and working together to create solutions. I say solutions but this is possibly incorrect terminology as this implies there is a problem'</p> <p>'This really got me thinking about general communications...words can be misinterpreted in different ways'</p>

	<p>'This raises the question of confidence in oneself within the workplace and has started me thinking about impostorship, a term I was introduced to at a University of Worcester conference, I believe to be Brookfield's work? A feeling that we are 'blagging it', don't really know what we are doing, yet we are experts in our field, working with children on a daily basis, continuously encountering new scenarios. This disappoints me, raising the question why are we so hard on ourselves?'</p> <p>Critical friend transcript regarding dilemma about reflective journals.' so within a week of reflection you might not get anything from it because they might reflect on things that are not quite as important to what you are looking for'. Again, this implies that there is a right and wrong way to reflection, that this is used to meet higher needs rather than a tool for self-improvement, arguably linked to confidence in the workplace and I suppose on a personal level also.</p> <p>Distributed leadership: Mini bus drivers comment; 'I forget she is the boss' 'does he say this because I don't seem in control or is this because I do relinquish control and allow others to lead? Lindon and Beckley (2016) speak of effective teams where there does not appear to be one obvious person in overall charge, distributed and shared leadership empowering others to be responsible for certain areas of their work' Confusion over distributed leadership; 'I have always tried to empower others, build confidence in practitioners through exploring their strengths and developing these. Yet I have been criticised for this in the past... Comments such as we have more managers than staff, have struck me deep as my intentions are good... I see my role more as a director on a movie set, bringing all these to the forefront, casting for specific roles and finding ways for these to complement each other, shying myself away from the leading role. I suppose I see myself as quite a humble person, I do have confidence in my skills but I will always step aside if I feel someone may be better suited for a task in hand or if I feel these opportunities would enhance their development'</p> <p>Distributed leadership: losing control; 'I don't see this as a threat, maybe it needs to be better contained or mouldedGood leaders produce more leaders.... I see my job now as to capture these inherent leadership skills, nurture (maybe prune a little)...this is new life, new beginnings and a sign of empowerment.</p> <p>Schemas – professional dialogue; 'this made me feel good that my ideas were noted and passed on, holding some value'</p>
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	<p>Pressures of workload</p> <p>'Although this ate into my valuable time I felt it important I addressed these issues at that time'</p> <p>'Pushed to my limits'</p> <p>'I become easily distracted ...my head busy with what is going to happen next'</p> <p>'never enough time for this part of my job... often left feeling frustrated but I do enjoy all the challenges and being self-motivated.. to think for myself...quite often on my feet'</p> <p>'I need to be more in control of my time management'</p> <p>'eyes and ears everywhere...I was thinking on my feet'</p> <p>'if I am this busy so must everyone else be'</p> <p>'I can achieve what I want if I don't complicate things'</p> <p>'I wasn't able to settle at one thing for any amount of time'</p> <p>'Having a person leading the day helps the day run effectively'</p> <p>'the rewards definitely outweigh the moments of doubt'</p> <p>Stay and play 'sometimes feels like we are being watched on everything we do'</p> <p>'starting to feel that hadn't accomplished anything...looking back over the day I hope I made a difference to three different families'</p> <p>'I was able to support her by empathy and general moral support'</p> <p>18 Nov: Regarding critical feedback 'being direct, specific and not devaluing what you are saying'</p> <p>7 Dec: My leadership journey 'the infrastructure around early years settings need to promote leadership resilience as without a strong leader the rest just falls apart'</p> <p>19 Dec: 'all of these people in their own way have damaged my confidence, effecting my energy levels and self- belief'</p> <p>27 Feb: Comment on team building activity; 'Relinquishing control was very empowering; they steered the process by working collaboratively and did not need me at the wheel'</p> <p>6th March: Focus group – 'on return the mood of the team was jovial, with comments made about how they enjoyed the opportunity to partake in the discussion and hoping it was what I wanted'</p> <p>1st April: 'I recognise now my passion for the new focus practitioner activity is actually about how I am changing as a leader, the approach taken is as more of a listener, steering the participant to make their own conclusions. This calmer approach is I now realise more my deputies' style, I do like to talk and do</p>
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	worry 'hear the sound of my own voice', this new style does relinquish control is humbler, I suppose. Although this is my deputies style the data suggests there is a lack of confidence in leading the focus practitioner with team members, so maybe confidence is a big issue here in distributed leadership?
Other	<p>Question – Have I pushed my workload onto others? More than one mentor – can this work? Resilience in leadership – how do we build this?</p> <p>Focus group – 'even without my presence there must still be an element of them hoping to give me data that they think I need rather than just going with the flow of the conversation' Links – to confidence in completing Reflective journals.</p>