

Anglia Ruskin University

**A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Early Childhood Educators' Roles in Fostering Peer
Relationships: Cross-Cultural Insights from India and England**

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‘Humans are born with a self-regulating strategy for getting knowledge by human negotiation and co-operative action’.

(Trevarthen, 1988: 39)

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Preface:

Before you set out to read my thesis, ‘A socio-cultural analysis of early childhood educators’ roles in fostering peer relationships: Cross cultural insights from India and England’, I would like to enumerate the reasons that have motivated me and inspired me to take up this project in this area.

The reasons range from personal, professional to deeply philosophical and intrinsically theoretical. I come from a country whose transition from colonial past to neo-liberal present has intense and intricate consequences for education at all levels, including early childhood, where intense competition and narrow academic focus permeates and dominates the noble pursuit of education, which is more or less a global trend with several countries following neo-liberal principles in education policies including England, one of the research contexts for the study. Fortunately India is bestowed with transformative philosophers, like Jiddu Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore, (as in Europe with philosopher pedagogues including Froebel, Montessori, McMillan and Steiner) who by establishing alternative schools based on transformative educational philosophies aimed to provide joyful, relational and holistic education that cultivates an integrated and universal human being who in turn usher in a more humanistic and sustainable world. Their philosophical ideas have influenced many and inspired me to critique the present narrow focus on competition and individualism and advocate for transformative educational frameworks that foster co-operation and democratic living in an atmosphere of freedom.

Professionally, having worked for some time in an alternative school based on Jiddu Krishnamurti philosophy and experienced, first-hand, the opportunities that experiential learning provides, both for the educator and the students, inspired me to argue for the transformative purpose of education. My experience of working with Bernard van Leer Foundation (a global funding organization based in the Hague that supports projects around the world and contributes immensely to the field of early childhood) also enhanced my intellectual horizons and gave an opportunity to experience diverse cultures across the world through their worldwide projects. My post-graduate studies at the Institute of Social Studies based in the Hague, where I had an opportunity to study and work in close association with several mid-career professionals from different countries and from different professions, further helped me to appreciate the impact of multiple social, cultural, economic, political and philosophical contexts under which education takes place and find its space and meaning.

These international experiences helped me to problematize universal notions of childhood that ignore the cultural and contextual underpinnings that impact upon processes of teaching and learning. This in turn helped me to go beyond traditional child development theories that ignore the influence of culture and helped me to re-organize my conceptual tools based on socio-cultural theories. For these reasons, I was drawn to Rogoff’s (2003) three planes analysis, which recognizes the mutuality of individuals and the socio-cultural contexts that they are part of, as a frame of reference for this study. This focus on mutuality and embedded-ness is central to the thesis in arguing for transformative educational frameworks that prioritize relational, critical and eco pedagogies that go beyond narrow focus on individual to community, the wider society and to the whole ecosystem that we are all part of. The aim here is, as Jiddu Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore aspire, the cultivation of integrated and universal human beings, who in turn pave way for good society. I will continue striving for these ends through teaching, research and advocacy.

ABSTRACT

Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education

A socio-cultural analysis of early childhood educators' roles in fostering peer relations: Insights from India and England.

There is strong evidence that positive peer relations greatly benefit children's social and intellectual development and hence a case for peer relationships has been made in both theory and research. However, there are growing concerns regarding the worldwide trend of 'schoolification' or pre-primary focus in early childhood care and education and its potential negative effects on young children's peer relationships. These concerns are more pronounced in England and also in India given the contradictory policy and practice contexts of prescriptive curricula with undue focus on school preparation.

Given the discourse of early years as restrictive contexts, the research was carried out as a qualitative multi-site case study in the Reception class of a (local) primary school in England characterized by pre-primary focus and at a philosophically 'different' independent school in India, based on Jiddu Krishnamurti philosophy that follows social-pedagogy model. The aim was to explore the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations in cross-cultural contexts. Participants were two reception class teachers and two learning support assistants for the class from England and four early childhood practitioners' from the Indian case study setting. The research took an ethnographic approach using participant observation and semi-structured interviews to understand the perceptions and practice of educators in fostering peer relationships in their socio cultural contexts using the socio-cultural theoretical lens of Rogoff's three-plane analysis.

Findings from both settings conclude that despite of the cultural variations, early childhood educators' engage in caring pedagogy by mediating a given curriculum; while their overall roles are defined and refined by cultural contexts within and beyond the immediate institutional contexts. In order to recognize and appreciate the wider ecological niche, which is impacting educators' roles, I have argued for a clear and separate *ecological focus* to the original personal, inter-personal and institutional planes. Drawing philosophical inspiration from Krishnamurti's '*To be is to be related*' and Tagore's '*inherent mutuality*' and combining with Fler's theoretical concept '*child embedded-ness*' -the study claims to make a contribution in terms of '*community embedded relationships*' as opposed to *child-centered peer relationships* and pro-offers a socio-cultural theoretical framework for conceptualizing *educators' roles in fostering peer relationships* by synthesizing all the three planes.

Key words: *Community embedded relationships, peer relationships, early childhood education, qualitative research, socio-cultural theories, teachers' roles, international, comparative and cross-cultural research, relational pedagogies, and transformative education.*

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Part One- Introduction

Chapter One – Background to the research study

The research study presented in this thesis focuses on understanding the roles of early childhood educators in fostering peer relationships drawing from case studies in India and England. Using Rogoff (2003; 2005) three planes analysis, it explores the *perceptions* of practitioners on the significance of peer relationships; investigates how those perceptions translate into *practice* and examines the contexts under which they enact their practice. By utilizing case studies from two diverse cultural contexts; the India case study (social pedagogy) and the England case study (pre-primary), the study attempts to contribute to the cross-cultural understanding of the topic under investigation in the context of the two broad pedagogical traditions in early childhood education.

This introductory chapter sets out the context for the study by offering a rationale for the investigation and introduces the research question: ‘How do early childhood educators *perceive* and *practice* fostering of peer relationships in their socio-cultural *contexts*?’ Further, while doing so, it critically explores the *perceptions* of the educators, their actual *practice* and the overarching *contexts* under which they enact their practice to critically understand and appreciate their roles in the task of fostering peer relationships. I shall further spell out theoretical framework adopted and present a summary of the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

1.1. An introduction to the research question

Relationships with peers constitute an important developmental context for children. There is strong evidence that peer relationships contribute to children’s happiness, their social, emotional and intellectual development and their general wellbeing (Danielson & Phelps, 2003). Research suggests that children who show low levels of peer acceptance and social competence are at risk for dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and adult criminal behaviour (Parker & Asher, 1987). From associating with companions, children acquire a wide range of skills, behaviours, attitudes and

experiences that influences their adaptations in their life span. It is argued that relations with peers affect social, emotional and cognitive functioning beyond the influences of family and neighborhood (Barblett and Maloney, 2010).

Children's ability to initiate and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults is recognized as a critical skill to be developed during early years to ensure their school success and success in later life (Bowman et al, 2000; Shonkoff & Philips, 2000). However, research studies confirm the prevalence of social, emotional and behavior problems in children (Campbell, 2002; Lavigen et al., 1996; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000).

Kernan and Singer (2011) contend that organized early childhood education and care settings have become significant sites of young children's daily lives in the many countries worldwide and as a result child rearing, especially fostering peer relationships is increasingly acknowledged as a collaborative endeavor between families and early childhood education and care institutions. Furthermore, phenomena such as urbanization, new patterns of migration and increased heterogeneity in societies, changing family structures and work practices are all impacting children's every day experiences at home and at the early childhood care and education settings.

Early childhood educator's roles in fostering peer relationships: The gap in knowledge

A huge body of literature (Ladd, 1984; Mize, Ladd and Price, 1985; Edwards, 1986; Hazen et al., 1984; Kostelnik Stein, Whiren, and Soderman, 1988; Jones and Jones, 2001; Katz, 1997; Singer and de Haan, 2007; Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009) stresses the role of teachers' as active mediators of children's social competence. Their role in fostering peer relationships and children's overall social competence has been seen as a critical point for quality pre-school experience (Buysse et al., 2004; Sylva et al., 2004). Research suggests that disruptive behaviour and children not having social competence as one of the biggest challenges they face in providing a quality program (Arnold, Mc Williams, and Arnold, 1998).

Furthermore, practitioner's own attitudes and values about how students learn and how important it is to have relational pedagogy underpinned by cognitive and social development seems to be an important criteria which impacts their potential roles in fostering peer relationships (Wenger, 1998). However, what is interesting and relevant for the study is the fact that practitioners were experiencing difficulty in focusing upon their own impact in terms of their attitudes, skills, knowledge and understandings upon children's learning as opposed to making a practical provision for the given curriculum (Moyles and Adams, 2001; Moyles et. al., 2002).

Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004; 2007) prioritizes children's happiness and wellbeing recognizing it as one of the key principles and emphasizes the importance of environment and the educators' roles in ensuring social and emotional development of children (DCSF, 2008, HM, 2004). However, there are concerns regarding the potential negative effects on young children's enjoyment and learning of curriculum for children from birth to five (DCSF, 2008; DCSF, 2009a) given it's prescriptive nature. There are contradictions on the one hand, between policy documents which emphasize the social cultural aspects of learning and the role of play-facilitating children to be agents in their own learning, forging and enjoying peer relationships; and on the other hand, prescriptive legal requirements which emphasize teacher- planned and directed learning with clear outcomes creating a tension between the two (Luff, 2007; 2010; Soler and Miller, 2006; Singer & Kernan, 2006). The difficulties relating to these limitations are particularly marked in Reception classes of primary schools (BERA, 2003; Woodhead, 2004, Evans, 2009, Sylva et al, 2010).

The Government in England responded to the criticism of schoolification with emphasis on pre-primary focus (Evans, 2009) following the review of EYFS one year into implementation. As a result of the Tickell Review (DFE, 2011), there have been certain changes in the reduction of number of learning goals and prioritizing the Social and Emotional development by placing it in the Prime learning goals (DFE, 2011). This significant change happened while this particular study was ongoing. The fact that the new changes prioritized Social and Emotional Development by making it a 'Prime Learning Goal', makes this study all the more relevant as it is important to understand

what practitioners perceive about this very important aspect of child development and corroborate it with their practice.

However, what is to be noted is that even after the review, the essential prescriptive nature of EYFS learning goals and the underpinning understandings of evolutionary developmental sequentialism (Kwon, 2002) still remain. This prescriptive nature and focus on learning goals with pre-set categories still has consequences for practitioners' roles given the restricted contexts and their ability to effectively foster peer relationships -making the study relevant even in the context of the affected changes to the learning goals following the Tickell review (DFE, 2011).

Furthermore, the findings from the five year longitudinal research project, Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE) which has studied the progress of approximately 3,000 children aged three plus in 141 pre-schools across England – suggest that the achievements of settings are evidenced by their cognitive outcomes. The study observed that the cognitive outcomes appear to be directly related to the quantity and quality of the teacher/adult planned and initiated group work that is provided and is associated with adult-child interactions that involve 'sustained shared thinking' and concluded that in reality involves very little cognitive challenge and shared thinking.

This has implications for practitioner's roles in ensuring effective pedagogy by modeling appropriate language, behavior, skills and attitudes that are also often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking (Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). This is relevant in the present context of reception settings being the restricted contexts (BERA, Early Years SIG, 2003; Broadhead, 2004; Evans, 2009; Sylva et al., 2010) to find out how far practitioners are able to foster peer relationships and are engaging in 'sustained shared thinking' which helps in facilitating interaction and effective relationships.

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness Early Learning (SPEEL) considers that quality of the interaction between practitioners and children in the 3-5 years age range as

critical to effective curriculum implementation and the long-term successful outcomes of children's learning including social and emotional outcomes. One of the findings from the project is that early years practitioners felt that they support children's development within an enabling, facilitating and observing role rather than directly as 'teachers' (Moyles et al., 2002) or technicians (Moss, 2003).

It also found that articulation of and reflection about *practice* appear to be important to educators in considering necessary changes to practice and the most effective practitioners are 'conscientious' educators who are very reflective about their impact on children's learning (Moyles et al., 2002). Given the significance of peer relationships for the social, emotional and cognitive development of children with implications for the whole life span it is important to consider what practitioners *perceive* of peer relationships which inevitably has implications for their *practice*.

Moreover, questions remain about how and in what ways do they actually foster peer relations under the proposed restrictive *contexts*. Kutnick and Brighella, (2007) contend that children spend time in distinct pedagogic worlds and spend more time with peers and away from the presence of practitioners and yet observations and interviews with teachers revealed consistent focus on individual children's development rather than a social focus of all children although they are concerned with children's social development in general.

This is of particular concern in England, where early years educators have been found to express concern about children who are perceived to lack social skills but tend to see this as a problem with the individual child and approach individually rather than a shared responsibility at the whole class level (Kutnick and Brighella, 2007). This is in contrast to their Swedish colleagues who were observed to actively promote and support children's cooperative engagement in a collaborative context. This study further concluded that distinctive pedagogic worlds could be source of social exclusion and question how practitioners fully integrate/support a socio-constructive basis of cognitive activities into peer based interactions.

This cross-cultural study emphasized the role of *contexts* having implications for practitioners' actual practice, noting the fact that the Nordic practitioners engage in collaborative social pedagogy in an environment free from prescription and evaluation. However the key question for the present study is: Does the fact that EYFS focus on individual child development and their skills in an atmosphere characterized by prescription and evaluation has any implications for practitioners' roles and their ability to foster peer relationships?

In the Indian context too, the ongoing longitudinal Young Lives study, which is a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries – Ethiopia, Peru, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam – over 15 years, confirmed the prevalence of downward extension of primary school curriculum into early years both in public and private provision with negative implications for children to engage in play and peer relationships (Woodhead et al, 2009; NCERT, 2007) despite the presence of a play based curriculum with emphasis on social and emotional development of children. This extreme scenario of downward extension of primary schooling into early years has consequences for practitioners' roles vis a vis peer relationships. Are the practitioners able to foster peer relationships in these restrictive contexts? What do they perceive about the significance of peer relationships?

Hargreaves et al., (2001) emphasize the importance of seeking and engaging with practitioner perspectives especially when there is an intention of understanding and reforming the practice. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) contends that teacher perspectives determine what counts for learning and how they support it for example if they believe in behaviorist pedagogy there is a strong possibility that they organize classes on behaviorist lines. Moreover, Nuthall (2001); Rogoff (1996); Sewell (2006) argue that teachers perspectives are associated with the perpetuation of cultural myths about teaching and learning arising from past experiences might get in the way of understanding a Socio Cultural perspective of learning which might have implications for children's relationships and how they are able to foster them. SPEEL study too contends that teaching is a highly complex task which demands an extensive set of skills and competences underpinned by the personal judgments, values, beliefs of

practitioners (Moyles et al., 2002) which is why it is deemed important to consider their perceptions before analyzing their practice.

Rogoff (1996) argues that the major constraint in building a community of learners was teachers' unconscious perspectives arising from past experiences of one-sided instructional models, which get into the way of understanding socio cultural view of learning and by extension to the task of fostering of peer relationships. Rogoff (2003) critiques the taken for granted nature of universal assumptions about children, childhood, child development as even those assumptions like age graded milestones are culture specific. Hence she argues for a cross cultural understanding of issues in order to ensure a critical look at one's own cultural contexts. She particularly advises cross-cultural researchers to look for similarities and variations in the cultural practices, which is the focus of the present study while exploring the cross-cultural contexts of India (Social Pedagogy) and England (Pre-Primary).

This culture-specific contextual understanding rather than universal understanding is important as Huijbregts et al, (2008); Wishard et al., (2003) contend that practitioners as members of the cultural community will carry out activities and practices that are consistent with their beliefs and values in their settings. These practices e.g. what they do or say as well as their interactions and relationships with children shape the social and emotional development of children. Hence the crucial importance of understanding their beliefs, values and attitudes while exploring the role that they play in fostering peer relations and thereby social development of children. What values, beliefs guide them need to be empirically studied (Ahnert et al., 2006). Papatheodorou (2010) contends that practitioners can be a mediating force in balancing a given curriculum and hence it is important to engage with practitioners and explore how they are able to foster peer relationships in the context of prescriptive curriculum in English (Pre-Primary) context and emergent curriculum in Indian context (Social Pedagogy).

Broader context: Schoolification in early years- a worldwide concern

The thesis takes note of the broader context of the early years care and education to situate and relate the research study. Worldwide trends indicate an increased focus and

investment in the field of early childhood care and education as evidenced from policy documents (OECD, 2006, 2009), increased funding from international organizations like World Bank and UNESCO (Penn, 2002). This is also reflected in the increased investment into early years in England over a period of time and increased attention on the early years in the Indian context. Increased attention and investment from governments has certain political implications in the way the aims and purpose of early childhood education is perceived and conceived. For example, in England context, it is seen as contributing to the future benefit of society by producing a competitive workforce and reducing the future burdens of the society by intervention and prevention along with providing opportunities for women to enter workforce (DfES, 2004; HM Government, 2004, Pugh, 2010).

In India, the rapid changes in the socio, economic, demographic shifts are creating spaces and demands for early childhood provision in the context of globalization and increased importance of English medium education (Kaul, 2007). In a way this emphasis on English medium education has consequences for early childhood education as societal demands for English medium education starts right from early years as evidenced from Young Lives study (Woodhead et al., 2008, 2009) with negative consequences for children's social and emotional development and their ability to engage in peer relationships.

In England, there are concerns about increased schoolification with the introduction of EYFS (Moss, 2003) which is top down prescriptive curriculum from government with an intention to prepare children to the next stage of school i.e. primary school. There are concerns raised about the dichotomy of policy contexts on one hand recognizing the play based curriculum and the children making and enjoying peer relationships and on the other hand practitioners have to take children along a fixed path of predictable outcomes and the concern that this will restrict the practitioners autonomy in terms of facilitating a play based, relationship oriented creative curriculum with due attention to fostering peer relationships (Luff, 2007, 2010; Soler and Miller, 2006). The government has responded to these criticisms and addressed some of these by reducing the number of learning outcomes following Tickell Review (DFE, 2011) however the essential

nature of the prescription and linear ordering of learning goals still remain along with the concerns for the school readiness focus.

Moss (2006a, 2006b) identifies a concern about the downward extension of primary schooling ‘pre-primary’ trend in many countries including England with implications for children’s ability to make and enjoy relationships and contrast it with the ‘social pedagogic tradition’ in Nordic context where practitioners have facility and freedom to facilitate learning in a collaborative and relational way without undue focus on school preparation. He particularly critiques English early years settings as institutions of technical practice and the prescriptive curriculum a manual for technicians. There were concerns that the prescriptive outcome based curriculum is pre-primary rather than socio-cultural (Evans, 2009).

Furthermore, Kutnick et al. (2007) alludes to the presence of ‘contradictory theories’ in early childhood education and argue that practitioners especially from Western Europe and Mediterranean are mostly likely to plan and engage in cognitive based pedagogies underpinned by child development pedagogies in contrast to Nordic counterparts who prioritise children’s social development influenced by Socio Cultural theoretical orientations. This cohere with Cullen’s (2000) assertion that in many European countries majority of early childhood educators have extensive theoretical and practical knowledge of developmental-constructivist perspectives but know less about sociocultural perspectives which will inevitably have consequences for practitioners roles in fostering peer relationships.

This has been the case with both India and England context where there has been recognition of sociocultural perspectives and children learning in collaboration with others at the curriculum level, however contradicted by restrictive contexts in both the countries following Dahlberg’s (2009: 229) distinction, *pre-primary versus social pedagogic* tradition. Pre-primary emphasizes the ‘cognitive goals and readiness for formal school’ while the social pedagogic tradition stresses ‘children’s play and social development with an accent on children’s agency’.

Given the presence of the restricted *contexts* of pre-primary orientation both in India and England and the significance of educators' *perceptions* for their *practice*: the pertinent question is: *How do early childhood educators perceive and practice fostering of peer relationships in their socio-cultural contexts?* What are their *perceptions* about the significance of peer relationships? How do those perceptions translate into *practice* and under what *contexts*? While answering these questions I will actively look for the regularities and variations evident in the cross-cultural contexts of Indian setting (social pedagogy tradition) and England (pre-primary tradition) taking cue from Rogoff (2003) that researchers should look for similarities and variations in order to contribute to cross-cultural understandings.

1.2. Sociocultural-Historical Perspectives

Sociocultural approaches emphasize the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge and foregrounds the belief that individuals cannot be separated from the contexts in which they are located or the activities in which they are engaged in (Fleer and Robbins, 2007). In essence it emphasizes the relationships between people, contexts, meanings, socio-cultural histories and communities (Wertsch et al., 1995:3) while explicating the relationship between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical situations in which this functioning occurs on the other.

The theoretical roots of Socio-Cultural theory started with the work of Vygotsky (1978). The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978:57) states: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals".

Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea that children's participation in cultural activities with the guidance of more skilled partners allows children to internalize the

tools for thinking and for taking more mature approaches to problem solving that children have practiced in social contexts (Rogoff, 1990). In the early childhood education the notion of mediated learning is evident in the focus on relationships that mediate learning (Fleer, Anning and Cullen, 2004).

Vygotsky's Social Development Theory rests on two main principles: the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

A second aspect of Vygotsky's theory is the idea that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD): a level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Full development of the ZPD depends upon full social interaction. The range of skill that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979a; Gauvain and Ellis, 1984). This concept of ZPD has assisted practitioners to understand that children learn with the support of others and to take a more active role (Fleer, Anning and Cullen, 2004) in their approach towards children vis a vis peer relationships. For the thesis this concept holds significant for its emphasis on active roles of early childhood educators in fostering peer relationships.

According to John Steiner and Mahn (2006: 3) "the power of Vygotsky's ideas lies in his explanation of the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes". According to them, in contrast to the approaches which focused on the Cognitive which focused on the internal or the Behaviorist approaches which focused on the external, Vygotsky conceptualized development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes. Anning et al., (2004: 1) describe the Socio-Cultural Approach as "theoretical sea -change toward theories that foreground the cultural and socially constructed nature of learning". And research in early childhood education

began using these theoretical perspectives (Hedegaard et al, 2008; Woodhead, 1999; Luff, 2010; Fler, 2007).

Rogoff (1990: 7), building on the work of Vygotsky, considers “children as apprentices in thinking, active in their efforts to learn from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society ...”. Rogoff (2003) further argues that human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural communities, which in turn contribute to changes in their communities across generations. Howes (2011), concurs with Rogoff’s understanding of how cultural communities shape learning and human development by focusing on and going beyond individuals, dyads, peer and classroom groupings and to cultural communities. Howes’s Theory of Developmental and Cultural Interface integrates theories of children’s development of social relationships with theories of development within context, mostly within cultural communities to present a culturally and contextually nuanced understanding of the children’s development of relations with peers.

Given the socio-culturally embedded nature of communities and their significance in shaping human development including children’s peer relationships and educator’s roles, Rogoff (2003) argues that research too should focus on the embedded nature of the learning activity. Through her socio-culturally framed research, she demonstrated how framing the data analysis makes the difference from conventional research in psychology which traditionally view research as static and dis-embedded – researching individual aspects of the child outside of the social, cultural and historical context (Fler, Anning and Cullen, 2004) or as separate entities. In order to address this shortcoming, Rogoff (2003) argues for mutuality of three planes i.e. personal, inter-personal and institutional to preserve the embedded-ness of the planes with the planes moving back and forth to examine the socio-cultural activity with any of these being in focus, while the others remain in the background. She contends that one cannot understand any of these planes without seeing how it fits into the ongoing activity.

Robbins (2005) contends that Socio-cultural perspectives recognizes cognition as a collaborative process and occur through a process of collaborations from individuals,

their social partners, practices and traditions, cultural tools, technologies, materials and values and belief systems which is why it is considered important to study individuals and the overall contexts in the successive time frame while maintaining the mutuality of the planes. For example we cannot understand the practitioners' roles in fostering peer relationships without appreciating their perceptions or the socio cultural contexts under which they operate.

The transformatory educational perspectives of Jiddu Krishnamurti (JK) and Rabindranath Tagore

While the study uses socio-cultural theoretical perspectives, as its conceptual framework it also engages in philosophical discussions about broader aims of early childhood education, roles of early childhood educators and the importance of relational pedagogy. For this purpose it draws inspiration from two Indian educational philosophers and early pioneers of India's alternative school movement: Tagore (1929, 1961) who considered "Education as Harmony" and Krishnamurti (1953a, 1953c, 1964, 1974, 1973, 1981) who considered "Education as Freedom".

Both JK and Tagore, in their lifetime have contributed to the holistic and transformative education by critiquing the fragmented and instrumental purposes of education that narrowly focus on individuals with an intention to prepare them for careers. They have established their own alternative experimental schools for this purpose (JK, Rishi Valley school and Tagore Shantiniketan along with a few other schools afterwards) based on a global outlook and concern for mankind and the environment. Here the purpose of education is to provide the opportunity to flower in goodness, so that the child is rightly related to people, things and ideas, to the whole of life (Krishnamurti, 1953).

Both JK and Tagore maintained that the highest function of education is to bring about an integrated and universal individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole in harmonious relationships with others, society and nature. For this, in consonance with academic learning, there has to be a learning of outer and inner worlds. The inner is the activities of the self - one's thoughts, emotions, feelings and actions. This mutuality of

the self in relation to community, nature and wider environment forms the integral basis for the curriculum practiced at their schools.

They have both actively denounced the narrow focus of education on preparing careerists in an atmosphere of competition. JK was especially concerned about the negative effects of too much competition in education. According to him:

“When A is compared to B, who is clever, bright, assertive, that very comparison destroys A. This destruction takes the form of competition, of imitation and conformity to the patterns set by B. This breeds...antagonism, jealousy, anxiety and even fear; and this becomes the condition in which A lives for the rest of his life, always measuring, always comparing psychologically and physically... Goodness cannot flower where there is any kind of competitiveness” (Krishnamurti, 1981: 80).

This focus on co-operation in an atmosphere without rewards and punishments prioritizes the intrinsic value of education: learning for the joy of it. Envisioning education as an everyday practice of democracy transforms the whole educative experience by calling for an active image of children and childhood and ascribing altogether different roles for educators. Having freedom at the beginning of education and viewing teachers as researchers and co-learners has consequences for how classrooms are organized. This means independent curricula, autonomy for teachers, active participation of children, freedom from inspection and external controls, and access to resources, including more generous children to teacher ratios.

Opting for a non-typical school with independent curricula for this study (an alternative independent school which is based on JK and Tagore’s ideas) was a conscious decision made with awareness of the limitations associated with implementing the ideas in mainstream settings given the socio-political realities in India. It is recognized that there are certain preconditions that are necessary, like having educators oriented towards JK’s philosophy (or Tagore’s), having necessary methodological training and affinity in translating the philosophy into effective pedagogy for its effective implementation and

success These special requirements and preconditions precludes or at least makes it challenging the wider adoption of this approach in mainstream schools as noted from my own experience as a teacher and also from several studies (Thapan, 1991; Mohan, 2012).

Moreover it is to be noted that the schools established by JK himself and the schools run directly run by the Krishnamurti foundation are essentially independent boarding schools meant for secondary schooling. However, the impact of JK and his ideas on India's educational system is quite profound and even revolutionary. Tagore's educational efforts, too, were ground breaking in many areas. He was one of the first in India to oppose narrow focus on education wrought by colonial powers. While the other freedom fighters of the era sought territorial freedom from colonial rule, Tagore sought freedom of the mind from all kinds of parochial thinking by experimenting with his own educational project (Mukherjee, 2015) and as a critique to Macaulay inspired mass education that focuses on a factory model of education. There are parallels here with Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia project, that was born out of the fascist political context of the time and the need to counter those disastrous ideologies using education as a means to cultivate integrated human beings who would question the power and authority and prioritise human relationships (Barazzoni, 2000). In the same way, both Tagore and JK too have envisioned holistic education as means to attain freedom of mind, be it freedom from the parochial thinking of the times, imperialist, nationalist ideologies or any other divisive notions.

Their argument for humane and holistic educational systems is all the more relevant in the present world riddled with so many challenges on many levels: personal, social, community and environmental. Their focus on cultivation of integrated and independent human beings who can think for themselves, the focus on community and nature beyond the narrow focus on individual –all have potential to transform the way education is envisioned and practiced. Tagore's school, Santiniketan has become a model for vernacular instruction and development of textbooks.

Their philosophical discussions are particularly useful to the thesis in problematizing prescriptive and instrumental curricula; which view children as static beings who contribute to the future economy and that positions educators as technicians. By prioritizing relationships and community and by arguing for co-construction of curriculum in an environment of freedom, co-operation and democracy- their ideas have immense potential for the theorization of a new relational pedagogy, which prioritizes peer relationships and envisions transformative roles for educators. This coheres with Tagore's (1929) argument that education should seek to develop sensitivity in a child through a direct experience of nature when his/her conscience is at its freshest level. He recognized early childhood education as the most critical time for developing empathy and the ability to connect with one's surroundings (O' Connell, 2007) including its people, wider community and cosmos (Krishnamurti, 1953).

1.3. A statement of the likely contribution to knowledge

The influence of Socio Cultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, Rogoff, 1998, 2003, 2008) and the importance of relational pedagogy (Waller, 2007; Ebbeck and Yim, 2008; Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009; Luff, 2009) in many countries including Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand and England have positioned positive relationships and interactions at the heart of Early Childhood Care and Education. This study is valuable given the significant ways that early childhood professionals contribute to the children's peer relations across the cultural contexts be it pre-primary (England case study) or social pedagogy (India case study).

Hence this study particularly aims to explore and understand the role that early childhood professionals can play in fostering peer relationships in their settings in diverse cultural contexts. Given the reality of multiple childhoods evidenced cross-culturally, (Rogoff, 2003; Woodhead, 1998) the choice of case studies from England (Pre-primary pedagogy tradition at the case study setting and throughout England) and India (Social pedagogy tradition at the specific case study setting) the study further aims to contribute to cross-cultural understandings of early childhood professionals' roles in fostering peer relations by focusing on the regularities and variations inherent in the educator's *perceptions* and *practice* embedded in their socio cultural *contexts*.

1.4. Early Childhood Education Context in England

Here I present a brief overview of the historical development of preschool education in the United Kingdom as it informs our understandings of the present context. Early childhood care and education for young children emerged in the United Kingdom in the late 18th century on a philanthropic basis and first nursery school was established at New Lanark in Scotland by Robert Owen (1771-1858) for the children of cotton mill workers so as to allow their parents to work in the cotton mills while children ages 1-6 were cared for. Owen advocated for free and unstructured play in the education of young children and not concerned with formal schooling and endeavored to create future citizens through the process of informal teaching and physical activities which stimulated a lot of interest in early childhood education across the country (Kwon, 2002).

The ideas of the early pioneers like Montessori, Pestalozzi, Froebel, McMillan, Steiner and Susan Isaacs with their alternative approaches and progressive ideals were influential in the development of early childhood curricula. Their emphasis on holistic development of the child including social and emotional development facilitated through children's play is quite influential in current curricula frameworks (Smilansky and Shefatya, 1990). Friedrich Froebel's 'kindergarten system' with its emphasis on play, learning through activity and the emphasis on unification of life is particularly influential in relation to play-based pedagogy and children's peer relationships (Kilpatrick, 1916). The influence of Mc Millan sisters, who integrated care and education, and called their program a nursery school to demonstrate their care and concern with nurture as well as learning is was meant to be a model for other schools as well as training center for future and current teachers. A play oriented, open-air environment was born out of their response to health problems they were witnessing in poor communities (Mc Millan, 1919).

The ideas of Montessori (1912), who espoused scientific pedagogy and devised Montessori method to educate young children through own exploration and natural abilities in carefully manipulated environments and practical play were immensely influential in offering alternative pedagogy to the mainstream one. Susan Isaacs (et al, 1936) emphasized children's social and emotional development and considered the

notion of play as the child's work. The ideas and approaches of these early pioneers were influential in ensuring a play-based curriculum that prioritizes children's peer relationships, which is important for their social and emotional development (Moyle, 2005).

Steiner educational approach is quite influential which has been and still provides an alternative approach to mainstream education (including EYFS) with its worldwide network of independent schools all over the world including England. Integral to Steiner school education is encouragement of balanced growth towards "physical, behavioural, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual maturation" (Rawson and Richter, 2000:7).

These transformative ideas and holistic approaches adopted by early childhood pioneers have influenced the way play based curriculum is conceived in England with focus on relationships and children's social and emotional development. The principles of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Steiner and Montessori, later, were also influential providing a widening base of UK professional knowledge (OECD, 2006).

This interest in early childhood care and education in England developed throughout the twentieth century, initially to improve the health and physical wellbeing of children living in poverty in industrial areas and then to offer child care during a period of increased maternal employment during the years of the Second World war (Luff, 2010) and these themes are still driving the policy in terms of facilitating maternal employment and child care (Penn, 2008).

The Passage of the Education Act of 1870 was an important event because the Act established compulsory elementary schools for all children from the age of 5, which became compulsory in 1880 for all children between the ages of 5 and 13. In the absence of special institutions for younger children, the elementary schools admitted children younger than 5 years old to protect them from the poor and unhealthy physical

conditions of slum houses and factory environments (Kwon, 2002). However, following the investigation of inappropriate curriculum and the provision for under 5's by the Board of Education, recommendations were made for separate provision and different teaching methods and under 5's were officially excluded from elementary schools (Kwon, 2002). Plowden report (HMSO, 1967) has placed the significance of child-centered education largely influenced by Piaget's theory of cognitive development and resulted in the further extension of services. Piaget's theory emphasizing developmental sequentialism has become influential and the notion of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) was introduced to highlight the importance of child-centred and age appropriate practice (Bredekamp 1987).

The first national curriculum for early years was introduced in 1996, when the Conservative government introduced the first stage of a Nursery scheme linked to a set of guidelines for pre-statutory settings: Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning in Entering Compulsory Education (SCAA, 1996) which was implemented in England and Wales. With the introduction of the Voucher scheme and Desirable Outcomes, the early childhood education has become an issue on the national policy agenda and there have been significant changes in the practices and politics of early childhood education. Preschool provisions had to show that they were moving children towards the Desirable Outcomes as defined by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA, 1996). The Desirable Outcomes are part of the curriculum which children are supposed to achieve before they enter compulsory education and include early literacy, numeracy, personal and social skills (Kwon, 2002).

This was reviewed to become Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999) which, in England was replaced in 2000 by the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000) with the six areas of learning and associated learning goals with a new emphasis on playful learning in preparation for school and was followed by an assessment framework, The Early years Foundation Stage profile (DfES, 2003) which enables practitioners to note children's progress against identified learning outcomes. It was reviewed in 2007 incorporating the Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002) together with national standards for the registration and inspection of child care and is called the Early

Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES, 2007; National Strategies, 2009a) and its implementation started in 2008.

The EYFS curriculum sets standards for the learning, development and care of your child from birth to 5 years old. All schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers must follow the EYFS, including child minders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes (DfES, 2007). EYFS essentially is an outcome based prescriptive curriculum and statutory framework largely influenced by the underpinnings of sequential developmentalism –the term which refers to the way in which the child passes through naturally ordered sequence of development towards logical and formal thinking (Curtis, 1998 cited in Kwon, 2002). It is a highly prescriptive document underpinned by four principles: Uniqueness and competency of the child from birth; positive, loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person; enabling environments which supports the child's development; and recognition that children learn and develop at different rates (DfES, 2007a). It had 69 learning goals organized across six areas: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Language and Literacy; Communication; Problem Solving; Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical development; and Creative Development and is accompanied by Practice Guidance which is intended to help practitioners plan to meet the diverse needs of all children and mandates the assessment of children's outcomes in 9 point scale across 13 areas related to early learning goals (DfES; 2007a; 2007b).

There are concerns that although EYFS emphasizes play based curriculum and holistic development, the recommended Practice Guidance (2007b) engenders a technocratic interpretation and implementation, discouraging deviation and stifling creativity and innovation (Papatheodorou, 2010) and considers practitioners as 'technicians' who are required to implement centrally handed down curriculum (Moss, 2003). There have been several concerns voiced by academics, parents and researchers on EYFS contributing to children's early 'schoolification' (Open Eye, 2008 cited in Papatheodorou, 2010) and inappropriate pre-primary focus (Dahlberg, 2009; Evans, 2009).

Responding to the widespread criticism leveled against the outcome based prescriptive EYFS (DfES, 2007), the government commissioned Tickell Review in 2010 (while the study was still ongoing), which submitted its recommendations in 2011 (DfE, 2011). The review made a list of key recommendations: six areas of learning and development to be replaced by three prime areas of development (personal, social and emotional; communication and language; and physical development) these three prime areas of development to be 'applied' to specific areas of learning: literacy, mathematics, understanding of the world, expressive arts and design.

Further it has reduced the number of early learning goals from 69 to 18 which reduced the amount of paper work, put greater emphasis on play, active learning, and creating and thinking critically and introduced the concept of healthy eating and exercise within personal, social and emotional development. EYFS profile now includes only 20 pieces of information (rather than earlier 117) and also redrafted the framework to be more accessible and understanding to parents. The revised changes are in implementation from September 2012 (DfE, 2011).

Although the review has successfully trimmed down the number of learning goals the essential nature of sequential developmentalism (Kwon, 2002) is still intact keeping the concerns of a restrictive curriculum and contexts. What has made this study all the more relevant in the changed scenario is the fact that Personal Social and Emotional Development was made a prime area and hence it is significant to understand what practitioners perceive of peer relationships. It is to be noted that Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) skills are considered essential for both pre-service and in service training of early childhood professionals in England (National Strategies, 2011). These social and emotional aspects of learning are given prominence in the Primary National Strategy's core professional development materials *Excellence and enjoyment: learning and teaching in the primary years* (DfES 0518-2004-G). The SEAL curriculum resource provides additional support for schools and settings that are using this learning and teaching framework (DfES 1378-2005).

The EYFS is still a legally binding document and it is mandatory for all registered early years settings in England to implement the statutory elements and is enforced by the Office for Standards in Education (henceforth Ofsted) since 2001 when the registration and inspection of settings moved from local authority to a centralized government system. Ofsted regularly inspects the settings and assesses the extent to which the preschool settings are working towards the Early Learning Goals and make judgments' about the effectiveness of the provision (DCFS, 2008; National Strategies, 2009b).

Hence, there are concerns regarding the prescriptive outcomes and restrictive contexts and its potential negative effects on young children's enjoyment and learning of curriculum for children from birth to five (EYFS). There are still contradictions between policy documents, which emphasize the role of play, facilitating children to be agents in their own learning, forging and enjoying peer relationships. The concerns that prescriptive legal requirements which emphasize teacher- planned and directed learning with clear outcomes creating a tension between the two is still valid. The difficulties relating to these limitations are particularly marked in Reception classes of primary school (Broadhead, 2004; BERA Early Years Special Interest Group, 2003; Dahlberg, 2009; Sylva et al, 2010). Hence, this study on studying the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations in Year R (Reception) given the concerns of 'restrictive' discourse becomes relevant with regard to the implementation of EYFS.

1.5. Early Childhood Education Context in India

With 1.2 billion people of whom 30% are children, and the world's fourth-largest economy, India's recent growth and development has been one of the most significant achievements of our times (World Bank, 2015). Although India has the second largest number of billionaires in the world, it also has 25 per cent of the world's poor people. Despite tremendous strides in economic terms, huge disparities among its population remain.

India's past cultural heritage places great significance on early childhood development stage and considers this stage as a foundation for basic values and social skills, which will influence the later years. Much of the childcare was informal within the family and

through grandparents caring practices, stories and lullabies and traditional infant games were handed down from one generation to the next (Kaul and Sankar, 2009). However gradual changes in the family structures from joint to nuclear, necessitated by changing social realities; increased maternal employment escalated by the onset of globalization and liberalization has affected the possibilities of good quality informal care and education within home environments (Sharma, 1998). In a way the needs emerging from various social, economic and demographic changes in the last few decades coupled with global events have influenced and are influencing the nature and provision of Early Childhood Care and Education in India.

Taking the view that learning begins at birth, it was resolved at Jomtien, Thailand (5-7 March, 1990), via the publication of the ‘World Declaration for All’ and ‘A Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs’, to extend early childhood care and initial education either through arrangements involving community, families, or institutional programs as deemed appropriate (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990). These two documents renewed a world commitment to ensuring the rights of education and knowledge for all the people. The World Forum for Education met again in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000 and expanded on the initial documents. In this meeting, the Forum adopted six major goals for education underlying the importance of early childhood education. The first one being: ‘expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. The other five goals focused on Universal Primary Education, education quality, gender equality, improving literacy and increasing life skills. Furthermore, out of the four sets of child rights envisaged in Convention of the Rights of Child, (UNCRC, 1989) the Right to Education including the Right to Early Childhood Education has been included under the broader framework of Right to development (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990).

The Delhi Declaration and Framework for Action (EFA) Summit of nine high population countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan) which was an important sequel to the World Conference on EFA held at Jomtien, Thailand, 1990 emphasized on the challenge before these countries not only to provide affordable quality early childhood programs but to provide integrated

programs encompassing health, nutrition and community aspects of Early Childhood Care and Education. In the year 2000, India again reaffirmed its commitment to Dakar Framework for Action, which incorporated to expand and improve comprehensive Early Childhood Education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group of children.

According to the UNESCO (2003) report on gender and education for all, children entering primary schools in many countries are still very differently equipped in preparation and that the early childhood education and care is unequally distributed particularly with a lot of rural and urban disparities. It has criticized the governments' especially from the developing countries that they are unable or unwilling to provide quality preprimary education to their children. This is true for Indian early childhood education context as well.

Constitutional Framework

The Indian Constitution contains provisions in the form of Fundamental Rights or Directive Principles Policy that has been used to realize quality Early Childhood Education services in the country. Initially the Indian Constitution committed to the provision of Free and Compulsory education to the children up to fourteen years of age. Since it doesn't indicate the lower age limit, the early childhood programs were considered as part of this constitutional commitment.

Eighty-six constitutional amendments were made in 2001 to divide the age group into two specific categories 0-6 and 6-14 to realize their specific interests under the two separate articles. Article 21A was introduced which specifies Right to Education as a Fundamental Right to 6-14 age group. However, following huge outcry from civil society and professional organizations, ECCE has been included as a constitutional provision but still not as a justifiable right under the Article 45 which states that the State shall endeavor to provide ECCE for all children until they complete the age of six years (Swaminathan et al., 2006).

An Enabling Policy Framework

Constitutionally, child development and education are concurrent subjects, which imply a shared federal and state responsibility in ECCE service delivery. In actual practice, the provision of Early Childhood Care and Education services is governed by a plethora of policies and related action plans beginning with the national Policy on Education, 1986 which viewed ECCE as an integral input into the Human Resource Strategy, a feeder and an introductory program for primary education and a support service for working women (GOI, 1986).

Some of the policy frameworks that enabled the ECCE provisions in India are National Plan of Action for Children (2005) included universalization of ECCE as one of the goals. It specified care, protection and development opportunities for children below 3 years and integrated care and development and pre-school learning opportunities for 3-6 years olds. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasized two years of pre schooling and considered ECCE as significant for holistic development of the child, as a preparation for schooling and as a support service for women and girls. It advocated play-based developmentally appropriate curriculum that focuses on children's enjoyment of friendships and peer relationships.

Early Childhood Care and Education Provision

In India Centre based Early Childhood education provision is carried out through three channels: Public, private and non-governmental. Public or government sponsored programs are largely directed towards poor and marginalized communities. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program is one of the important programs concerning ECCE in India, which Government of India has developed as a sequel to the National Policy for Children (1974).

The basic premise of this program, which came into existence in 1974 and has gradually evolved into one of the most comprehensive integrated program, is that early childhood care and education are inseparable issues and hence must be addressed as one. The process execution of the program includes delivery of integrated package of minimum basic services –health care, nutritional nourishment, and early childhood education to

children so as to reach a multitude of objectives including school readiness competencies.

Private initiatives

The past few decades have witnessed unprecedented expansion of early childhood initiatives in the country. In addition to the expansion of public initiative in the form of ICDS there is major expansion in the field of private sector which are fee charging and profit making initiatives (working Group year plans). These private initiatives are in various forms like family and day care homes, nurseries, kindergartens and preprimary classes in private primary, elementary and secondary schools. According to the estimates of a National Focus Group, (2005) the number of children enrolled in these private initiatives are estimated to be 10 million or at the same figure as major public initiative ICDS during that period. Due to the absence of regulatory mechanisms to enforce registration there is no clear data on private schools.

The great limitation regarding the understanding the situation of private initiatives is that there exists no information on the infrastructure, operative numbers, man power and process indicators as none of the educational surveys, census and even sample survey has considered this aspect as worthwhile. And also as registration of the ECCE centers' is not made compulsory due to which there seems to be a general agreement that majority of the ECCE centers' lack basic infrastructure and/or practice pedagogical in appropriate practices (Swaminathan et al., 2006). And also there are no national monitoring mechanism with norms and standards to systematically assess conditions of various service providers (UNESCO, 2006) including the private initiatives.

There exists a great variability within the private sector: ranging from a handful of well-established private elite schools of high quality services to the great mass of highly unequipped, poorly managed, over-crowded garage schools which squeeze children into tiny unhygienic spaces and attempt to force feed them with three R's at too early an age (Swaminathan, 2006). These private initiatives were originally confined to upper and middle classes but have now started mushrooming in semi-urban and rural areas, reflecting the unprecedented demand for and popularity of these services (Woodhead et

al., 2009; James et al., 2014). However the popularity of private sector is attributed to its medium of teaching in English, as knowledge of English is seen as an avenue to upward mobility. The public sector is firmly committed to the regional language or mother tongue medium (Swaminathan, 2006) making it less attractive to career conscious parents.

This trend however greatly escalated with the onslaught of globalization and liberalization of the economy there is a widespread demand for English in Indian context. Knowledge of English is seen as a vehicle for upward mobility and hence parents of all classes and occupations put a lot of significance on their children learning English. But the majority of them confuse learning English with English Medium schooling, even starting from the early years, leading to the privatization of primary and early years levels of education. The Young Lives longitudinal study substantiates this conclusion, which directly relates to this study's context:

‘One of the major motives of parents private school choice is that most private preschools offer English as the medium of instruction, tantalizing parents with the prospect of getting children on track towards participation in the new global labor market. By contrast the language of instruction in most of the government preschools is traditionally Telugu, though the policy is under review. This particular pattern of moving from public schools to private schools is confirmed by the main survey data; where for Andhra Pradesh 123 caregivers reported that their children have attended more than one preschool since the age of three. In 101 cases, the care givers have reported that their child had moved from public to private provision’ (Woodhead, 2009, 54:21).

The Working Group on Early Childhood for eleventh Five-year plan recognized the fact that language intervention through mother tongue is the scientifically proven appropriate pedagogical way of working with early years children. However, due to globalization and privatization the child's learning in English medium is seen as a legitimate desire for career conscious parents. This was further substantiated by the Committee appointed by Government of India on Early Childhood Education (2004),

which commented that in these days of globalization and increased privatization socially and economically upward mobile families are fleeing the public initiatives towards locally available fee paying private alternatives in search of English medium preschools.

It also maintains that in view of social and political realities and to ensure that the curriculum is delivered through culturally and contextually appropriate ways and practices, the pre schooling has to be done in mother tongue only with options of oral introduction of second language and regular introduction of second language only in grade one.

Curriculum of Early Childhood Education in India

However there is no independent national early childhood curriculum in India except that there exists a small section on preschool education included in the National Curriculum Framework for education advocated in the National Policy on Education (1986). The early childhood curriculum is focused on physical growth, socialization, cognitive development, language development and play. The existing curriculum framework focuses on the child's holistic development (cognitive, emotional, social and physical) and emphasizes play based pedagogy with due attention to friendships and peer relationships. This aspect on social and emotional development is emphasized in both pre service and in service training of early childhood educators that prioritizes children's play and peer relationships. However, in reality the situation is quite complex due to the absence of legal frameworks and regulatory mechanisms that specify requirements and standards of ECCE teacher training programs. Instead various education channels provide different types of training with varying levels of training. Often most teachers working at Anganwadi centers, NGOs, and private preschools are those with little training without any teaching qualifications resulting in unhealthy pedagogical practices (Ohara, 2013, Kaul and Shankar, 2007; Woodhead et al., 2011).

In private sector, pre schooling emphasis is placed on formalized cognitive domains by way of downward extension of primary schooling and thereby marginalizing other

affective and psychomotor domains. In a survey conducted by NCERT (2008) of prestigious private schools in ten major cities of the country uniformly indicated that the play based curriculum as advocated by National Policy of Education is more an exception than a norm (cited in Swaminathan, 2006). The survey indicates that in all the major cities children as young as 3 to 4 years old are being taught the same syllabus not only as year one but year two. In a study conducted by NCERT (2008) on the public provision of ECCE in ICDS centers', almost all of the ICDS centers' observed were adhering to the '3 R's' (i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic) and there was virtual absence of any play activities suggesting gross negligence of social aspects of learning. These findings also corroborated by findings from the Young Lives research team.

These aberrant pedagogical practices from both the public and private initiatives are left unchecked (UNESCO, 2006). And in the absence of regulatory mechanisms and minimum specifications concerning ECE centers' the current practices in both the public and private centers' are detrimental to children's development. Given that the purpose of the early childhood education is to expand the child's learning potential through play and experience based pedagogy this issue of downward extension of primary schooling is of a grave concern (UNESCO, 2006).

From the preceding discussion, two extreme scenarios emerge in the early childhood education situation in India: At one end, dysfunctional public provision with emphasis on 3Rs and at the other, Anglicized private schooling with heavy emphasis on structured and formal schooling, both implementing a curriculum that predominantly focuses on school readiness ignoring the social and emotional development of children and by extension their friendships and peer relationships.

It is in this scenario that the philosophy of Krishnamurti (1953, 1964, 1974) and Tagore (1929) become highly relevant with its emphasis on holistic development of the child in a curricular framework that takes into account the cultural and contextual learning with a world view that emphasizes on 'Being and Belonging' (Papatheodorou, 2010) in a mother tongue based instruction. Their emphasis on community, relational pedagogy and the importance of freedom in education and the striving for good society is

important to theorize new relational pedagogies that prioritize peer relationships and conceptualize revolutionary roles for educators. This emphasis on community beyond the exclusive focus on individual and the emphasis on relationships in mediating learning cohere with the socio cultural theoretical understandings informing the study.

1.6. An Outline of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is outlined as follows. This introductory chapter introduced the research topic and enumerated the research context and presented a rationale for the study. The Second part of the thesis presents literature pertaining to the main themes of the research topic and consists of Chapter Two and Three. Chapter Two particularly explores on the significance of peer relationships along with a theoretical rationale drawing from extant literature and research. This comprehensive review helps in understanding the *perceptions* of practitioners as to the significance of peer relationships. The Third Chapter explores the cultural contexts of case study settings by exploring the some of the key themes and philosophical underpinnings embedded in both EYFS (England case study) and Jiddu Krishnamurti & Tagore curricula (Indian case study). This helps in understanding the underlying assumptions inherent in each curricula viz. the image of child and childhood, the aims and purposes of early childhood education, the role of educators and the place of families and communities etc. In a way, it helps in understanding the wider *contexts* under which practitioners enact their *practice*. Chapter Four forms the part of Third part of the thesis and explores the ontological epistemological rationale for the methodology chosen and explains the research methods used along with explanation for the data analysis. It also sheds light on the reflexive role the researcher in the research process so crucial for the qualitative research.

Part Five of the thesis consists of Chapters Five, Six Seven and Eight. Chapter Five presents and discusses the findings arrived from the personal plane of the data analysis that explored the *perceptions* of the practitioners in fostering peer relationships. It answers the first part of the research question. Chapter Six presents and discusses the findings arrived from the Inter-personal Plane of the data analysis and answers the second part of the research question: what is the *practice* aspect of practitioners in fostering peer relationships. Chapter Seven presents and discusses the findings arrived

from the Institutional Plane of the data analysis and answers the third part of the research question: what are the *contexts* under which practitioners enact their practice? The three parts of the research question addresses the data analysis and the discussion holistically while exploring the similarities and enumerating the variations in the practice from the cross-cultural perspectives of England and India.

Chapter Eight and sums up the work by drawing conclusions from the research and presents an analytical model to understand practitioners roles in fostering peer relationships by integrating the three planes of analysis. It is offered as a main contribution from the study. It further focuses on the theoretical and conceptual, policy and practice contributions of the study and ends by offering possibilities for future study and research.

1.7. Chapter summary

This chapter has offered a rationale for the research study and introduced the research question: ‘How and in what ways do early childhood educators engage in fostering peer relationships?’ which has been further divided into exploring their *Perceptions*, understanding their *Practice* and exploring the *Contexts* under which they enact their practice. The Sociocultural-Historical framework has been chosen as a conceptual framework guiding the study paralleled by philosophical discussions relating to practitioners roles, significance of peer relationships, aims of early childhood education, the image of child and childhood using insights from Krishnamurti (1953) and Rabindranath Tagore (1929) who had argued for a relational pedagogy and aspired for transformative value of education throughout their life.

PART TWO: Literature Review

The topic of children's peer relationships and their developmental significance has taken a prominent position in the fields of developmental and clinical psychology. This reflects a broader consensus that peer relationships are significant for a variety of reasons including school and life preparation and also in recognition of the fact that lacking in this very important skill will have negative consequences for children's social and emotional development (Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker, 2006). The crucial importance of fostering and facilitating this important skill in institutionalized contexts by educators' is well recognized (Katz, 2007; Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009; Papatheodorou, 2010).

While there is considerable amount of literature and research on different aspects of peer relationships, social competence, friendships, peer culture emanating from developmental psychology (Piaget, 1962) and ethological perspectives (Smith, 1984; Vaughn and Santos, 2008) and sociological perspectives (Deegan, 1996; Corsaro, 1985, 2004; Mayall, 2002), there is limited amount of research on educators' roles in facilitating peer relationships in the institutional contexts of early years. Research mostly focused on individual children in clinical conditions (Evolutionary) or in relation to the environments they inhabit (Ethological) or in relation to their social contexts (Sociological) but not so in relation to their mutuality and unification (Genovese, 2003).

Thus the limited research focusing on the practitioners' roles with regard to fostering peer relationships in early years suffers from methodological and theoretical limitations in terms of what Rogoff (2003) would say on maintaining the mutuality and the integrity of the unit of analysis (Fleer, 2003). Hence, a study, which brings together the individuals and the institutional context in successive time frames by maintaining the mutuality, can effectively address the gaps and limitations inherent in this area of research. While this definitely makes the study highly worthwhile and relevant, makes it a challenging feat with respect to literature review as understanding educators' perceptions and their practice from the Socio-Cultural theoretical standpoint has not been the specific focus of earlier studies.

However, I have addressed this problem by reviewing the extant literature relating to the key themes of the main research question: by looking at the significance of peer relations which will potentially influence educators' *perceptions*, by reviewing underlying theoretical perspectives which inevitably impact on their *practice* and by examining philosophical and policy orientations which will inevitably influence the *contexts* under which educators enact their practice.

Broadly this part of the thesis engages with the literature to address three aspects of the research question: *Perceptions* on the significance of peer relationships; the *practice* aspect of the peer relationships by attending to underlying theoretical underpinnings (Chapter 2) and the *contexts* under which practitioners enact their practice defined by policy and philosophical underpinnings (Chapter 3).

Chapter Two- Significance of Peer relationships

2.1. Introduction

Peers, defined as same age group spend a lot of time in the company of each other. Peer relationships provide important developmental contexts for children. Under these contexts children acquire a wide range of skills, attitudes and abilities, which are going to be helpful to them throughout their life span. Given the importance of peer relationships for children especially in early years it is important to review the literature pertaining to its significance.

According to Kutnick (2007), children spend time in different pedagogical worlds and spend most of the time with the same peer group rather than with the teacher. Singer and de Haan (2007) too contend that in early childhood care and education settings, children enter into two different types of relationships: with adults and with peers. While relations with adults affords them emotional support, cognitive challenges, rules and guidance etc. relations with peers provide them with social partners affording them shared interests and mutual joy.

Corsaro (1985; 1992, 2004) considers children as active agents of their own socialization. According to him children take cues from the adult world and produce their own unique peer culture distinct from the adult worlds by actively co-constructing shared meanings, conflict strategies and understandings in which they incorporate the elements of adults' culture. Given that children spend a lot of time with each other immersed in their own cultures yet interwoven with the adult worlds, it is important that to understand what practitioners think of children's peer relationships as it inevitably has consequences for how they make efforts to foster them. In this chapter, I have considered the significance of peer relationships as understood from extant literature and relevant research, which would potentially impact practitioners' perceptions.

As was evident from the review, there are different ways in which peer relationships are considered important: first and foremost, it is considered as an important pre condition

for children's happiness; their social and emotional wellbeing; as essential for children's social competence and to make friendships; as an aspect of process quality and children's rights; as a context for learning be it cognitive, linguistic; as a preparation for school, as an important skill for future life and career; as an aspect of an inclusive classrooms and an important basis for relational pedagogy. In the following section I address each of the key themes emanating from the relevant research and literature.

2.2. Peer relations as a pre-condition for children's happiness; social & emotional wellbeing & friendships and social competence

There is considerable debate in the children wellbeing literature emanating from health and education on what constitutes social competence and wellbeing (Barblett and Maloney, 2010). According to the authors, terms such as social competence, emotional intelligence and mental health pervade health literature, while education uses the similar aspects as social and emotional development demonstrating the inter-connected meaning of the same terms. Mackay and Keyes (2002) define social competence as 'the ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaving to achieve inter personal goals and social outcomes'. And wellbeing is defined as 'children's physical social and emotional welfare and development' by Department of Education and Children's Services (cited in Barblett and Maloney, 2010: 14).

Despite the conceptual confusions and the multiplicity of definitions, what's been commonly accepted is that children's positive peer relationships are very significant, as a pre-condition for their happiness, their social and emotional wellbeing and as a must for their friendships and social competence has been well recognized in the development research and literature (Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Dunn, 2004; Kernan and Devine, 2009).

Attainment of effective social competencies with peers is considered as a fundamental feature of early childhood (Hartup, 1992; Ladd and Coleman 1993; Odom and McConnell and McEvoy, 1992, Guralnick and Neville, 1997). And this tendency to seek social interaction with peers is considered a critical developmental competency that begins to be established early in life with young children's peer interactions

increasing in frequency and complexity throughout their early years (Hartman, 1992; Ladd and Coleman, 1993; Weikart, 1999; Rubin Bukowski and Parker, 2006).

Furthermore, peer relations and social competence are envisaged as critical developmental processes for development of relationships and friendships during early childhood (Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995; Richardson and Schwartz, 1998; Odom et al., 2001). It is recognized that peer relationships positively impact children's emotional wellbeing and will have implications for children's relationships throughout life span (Howes, 1988; Walden, Lemerise, and Smith, 1999). Through peer relationships children experience and form positive identities, which is considered as core dimensions of children's, wellbeing and sense of belonging (Dunn, 2004; Brooker and Woodhead, 2008).

Peer relationships are seen to be crucial to develop social and emotional intelligence which has been recognized as a crucial form of intelligence by Gardner (1983) where he introduced the ideas of multiple intelligences which included both interpersonal intelligence (the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people) and intrapersonal intelligence which is the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations. Goleman (1995) focuses on the inadequacy of the IQ model to measure overall intelligence and predict successful performance in life. He argues that emotional intelligence is equally as important as mathematical-logical intelligence and that an educational system which does not aim at harmonizing thought and emotions is responsible for many problems, such as violence, eating disorders, depression, physical illness and failure in life. Many studies further prioritise emotional intelligence and attest to the fact that positive peer relationships assist children fight against stress (Hartup, 1992; Ladd, 1990; Asher, Parkhurs, Hymel, and Williams, 1990) and enhance their overall wellbeing.

Early childhood educators traditionally have stressed the central importance of children's ability to engage in social interaction with peers (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997; Odom and McLean, 1996; Bowman et al., 2000). Barblett and Maloney (2010) contend that attending to and developing positive social and emotional development in

children has always been the priority for early childhood practitioners. Furthermore peer relations are considered to be important building social skills necessary to adapt effectively to the environment (Ortega and Del Rey 2004; Corsaro and Eder, 1990; Ortega and Mora-Merchan, 1996).

Hartup (1992) notes that peer relationships, in particular, contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. He argues that the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, not classroom behavior but the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. According to him, the children who are generally disliked, aggressive, and disruptive and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk signifying the importance of educators' role in fostering this important skill.

Recognizing practitioners' significance and preoccupation with children's social and emotional development Muijis and Reynolds (2001) contend that practitioners are more concerned with children's emotional and social needs than their cognitive development. This has been reiterated in the recommendation from OECD (2006) which has argued for the centrality of well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNCRC) and the associated General Comment 7 on 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood' recognized children's wellbeing as embedded in well-meaning relations to others emphasizing young children's active participation and the experience of citizenship.

Participation has been one of the key outcomes in the EYFS (DCSF, 2008, National Strategies, 2009d) policy documents, which emphasizes children's happiness and wellbeing. The EYFS recognizes that children's will be happy and emotionally secure in relation to others and considers it as one of the key aims and emphasizes the on the practitioners roles in this. The EYFS further states that 'none of these areas of Learning and Development can be delivered in isolation from the others. They are equally important and depend on each other to support a rounded approach to child

development. All the areas must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities' (DCSF, 2008:11). This area of social and emotional development has taken high priority as it's been listed as a Prime area following the Tickell Review (DFE, 2011). However there are concerns that the focus on prescription and outcome based indicators have not contributed to the happiness and wellbeing of children (Papatheodorou, 2008; Penn, 2008).

This is in contrast to the views and visions of early childhood pioneers who had influenced the early childhood curricula and pedagogy in England (for ex. Froebel, Montessori, Steiner, Mc Millan) who considered happiness as very important for children and their social and emotional development.

The Indian philosophers JK and Tagore have both considered happiness and children enjoying learning with good relationships with others as one of its goal. They have explicitly recognized the importance of children learning with happiness as an important goal where children learn with joy in a co-operative environment free from external rewards and punishments. This understanding is inherent in Krishnamurti (1953) curriculum, which recognizes the children's happiness and readiness to learn in well-meaning relations to others, and has advocated for relational pedagogy with central focus on peer relationships.

Dunsmore (2004) emphasized on the importance of peer interactions for children's emotional development. Likewise Trowell and Bower (1995) consider emotional wellbeing as embedded within relationships with others. A number of studies have emphasized on the positive co-relationship between children participating in early childhood and their cognitive and social outcomes (Schweinhart, 2002; OECD, 2001; Sylva et al, 2004).

2.3. Peer relations as a preparation for school and for later life

Positive peer relationships and children's social and emotional development are seen as very important considerations for their school success as well as future success in terms

of career and personal lives. Several studies indicate that children's attainment of social and emotional development in early years ensure future success advocating for a nurturing relationships (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000; Bowman et al., 2000; OECD, 2001; Raver, 2002).

Given the importance of peer relationships, several have studies advocated for the active promotion of it in the everyday classroom practices (Blatchford and Kutnick 2003; Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009). It is recognized that children's social competence predicts their future school performance (Howes, 2000; Howes and Phillipsen, 1998). Several studies have conclusively established that peer relations and social competence improve children's academic performance, thereby signifying the crucial importance of peer relationships (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg, 2004; OECD, 2006; Howes, 2000).

Peer relationships are considered to be important not only for present and future school success but crucial to make friendships and important for life success (Hartup, 1992, 1996) and will impact on and are significant for future relationships (Howes et al., 1994; Lindsey, 2002). Peer relationships are important to develop positive and healthy relationships in life and also impact on school performance (Wood, 2007). Peer relationships are recognized as very significant for social and cognitive development (Howes et al., 1994, 2000). Donohue, Perry and Weinstein (2003) have demonstrated how children engaging in social constructive interaction develop more social skills and more academic achievement. Ladd (1990) concluded that children who engage in positive peer relationships are predicted to be academically successful in elementary school.

However, there are concerns that exclusive focus on school preparation and future preparation has consequences for children's social and emotional development. For example, in both England and India, there are contradictory policy narratives which recognize the importance of children's social and emotional development yet in practice hugely concerned with the school preparation by engaging in pre-primary practice (Dahlberg, 1999, 2003; Moss, 1996, 2003, Penn, 2008). Here early childhood

education has economic imperative and is seen to be contributing to the future benefit of society by producing a competitive work force. For example, one of the five aims of National Strategies in England apart from being happy and healthy is that contributing to the economy (National Strategies, 2009d; DCSF, 2008).

In India too early childhood education is increasingly perceived as foundation for school preparation and for later success albeit recognizing the importance of children's peer relationships and their social and emotional development (NCERT, 2008). It is also seen as a panacea for social justice by reducing the future burdens of the society by intervention and prevention programs that locate and address problems early (Heckman & Masterov, 2004) by giving attention to children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

2.4. Peer relations seen as an aspect and outcome of quality environments

The many benefits of positive peer relationships and the bi directional nature of positive peer relationships and the quality learning environments is increasingly evident from the research. Quality learning environments are associated with social competence and positive peer relationships (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001) while positive relationships and positive interactions between teachers and children and among peers as considered as important criteria for quality (Howes and James, 2002; Sylva et al., 2006).

Debate around 'quality' in early childhood education and care have placed warm interactions between an adult and a child and children's peer relationships as key indicator of the 'process' side of quality along with 'structural' variables of practitioner-child ratio, practitioner education and training (Hamre and Pianta, 2005; Sylva, et al., 2006, Vandell and Wolf, 2000, Phillipsen et al., 1997, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson, 2003, Mashburn, 2008). Additionally, a significant pro- active role for practitioners' role in providing and promoting effective preschool experiences is evidenced from the studies by Hestenes and Carroll (2000) and, Sylva et al., (2006). It has been recognized that emotionally supportive classrooms are those where teachers model positive social behaviours (Pianta et al., 2002; Burchinal et al., 2005; Howes, 2002). Thus signifying the importance of educators in fostering peer relationships as

the quality of interactions impact especially on peer relationships (Mashburn et al., 2008). Furthermore, a positive correlation between teachers' education and experience and children's positive peer relationships and academic outcomes has also been noted from the studies of Pianta et al. (2005).

2.5. Peer relations as an aspect of inclusive classroom

Peer relationships are increasingly recognized as facilitating inclusive classrooms and in turn inclusive settings are considered as fostering peer relationships. This bi-directional nature of peer relationships is evident from the literature and is considered very crucial for inclusive practice (Wilson, 1999; Buysse et al, 2003). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) further placed children's relationships and their sense of belongingness and identity as an important part of their participatory rights (1989) which pave way for inclusive classrooms.

This focus on inclusion is very important to facilitate diversity be it cultural, racial, linguistic or religious as it is evident that from a young age children can form political and cultural preferences (Connolly and Kelly, 2002) and form gender identities (Connolly, 2005). And it is shown that children show preference for same sex and age peers (Waldern et al., 1999) and language skills also shown to be a factor in children's ability to form identities and initiate and maintain peer relationships (Wood, 2007).

Hence attention to diversity and facilitating inclusive classrooms is considered very crucial as children are aware of differences and are forming identities very early. As Derman-Sparkes and Taus, 1998 (cited in Nutbrown and Clough, 2009:195) contends:

Between the ages of two and five years old, children are forming self-identities and building social interaction skills. At the same time, they are becoming aware of and curious about gender, race, ethnicity, and disabilities. Gradually, young children begin to figure out how they are alike, and how they are different from other people, and how they feel about these differences.

Consequently Nutbrown and Clough (2009) argue that as children are keenly interested in differences, making difference positive rather than negative should be an important aim for early childhood practitioners. However organizing and facilitating inclusive settings to facilitate peer relationships is not an easy task. Buysee, Wesley, Keyes, and Bailey (1996) investigated the attitudes of 52 early childhood educators engaged with teaching children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms and found that practitioners' confidence was lowest with children having disabilities.

In a survey of faculty members from 2-4 year higher education programs in nine states that prepare teachers to work with preschool children conducted by Hemmeter et al., (2008) which was aimed to determine how professors address content related socio-emotional development, it was reported that their graduates were prepared to work with families, preventive practices and supporting socio emotional development but were less prepared to work with children with challenging behaviours. These studies indicate the challenges inherent in ensuring inclusive environments, especially there is a lot of diversity present be it physical, cultural, linguistic or racial.

Given the complexity of diversity present in early childhood settings, facilitating an inclusive setting to promote peer relationships is considered not an easy and straightforward task. Hence, the role of practitioners is increasingly called for who are recognized as mediators in balancing the diversities and providing an inclusive setting (Katz, 2007; Papatheodorou, 2010).

2.6. Peer relations as the basis for relational pedagogy

The growing influence of socio cultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1986, 1990; Rogoff, 1998, 2003) which consider cognition as a collaborative process and the growing importance of relational pedagogy (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009; Waller, 2007; Ebbeck and Yim, 2008; Luff et al., 2009) in many countries including Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand and England has placed peer relationships at the heart of relational pedagogy.

This is the case with the Nordic context as well, where Kutnick et al., (2007) contend that Northern European early childhood settings are less likely to emphasize a pre-school orientation unlike English counterparts as they focus on the importance of early education for the child's wellbeing. He has noted that educators in the Nordic settings adhere to socio cultural understanding of learning with emphasis on community and collaboration and so are able to engage in a relational pedagogy.

This emphasis of socio cultural settings promoting collaboration is further evident from Ortega et al, (2009) whose research has shown that learning and socialization are promoted during cooperative group activities than in competitive or individualistic ones. A few studies in early years demonstrate how group activities can promote children's social networks (Brown et al, 1988) and relationships. It is also recognized that children are motivated to be affiliated, to connect with others, to be part of the group, to understand and to be understood (Brennan, 2008 cited in Kernan and Singer, 2011).

It is evident that children learn to initiate, engage and involve themselves in peer relationships in early years (Howes et al., 1994; Walden, et al, 1999). To achieve this, practitioners' role is emphasized in promoting collaborative and co-operative classrooms, which can facilitate peer relationships. Several researchers argue for an active intervention from teachers and suggest that teachers should provide opportunities for peer interaction during work activities underscoring importance of co-operation for children's peer relationships (Han & Kemple, 2006; Howes and Ritchie 2002; Kutnick, 2007).

However, it is recognized that certain pre-conditions are necessary to facilitate peer relationships effectively. It is found that classrooms with smaller teacher child ratios have resulted in teachers being warm and sensitive in their interactions, which is considered key criteria for high quality programs (Shim, Hestenes and Cassidy, 2004; Moyles, 2002). This emphasis on warm interactions facilitating relational pedagogy is central to many effective early childhood curricula around the world: the Te Whariki (New Zealand), High/Scope (USA) and Reggio Emilia approaches (Northern Italy). Furthermore, the type of classroom instruction teacher directed versus child directed

classrooms seems have consequences for relational pedagogy and so to children's relationships (Innocenti et al., 1986).

It is also recognized that children who are securely attached to their care givers and have secure relationships are most likely to develop secure relationships with their peers and develop internal working models of relationships based on their early relationships (Bowlby, 1969) and will develop emotion regulation and conflict resolution, negotiation skills (Walder et al., 1999) which are important for maintaining effective peer relationships.

2.7. Peer relations as a context for all learning

It has been recognized that peer relationships provide contexts for all learning be it language, cognitive or social and the importance of it on learning and academic outcomes is conclusive in research (Hanna and Meltzoff, 1993; Gettlinger, 2003; Kutnick, 2002; Kumpulainen and Mutanen 1999; Ortega, 1999; Vaughn and Santos, 2008). Theoretically too the significance of peer relationships for children's learning was well recognized (Piaget, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1998).

Piaget's work according to Bliss, (1993) pioneered the so called 'clinical method' (Piaget, 1983) which was designed to determine children's thinking over a period of time which involved questioning children to discover how knowledge develops, how it changes, and what laws govern these changes. Mostly he was interested in finding out 'what conceptions of the world the child naturally forms at different stages of its development'. With implicit understanding that the general course of development of intellectual structures are the same for all (Wadsworth, 1989 cited in Robbins, 2005) regardless of where or how they live and what is valued within their communities with complete disregard of diversity of cultural communities and their values and practices.

Moreover, there is a lot of criticism directed against Piaget for his preoccupation with the individual and the implicit assumption that intellectual structures are the same for everyone (Fleer, 1992; Bruner and Haste, 1987). Robbins (2005) contends that contrary

to the commonly held belief that Piaget has rejected the influence of social relationships on the development of cognition and that he actively preferred to see children as actively constructing their own understandings of the world in an independent manner, it is he who emphasized the role of conflict between peers as promoting the cognitive development.

However, Piaget's understanding that the intellectual structures are the same for everyone is persistent among many early childhood educators and researchers of young children, who consider children as 'individuals' who actively construct their own understandings of the world in a pre-determined, state like, universally applicable manner, independent of their contexts (Robbins, 2005). Thus understanding educators' roles from this perspective assumes that it is children who actively make sense of the world and that peer relationships happen in a sequential manner, which is the same for all people. Kwon (2002) argues that this principle of 'sequential developmentalism', the idea that children pass through the biologically ordered stages of development is highly influential in English early childhood care and education settings.

This understanding is implicit in the EYFS (DfES, 2008; National Strategies, 2009a), which gives a chronological ordering of the development outcomes (including children's social and emotional development) and encourages practitioners to identify children's learning goals (including social and emotional) according to the preset categories. The assumption implicit in this position is that the ability of children to engage in peer relationships is within the biological realm of the children. This theoretical influence continues to be the major influence in many curricular frameworks, research projects and teacher education courses and textbooks (Robbins, 2005, Fler, 2002). In England, the Plowden Report (HMSO, 1967) which advocated for child-centered approach influenced by his ideas which still remain influential in UK classrooms (Northen, 2003).

There are concerns that this exclusive focus on the individual who passes through universal stages positions some children from outside the middle class western world context as 'lacking' in their learning and development (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978)

as and when they don't fit into preconceived categories of social and emotional development about what educators expect they will say or do. This is important for the present research because the EYFS is framed under ages and stages of model of evolutionary development (Piaget, 1983; Kwon, 2002) also with regard to social and emotional development. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) maintain that exemplary practices are those in which educators use their knowledge of patterns of growth relating to child development theory in the early years along with an understanding of individual children, their interests, and cultural backgrounds to set up environment.

Contrasting with the dominant Piagetian based perspectives in understanding peer relationships and its significance in cognitive development, which consider cognition as an individual construction; the Socio-Cultural perspectives consider cognition as a collaborative process and take into account the social, historical and cultural dimensions of everyday activities and seek to understand children within this embedded contexts (Fleer, Anning and Cullen, 2004; Fleer, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1998, 2003; Howes, 2011). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development were first systematized and applied by Vygotsky (1978) in Russia in the 1920 and 1930s based on the concept that human activities take place in socio cultural contexts, mediated by language and other symbol systems, and are best understood when investigated in their historical contexts (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996).

Fleer and Cullen, (2004) argue that the centrality of social mediation has been a constant theme and in early childhood education the notion of mediated learning is evident in the focus on the relationships that mediate learning. According to them the notion of the Zone of proximal Development (ZPD) has assisted practitioners to understand that children learn with the support of others and to take a more active teaching role. The complementary concept of scaffolding (Bruner, 1984) also refers to the process by which experts assist novice learners within their ZPD and has been accepted as a form of teaching interaction that is sensitive to individual learners.

John-Steiner and Mahn, (1996) argue that the power of Vygotsky's ideas lies in his explanation of the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes; in his

conceptualization of development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes by rejecting the Cartesian dichotomy between the internal and the external which focuses either on the internal or the external approaches. The emphasis here is focused on the relationships between people, contexts, actions, meanings and cultural histories, cultural tools and artifacts (Wertsch et al, 1995). Robbins (2005) argues that according to socio cultural theorists cognition is not merely an individual construction but a collaborative one intrinsically related to participation with others in socio-culturally relevant activities working with and transforming specific cultural tools and artifacts, practices and contexts in which they engage in a mutually constituting relationships. According to Goncu (1999), sociocultural views recognize individual variation, unique characteristics ranging from multiple cultural affiliations to tendencies and constraints of the biological system such as temperament and certain learning disabilities coordinate with the social and cultural context in ways that yield a unique process of cognitive development and hence do not see it as pre-determined. Lourenco and Malchado (1996) contends that the current debate in education on the role of individual and social factors in development often presents Piaget as giving primacy to individual cognitive processes, in contrast to Vygotsky's view of the primacy of social and cultural processes (Bruner, 1985; Forman, 1992; Phillips, 1995; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1985; Wertsch, Minick, and Arns, 1984).

2.8. Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored the current research and literature pertaining to the significance of peer relationships, which will potentially impact practitioners *perceptions*. The review concluded that there are very many uses of peer relationships for children- as a basis of their happiness and wellbeing, as a must for their friendships and social and emotional development, as a basis for school preparation and life success; as an important aspect of quality classrooms, relational pedagogy and as a precondition for inclusive classroom. This crucial importance of fostering peer relationships and the challenges inherent in it and the dangers of not fostering peer relationships for children are well recognized. Given the crucial importance of peer relationships for children's cognitive and language development, I have addressed the current dichotomy with regard to individual versus community based approaches to peer relationships by focusing on Piaget and Vygotsky's ideas. It is well recognized in the

literature that the theoretical standpoints embedded in curriculum and/or adopted by the practitioners will have consequences for their everyday *practice*. Having explored the research and theoretical basis for practitioners' *perceptions* and their *practice*, the review next focuses on the overall cultural contexts under which practitioners enact their *practice*.

Chapter Three- The cultural contexts: Policy and Philosophical Underpinnings

3.1. Introduction

Rogoff (2003) contends that as people develop as participants in cultural communities their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities, which also change over time. Given this sociocultural orientation and the fact that curriculum makers and educators inherit different philosophical, political and pedagogical beliefs and perceptions as part of their participation in their socio cultural communities, this chapter pays particular attention to specific curricula frameworks followed by the case study contexts (to be introduced in chapter 4.) The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (adopted by England case study and also followed throughout England) and the Jiddu Krishnamurti curriculum adopted by the Indian independent case study setting distinguished from the mainstream (a rationale is offered in Chapter 4).

By closely exploring the underlying beliefs and assumptions inherent in curricula frameworks (that are followed by the case study settings), it helps to understand both the *perceptions* and *practice* of educators' roles in fostering peer relationships as members of particular socio cultural communities embedded in particular socio *cultural contexts* that are specific to them. It's been argued that no curriculum is ideologically neutral and curriculum makers like other educators have philosophical, political and pedagogical beliefs that underlie the curriculum they create and practice (Apple, 2004).

It is regarded that this contextual understanding allows for the examination of the ways in which learning and teaching takes place under different cultural circumstances and in different historical contexts, contributing to a contextualized rather than universalistic theory of development (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky (1978) talks about cultural tools both material and psychological which mediate social and individual functioning and connect the external and the internal, the social and the individual. While psychological tools are used to direct the mind and the behavior, shape and transform the mental processes; technical tools bring changes in other objects.

Based on this Socio-Cultural argument, Fleer, Anning and Cullen (2004) contend that the adults and child learners are viewed as situated in particular institutional, social, cultural and historical contexts, reflected in the beliefs, artifacts and practices that either contribute or constrain learning. Despite this understanding of recognition of contexts and the significance of cultural tools, this socio-cultural understanding received belated attention in early childhood research.

This despite its theoretical power, has been, attributed it to the delayed interest in appreciating cultural tools and in recognizing the socio, cultural and historical dimensions of Vygotsky's theory. They further content that classroom based research guided by social constructivist perspectives may reflect a focus on immediate contexts of learning but fail to recognize the significance of long-standing beliefs and practices for pedagogical practice.

Given this limitation in appreciating the significance of cultural contexts on the educators' practice and the importance of cultural tools in impacting the practice, I am going to review common features of the EYFS and JK curriculum frameworks and the underlying assumptions to understand and appreciate the broader philosophical and policy contexts under which practitioners enact their own practice. I specifically look at similarities and variations inherent in each curriculum to highlight the diverse cultural and contextual nature of early childhood settings in which practitioners enact their practice. This critical review helps to shed light on the availability of cultural tools, which further affords or constrains their everyday practice.

3.2. The policy and philosophical foundations of EYFS and JK curricula

A critical review of EYFS and JK curricula (the guiding curricula frameworks for English and Indian case study settings respectively (to be introduced in Chapter 4.) highlighted some common themes embedded while illuminating some similarities and variations.

The aims and purpose of the early childhood education that the policy makers set out to achieve through the curriculum frameworks; the image of the child and childhood that is envisioned; the assigned roles of early childhood educators that are enshrined in the curricula; the role of environment and the place of families and communities in the education process all have a defining and potentially important impact on the educators' roles while fostering peer relationships in their settings. The following Table 3.1 presents the critical review of common themes inherent in both EYFS and JK curricula.

Insights: Similarities and variations	EYFS (England) (Pre-primary, Prescriptive & Outcome driven)	JK curriculum (Socio-cultural & Emergent)
3.2.1. The purpose of early childhood education	To contribute to future economy	To strive for good society based on relationships
3.2.2. The image of children & childhood	Emphasis on unique child and children as future workers	Active citizens with rights and responsibilities
3.2.3. The role of educators and schools	School as a place where children can be skilled individually Practitioners as technicians and facilitators	Schools are the places where the ideals of democracy are practiced in true spirit Practitioners as co-learners
3.2.4. The importance of environment	Well recognized	Third teacher
3.2.5. The place of families and communities	Shared responsibility	Parents and communities contribute to the learning processes

Table. 3.1. The common themes inherent in the EYFS and JK curricula

3.2.1. The purpose of education enshrined in the curricula frameworks

Hedegaard (2005:8) argues that 'Educational systems are constructed on the basis of theories and values about children and childhood. Upbringing and education is directed

towards ideals of where to bring the children through the educational system'. As he rightly pointed out the views about children, childhood and education inevitably results in the ideas of where to bring the child through the education system and will dictate the content of the curriculum. Hence fostering peer relations isn't a voluntary process as it may appear but happens in an intricate web of attitudes, environments and aspirations all with potential to impact the process.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) explains how young children's learning does not take place in a vacuum. He contends that we must explore the ecological niche in which the child is living in order to understand the contexts. This ecological niche can be put as an ecology which consist of theories, values and aspirations about children, childhood, and education which is prevalent in the cultural plane of the communities.

Soler and Miller (2006) explicate how parents, teachers and researchers and politicians often have strong and conflicting views about what is right for young children in the years before school. According to Soler and Miller, the curricula can become 'sites of struggle' between ideas about what early childhood education is for and what are appropriate content and contexts for learning and development in early childhood. Drawing from curricula of different countries and contexts viz. England, New Zealand and Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy the authors explore how a growing pressure from instrumental influences can impact on progressive and socio-culturally inspired early childhood curricula and approaches. By comparing these three early childhood contexts they have also explored how early childhood curricula an educational systems are often forged amidst differing contexts in relation to national and local control of early childhood curricula and approaches and explicates how these different contexts give rise to differing conceptualizations' of knowledge, learning and pedagogy.

Early childhood education has been considered as context for children to engage and explore with their worlds by play and play based pedagogy without pressure to engage in formal learning and instruction (Seefeldt and Wasik, 2002; Moss and Petrie, 2002). However a critical look at the curricula presents contested values when it comes to the purpose of early childhood education. The way children and childhood is envisioned

transforms the aims and ideals of education. Whether children are viewed as a future workforce or as redemptive agents who can bring about social change, determines the instrumental or transformative value of education.

Starting Strong II identifies two common orientations: the 'pre-primary' and the 'social pedagogy' approaches. The pre-primary approach is most commonly found in English-speaking countries, where "in addition to a downward transfer of subject fields, programme standards and pedagogical approaches from the primary school towards kindergarten, common teacher education is also practiced in several pre-primary systems (OECD, 2006, p.61). While in the social pedagogy tradition early years are seen as a broad preparation for life and the foundation stage of lifelong learning.

Miller (2003) and Rogoff (2003) show how mass education and compulsory schooling has shaped the curriculum and children's experience of schooling. According to the authors, events like industrialization and compulsory mass education resulted in the homogenizing of the curriculum and the need to compare one student with another paving the way for standardization and homogenization in the early years.

Further according to Dahlberg and Moss (2008:5):

'The globalization and dominance of this local Anglo-American discourse has arisen as a result of the spread of the English language, of American research, and of neo-liberalism, whose values and assumptions it embodies. It offers a compelling narrative of how social and economic problems can be eliminated by early childhood services, delivering predetermined outcomes through early intervention with powerful technologies; of workers as competent technicians; and of children as redemptive agents, able if given the right start to rescue society from its problems. The discourse is positivistic and technical, instrumental and calculating, tempting us with a high return on public investment. It is inscribed with certain values: certainty and mastery, linear progress and predetermined outcomes, objectivity and universality, stability and closure. It draws heavily on certain disciplines, namely child development, management and economics'.

For Soler and Miller (2006) an instrumental curriculum puts emphasis on serving an extrinsic aim or external purpose such as producing citizens who will benefit society which can be contrasted with the view that curriculum should serve intrinsic aim of providing a value in its own right. Kernan and Singer (2011) contend that early childhood education arrangements are serving various goals ranging from equal opportunities for males and females to acculturation of immigrants, rescuing children ‘at risk’ from impoverished homes whose parents were considered incapable of effective socialization and the provision of better educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged families.

Krishnamurti (1953) argues that the aim of education is in bringing out an integrated human being who lives in well-meaning relations with others who can usher in good society. This transformative view of education has implications for peer relationships as children here are not seen as who develop and evolve at preset uniform rates with needs but as active individuals who can question and challenge the status-quoist society with a view to bring in good society that was grounded in right values and right relationships.

This view coheres with the ideas and work of pioneers of early childhood education such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Froebel, Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori and Margaret McMillan. These early pioneers’ innovative and transformative understanding and approaches to early childhood and education has a profound impact on how childhood is perceived and early childhood education is conceptualized in the curricular frameworks.

Contrary to widely prevalent notions of childhood as a preparation for adulthood, early childhood education as they have envisioned adopts a holistic development through a curriculum based on relational pedagogy with social interaction by centrally involving the child and in relations with the family and the wider community and environment. Their progressive and transformative ideals have rejected the formality and instrumentality of the traditional established approaches (Wood and Attfield, 2005). By recognizing children as active agents and autonomous beings in co-constructing their

learning experiences through play and peer relationships they have paved the way for relational pedagogy and transformative curriculum securely based on relationships.

This emphasis on relational pedagogy is the basis of the Reggio Emilia approach with education based on relationships of children in relation to others, to society and to the wider environment. Thus the instrumental value of education is increasingly contested (Moss, 2005; Soler and Miller, 2006; OECD, 2006; Papatheodorou, 2010) and calls for a 'reconceptualization of the curriculum' -for a broader and socially just curriculum are increasingly heard (Burbules and Torres, 2000; Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005, Mallory and New, 1994; Krishnamurti, 1953; Tagore, 1929; Mac Naughton, 2004; Grieshaber and Cannella, 2001).

This is particularly relevant in the context of India, where as has been explained at the outset of the thesis, there is a downward extension of primary schooling into the early years resulting in what Dahlberg (2009) calls a 'schoolification trend in early years' and is also the case with England, where the focus of early years is preparation for the next stage of school (DfES, 2007, 2009; Moss, 2006). This has reached alarming levels in India, with research pointing to the unhealthy pedagogic practices of preprimary focus with negative consequences for children's scope and space for initiating and enjoying peer relationships, as was evident from the ongoing longitudinal study of Young Lives (Woodhead et al., 2010) and the NCERT (2006). This has been linked to the wider culture of competition and career preparation in the context of globalization with the need and demand for reconceptualization of the curriculum resulted in the foundation of 'Red' setting which has been chosen as the Indian case study (to be introduced in Chapter 4).

However, the trend of increasing schoolification worldwide with a narrow focus on the individual child and an undue emphasis on competition has been increasingly criticized by Krishnamurti (1953), Tagore (1929), Papatheodorou (2010), Miller (2006) and Moss (2005; 2006a). Krishnamurti (1953) is highly critical of education that has a narrow focus of school preparation or life preparation. He envisioned schools as the places where democracy is practiced in an environment of co-operation and freedom. There are

educators who criticize the inherent dangers posed by education that has competition and economic prosperity as the only aims of education ignoring the larger aspects of life. He is a critique of an instrumental focus in education that concentrates on the individual skills and abilities with an aim of future workers and careerists.

Tagore's (1929) educational concern coheres with JK on the themes of survival, coalescing around care of the natural environment and preservation of cultural and political diversity and calls for the transformative focus of education critiquing the narrow instrumental focus. This recognition of the mutuality of the individual in relation to the community and to the wider environment is in sharp contrast to the narrow and instrumental focus of EYFS, which prioritizes the individual children's skills and abilities and is preoccupied with the education purpose of preparing future careerists (Moss, 2003; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Penn, 2008). Similar is the case with the most of the mainstream early childhood education in India, where, as explained at the outset, both the public and private provision is engaged with the pedagogic practices of down ward extension of primary schooling with a focus on preparing the future workforce.

This excessive focus on the future led to the emergence of alternative perspectives that critique the instrumental value of education and instead argued for the transformative value of education with an intent on bringing about good society based on good relations. This emphasis on education as cultivating the human being for a good society with emphasis on 'being' and 'belonging' coheres with the educational philosophy of both Reggio Emilia curriculum and Te Whariki curriculum (Soler and Miller, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998; Fler, 2003; Cullen; 2004) curriculum which are based on the transformative value of education with a pedagogy that respects and values relationships and opens to the immense possibilities of learning and doing with a rich image of children as co-constructors in the meaning making process.

This focus on here and now inevitably has implications for children's peer relationships rather than in a curriculum, which is preoccupied with school preparation, and career

preparation, which will inevitably take the focus away from the child. As Arthur et al. (2008, cited in Barblett and Maloney: 2010:17) state it is ‘critical to balance the focus on the future contribution of young children to society with recognition of what happens in their lives in the present’.

3.2.2. The image of children and childhood embedded in the curricula

It has been recognized that the worldviews about the children and childhood influence curricula (Papatheodrou, 2010, Penn, 2008). Childhood is a contended term used and defined differently across the ages and the cultures. Locke (1960) defines them as tabula rasa, equivalent to clean slates while Rousseau (1762) believed in the inherent goodness and innocent of children and argued that each child would survive and prosper if left alone on a proverbial island. Aries (1960) argued that there was no such thing as childhood in medieval period while developmental psychology considers children as miniature adults. However these contested notions of psychological and sociological perspectives gives rise to new sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1997) where childhood is considered as descriptor of a structural feature of society, not the just the phase of biological immaturity inherent in ages and stages theory (Piaget, 1967).

All these definitions of childhood paints the picture of children as somebody who is vulnerable, blank slates are in the process of growing are in need of needs and hence are need to be protected and educated painting a universal image of childhood at the receiving end of adults and ready to be shaped by them. While the EYFS (DfES, 2008, 2011) policy framework endorses the image of children as active agents in their own socialization who can engage in peer relationships yet the attendant guidance and children’s profiles paints a picture of evolutionary view of children who develop at the preset universal stages based on the development sequentialism (Kwon, 2002).

This view has implications for children and their peer relationships, as an evolutionary view of children might brand certain children as deficient and incompetent, if and when they don’t achieve according to the preset outcomes listed in an evolutionary manner (Vygotsky, 1978). This exclusive evolutionary focus discounts the importance of

ethological, sociological and cultural factors, which might influence children's ability to engage in and maintain peer relationships. Lens Taguchi (2010) argues that assuming universal notions and developing strategies with preset outcomes can only result in strategies designed to reduce the differences and complexities among children by bringing them to a mastery of basic skills and to allow them to assimilate well into the school system.

Rogoff (1998), therefore, question the universal notion of organizing childhood into discrete packages. As Smith and Taylor (2000:2) argue, children in western world were viewed as 'lesser adults progressing toward childhood'. Here Moss (2007) argues that constructions of children as knowledge producers and redemptive agents requiring shaping and processing by technicians doesn't go well with the constructions of the child as an active subject, citizen with rights and co-creator of knowledge, identity and values.

Alternatively, the image of children and childhood as envisioned in Krishnamurti (1953) entails an altogether different view as it recognizes the active and dynamic view of childhood where children engage in well-meaning relationships with others and learn from each other in the context of culture. This view coheres with the socio-cultural theoretical perspectives on mediated and collaborative learning and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which constructs children as competent social actors and citizens with rights and maintains that:

There has been a shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialization of the immature human being towards mature adult status. The Convention requires that children, including very young children, be respected as persons in their own right.

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006:2).

This active positioning of children with agency coheres with the Reggio Emilia's view of hundred languages and a citizen with rights and responsibilities (Malaguzzi, 1998).

Dahlberg et al (1999), argue for a postmodern analyses of early childhood education and have problematized the notion of the universal child. Under post-modernism, children are seen as cultural and relational agents where adults teach issues of equity and social justice and encourage children to act to change communities (Lim and Genishi, 2010).

3.2.3. The role of the educators embedded in the curricula

The role of educators as active mediators of children's peer relationships and as enforcers of relational pedagogy has been well recognized (Katz, 1997; Papatheodorou, 2010). However their role also has many challenges, as Siraj-Blatchford (1991: 21, cited in Moyles, 2002) contends, curriculum does not necessarily determine pedagogy - signifying the importance of practitioners personal attitudes and perceptions that transform the curricula and determine the way in which they establish relationships with children and their families.

This emphasis on educators' own perceptions and beliefs in determining the pedagogy of actual practice is reflected in the works of Moyles (2002) and Wenger (1998). Moyles (2002) maintains that though all the practitioners (in England) work within the Foundation Stage curriculum, how they interpret it varies as they respond to the particular needs of children, families and community with whom they work and inform the ways in which interactions occur. Wenger (1998) too argues that teacher's perspectives determine what counts for learning as well as how they support it and consider that their role is important to build community of learners. Papatheodorou (2010) further argues that educators have a capacity to transform the given curriculum and act as mediators.

However, the emphasis on transformation appears not so easy for educators given the challenges associated with a prescriptive curricula, with an instrumental focus which specifies not only what to teach but how to teach, with emphasis on pre-determined outcomes. The constricting circumstances and the simplification inherent in the instrumental, technocratic curriculum has been well recognized (Dahlberg, Moss and

Pence, 1999; Papatheodorou, 2008; Soler and Miller, 2003). Soler and Miller (2003) particularly identify a tension between the progressive ideals of many childhood educators and a centralized, instrumental, competency-based curriculum like EYFS curriculum. The OECD (2006: 17) questions this instrumental and narrow focus on what to teach or how to teach. It argues that governments should provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services: “once goals and program standards for early childhood services have been decided in the national framework documents, educators and services should have the autonomy to plan, and to choose or create curricula that they find appropriate”.

The SPEEL project too emphasized the dangers inherent in instrumental curricula with a narrow focus on technical competence and argued for a distinction between the technician and the reflective practitioner as ‘when technical competence ceases to involve reflection; the quality of teaching is likely to suffer’ (Day, 1999: 39 cited in Moyles et al, 2002:104). It particularly identified that successful and effective pedagogy includes the promotion of reflective practice encouraging critical evaluation of practice with regard to its appropriateness (Moyles et al., 2002).

Anning and Edwards (1999) and Kelly (1994) attribute this emphasis on technical practice as ultimately driven by economic needs and an emphasis on commercial competitiveness resulting in teacher autonomy being reduced (Ashew and Lodge, 2001). In contrast models of Te Whariki adopt ‘equitable educational opportunities and quality early childhood policies and practices’ (Carr and May, 2000: 53). To achieve this transformatory potential, an educator needs to play critical and facilitating roles. Dewey (1933: 40) argues that “A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth”.

Vygotsky and Lauria (1993) too, consider classroom as a social organization that is representative of the larger social community. But instead of the individual as agent for change in the social organization, it is the social organization and the larger social

community that is the agent for change in the individual. The purpose of the education is to mould children into the larger social structure so that they become productive members of the community. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO) recognizes the significance of educators in facilitating the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) by scaffolding Bruner (1986) and by organizing collaborative learning environments (Rogoff, 1998, 2003).

Educators' roles have been further explored from post-modern perspectives. Foucault (1980), for example, discusses 'regimes of truth' and explores how knowledge creates boundaries and possibilities. Based on this view, Ryan and Grieshaber (2010) contend that a postmodern orientation assumes that all knowledge in its use exercises power relationships and that even knowledge of culture, disability, gender, and class can limit understandings and hence educators need to open to diverse perspectives. This reflexivity on the part of the educators' has a power to transform the relationships.

Ryan and Grieshaber (2010) contend that the educators need to 'situate the knowledge' and be open to 'multiple readings' by 'engaging with images'. This coheres with Krishnamurti's, (1953), view to counter one 'regime of truth' by being open to a thousand possibilities and diverse view-points which allows for a 'hundred voices' (Malaguzzi, 1998) to be heard. This shift in educators' roles to be that of facilitators in accommodating a hundred voices requires a pedagogy that is different from a mere technician. For example, Hayes (2005) identifies this approach as a 'nurturing pedagogy' that is interactive, dynamic, ethical, educational and caring. Further, Denham and Weissberg (2004) contend that it is important that early childhood educators develop warm and trusting and responsive relationships with children. According to the authors, these relationships provide the child with an internal working model of positive social relationships. Wang et al, 2001 (cited in Moyles, 2002: 108) researched the impact of practitioners verbal and non-verbal scaffolding on the everyday classroom performances of children with Down's syndrome and have discovered that the use of body language and non-verbal behaviours such as hand gestures have enhanced interactions in both conscious and spontaneous ways.

Katz and McClellan (1991) argue for active intervention from the practitioners in fostering peer relationships. In addition, Barblett and Maloney (2010) contend that developing positive social and emotional growth in young children has always been a fundamental priority of early childhood practitioners, which coheres with Moyles's (2001) view that being passionate is the fundamental feature early childhood educators. Moyles et al (2002) argue that effective pedagogical practices are dependent upon head teachers/managers developing a strong overall management and organization ethos in which practitioners feel they are important, valued and have status.

Howes (2009) explored race, ethnicity and childcare quality by conducting case studies on 12 center-based child care programs concluded that care givers who report being motivated for the community see themselves as self-consciously involving themselves in their work. This proactive position seems to be an important factor, as Kemple and Hartle (1997) argue, that positive and satisfying peer relationships do not magically occur on their own. According to the authors, it requires the attention of the practitioner who knows how to provide appropriate support when needed. They state that educators can foster peer relationships by organizing the physical space, by attending to the emotional climate, by providing right materials and equipment, by schedules and routines and by planned activities and also by providing on the spot support. Lim and Genishi (2010) consider that educators respect for children's strengths, careful documentation of children's work and collaborative relationships with families cited as an exemplar of blending developmental and social cultural approaches embedded in both Piagetian and Vygotskian theories.

Thus, the way the very purpose of schools is envisioned in curricula frameworks has consequences for educator's roles in terms of their ability to foster peer relationships. For example, the early childhood services of Reggio Emilia insist on the importance of viewing public services as a collective responsibility and offer us an understanding of the school as first and foremost a public space and as a site for ethical and political practice – a place of encounter, interaction and connections among citizens in a community, a place where relationships combine a profound respect for otherness and difference with a deep sense of responsibility for the other, a place of profound interdependency (Moss, 2005; New, 2004).

In their work, the teachers of Reggio have struggled to realize the emancipatory potential of democracy, by giving each child possibilities to function as an active citizen and to have the possibility of a good life in a democratic community (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005: 10). The same view is inherent in Krishnamurti philosophy, which considers children as active citizens and schools as sites where principles of democracy are practiced on everyday basis while adhering to simple co-operative living without recourse to rewards and punishments (Krishnamurti, 1953).

This is also inherent in the ideas of Starting Strong which argues for a critical thinking about an educational discourse which combines a rhetoric of (individual) choice with a practice of standardization and about the relationship between uniformity and diversity, centralization and decentralization, individual and collective choice. The report's conclusions propose a 'national framework of entitlements, values and goals, including broad curricular guidelines; and strong decentralization, allowing space for local autonomy, interpretation and innovation – and, therefore, the practice of democracy'. (Moss, 2007:15).

3.2.4. The importance of environment as envisioned in the curricula frameworks

The power and primacy of environments is well recognized in the curricula (Kutnick, 2007; Sylva et al., 2004). Learning environments within the settings influences the quality of children's learning (Day, 1999) and play a role in children's academic and behavioural outcomes (Papatheodorou, 2002). Similarly Krishnamurti (1964: 151) signifies that the whole being is sensitive to the environment.

Your total being - body, mind, and heart - is sensitive to beauty and ugliness, to the donkey tied to a post, to the poverty and filth in this town, to laughter and tears, to everything about you. From this sensitivity for the whole of existence springs goodness, love... (Chapter 23)

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) supports the learning environment as beneficial to children and improves on their knowledge. This type of environment is

resourced with special activities to challenge children to learn and gain confidence to explore in their field of learning (DCSF, 2008). The EYFS lays stronger importance on the three key areas, which are most effective for children's healthy development. These areas are communication and language, physical and personal as well as social and emotional. For children to attain these qualities, they need a good learning environment.

The Reggio Emilia education philosophy shares a similar view to the EYFS approach indicating that, children learn better within their environment. According to Fraser and Gestwicki (2002), the environment is regarded as essential to children and motivating force in creating spaces for relations, opportunities, emotions and cognitive position that creates a sense of wellbeing and security. The Reggio Emilia approach creates an environment with detail to freedom, activities, organizational materials and aesthetics that children can easily understand and develop. This setting contributes a lot towards children growth and development (Fraser and Gestwicki, 2002). Gandini (1998) contends that physical environments shared activities; co-operation and conflict allow children to co-construct their knowledge of the world.

Kontos et al (2002) provide an eco-behavioral approach to understanding preschool environments by focusing on teacher interactions, classroom activities and social configuration of the ecology of the classroom. It gives a lot of importance to the social contexts of the early years ecology and concludes that it determines the teacher and peer interactions. Page, Strayer and Reid (2001) describe social cognition on the basis of social behavior derived from inter-personal experience. They have distinguished three components of social and moral thinking: procedural problem solving skills in social contexts; cognitive representation of events in terms perspectives of others and events; and internalization of pro -social thought including rules, regulations, values. They have discussed these constructions of social thought based on individual children's cognitive development and interaction with their social environment.

Tagore (1929) discusses the importance of and the positive experience of "subconscious learning" from the environment where children actively pick up the cues from it. According to him education should seek to develop sensitivity in a child

through a direct experience of nature when her/his consciousness is at its freshest level. He recognized early childhood as the most critical time for developing empathy and the ability to connect with one's surroundings (O' Connell, 2010).

The schools established by JK and Tagore actively endorse eco pedagogy and organize learning around the nature and outdoor activities in order to develop relational aspects as well as empathy and sensitivity in the children. JK explicitly states that 'If you establish a relationship with it [nature] then you have relationship with mankind... But if you have no relationship with the living things on this earth you may lose whatever relationship you have with humanity, with human beings (Krishnamurti, 1987, 25th February diary entry).

The importance of the environment is also recognized in the EYFS, which explicitly states that: It is essential that children are provided with safe and secure environments in which to interact and explore rich and diverse learning and development opportunities. Providers need to ensure that, as well as conducting a formal risk assessment, they constantly reappraise both the environments and activities to which children are being exposed and make necessary adjustments to secure their safety at all times (DCSF, 2007: 21).

Kernan (2011) also emphasized the significance of creating right environments and has suggested three ways for adults to support children's peer relationships and friendships. Firstly, by reiterating the importance of creating environments where children feel safe and secure to broaden their social circle, secondly for adults to model and provide opportunities for children to practice the skills and strategies of successful friends; thirdly by organizing the physical indoors and outdoors. Finch (1996) argues that physical environment, both indoors and outdoors, encourages positive growth and development for children through opportunities to explore and learn safe, clean, spacious, bright, welcoming, warm, and accessible environments for children and adults, including those with additional needs, should afford opportunities to rest and play.

Dewey (1939) contends that pupil's learning is not a static one-way process- and stressed the way in which the pupil constructs their learning environment, which impacts on their learning experiences. Dewey (1939 and 1916) considers that the social environment is truly educative in its effects in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing this his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit (cited in Rogoff, 2008: 2). EPPE (2003) emphasized good quality learning environment as an important criteria for effective pedagogy. However the physical setting, the relevant materials, how the materials are organized, the staff student ratios all have implications for peer relationships. The EPPE project further emphasized the importance of quality social and emotional environment where staff interacted warmly and responsively to children's needs and children make good progress there not only intellectually but also emotionally (Sylva et al., 2004).

Han and Kemple (2006) contend that teachers should provide opportunities for peer interactions during work activities and suggest that collaborative techniques will prove to be effective. Ortega et al, (2009) too argues for an active teacher intervention techniques to promote peer interaction and peer relationships. Conflict, disagreement and change are considered an integral part of the peer relationships dynamics (Degirmencioglu et al, 1998). And their roles in mediating conflict resonates with the studies of Edwards (1992), Bernat (1997) who emphasize on the roles educators can play by resolving conflicts and bringing in harmonious climate.

New (1999) has particularly emphasized the importance of inclusive physical, social and intellectual environments as they support the learning and development of all young children, including those of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as those with special needs which is further exemplified in the writings of Mallory (1998); New (1998a). New et al (2005) have argued for a risk rich curriculum in lines with Nordic and Reggio Emilia to enable new discoveries and new relationships which coheres with censure free pedagogy of the Indian setting which doesn't believe in rewards and punishments but children learning in an environment of freedom and responsibility but not about concerned about rewards and punishments. Pramling (1999) argues for a creation of

everyday environments where children have rights and can exercise their agency, which is important for children and their relationships with each other.

3.2.5. The place of families and communities in the curricula

Oden et al. (1993) conclude that peer relationships development as multi-contextual yet family focused signifying the central importance of families for children's development. EPPE project too point out to the importance of the quality home learning environment as more important for social and intellectual development of children than parental occupation, education or income. The key is what parents do is more important than who parents are (Sylva et al., 2004).

This emphasis on good and participatory relations with families and communities is also evident from the OECD (2006) study which proposes “a vision of early childhood services as a life space where educators and families work together to promote the well-being, participation and learning of young children”, and argues that this vision must be “based on the principle of democratic participation” (OECD, 2006: 220). ‘Learn about children in-order to teach them well’. Negotiated discussions with parents and community members will only be as successful as the teacher is knowledgeable about the children at the center of the conversation. Teacher knowledge must include information about children's lives outside the classroom.

By venturing out of the classroom teachers become more cognizant of the characteristics and possibilities in children's lives (New, 1994). Hence personal encounters with parents and family members make teachers more knowledge-able about diverse needs and requirements, abilities. Such engagement with parents and family members will help educators in a pluralistic society to understand other cultural frames of reference better (Ogbu, 1994 cited in New 1999). Te Whariki curriculum employs co-construction of learning stories acts as a ‘conscription device’ which can bring teachers, families, children together in sharing and valuing similar educational goals with emphasis upon participation (Cowie and Carr, 2009: 106). The ‘pregettazione’ in

Reggio Emilia exemplifies shared understandings and learning in collaborative contexts (New, 1990).

This image such as early childhood centers as “communities of learners” has much in common with the image proposed by Gunilla Dahlberg, Alan Pence and Peter Moss in their book ‘Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care’, as public forums in civil society in which children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance” (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007: 73). This image has been inspired by the thought and practice of Reggio Emilia’ which shares an ideological kinship with Krishnamurti’s philosophy, which also serves as a basis for alternative image of child and early childhood education.

This principle of democratic participation is key in JK curriculum that considers parents and families as copartners in the children’s learning experience. Such an educational environment is not only healthy for younger children it is also conducive to the social construction of new knowledge as adults learn from one another. This extension of adult relationships builds upon the theoretical principles of diversity that Dewey (1926) advocated for and is now seen as essential in any democratic community of learners (Garrison, 1995). The EYFS (DCSF, 2008, National Strategies, 2009d) also recognizes the importance of engaging with families and advises regular exchange of information concerning each child including parental involvement in record keeping. This engagement with parents and families is considered important as it is recognized that often parents have different cultural beliefs and values about their young children’s peer relationships.

Aukrust et al (2003) study of parents of preschool and in four communities found strong variations in parental descriptions of their own child’s early friendships and their views about importance of peer relationships. They found how parents prioritize Oslo (Norway) parents favored the value of close, long-term continuity with peers and teachers. Lincoln, Nebraska (US), parents had a more academic than relational focus. Korean (Seoul) parents were oriented to education as a means to economic success and favored their children having quality learning experiences while getting along with

other peers in a large classroom. Turkish parents (Ankara) were low in reporting their child's friendships at Pre School but valued parent-teacher and child –child relationships. This cross-cultural study sums up how diverse parents from diverse cultures value their children's peer relationships or not. This shared understandings are deemed essential as Rogoff (1995:159) argues that 'People, by themselves and with companions, puzzle out how to manage a new situation on the basis of their own and their shared history, to reach out their own and their shared goals through subtle and explicit communication indicating the 'kind' of a situation in which they are involved'.

3.3. Chapter summary

This chapter looked at the policy and philosophical contexts of the curriculum frameworks relating to the research study; EYFS in England and the emergent curriculum (followed by Indian case study setting) based on the ideas of Krishnamurti (1953) and Tagore (1929). A few common themes were identified in terms of purpose of the curriculum, image of children and childhood enshrined in the frameworks, the role of educators and the schools according to the curriculum; the importance of environment and the place of families and communities as reflected in the curricular contexts. These themes were explored critically by reviewing in terms of similarities and variations inherent in each curriculum and were further discussed in relation to extant literature. Understanding these cultural contexts in which educators' enact their practice is necessary to explicate the relationship between what practitioners say, do and their overall contexts as embedded members of cultural communities.

Part Three: Methodology and methods

In this part of the thesis, I will explain the research process by presenting my ontological and epistemological perspectives; present a theoretical rationale for the methodology adopted and elucidate the qualitative methodology and the case study approach. I will then provide a detailed description of case study settings from both India and England; their characteristics and present subjects of the study. I will also elucidate on the research methods adopted, namely participant observation and semi-structured interviews, as part of case study approach. I will also explain the data analysis process, ethical considerations involved and further comment on the role of the researcher and the trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and methods

4.1. Introduction

Bassey (1999: 39) defines educational research as: “systematic, critical and self-critical inquiry, which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom about the experience and nurture of personal and social development”, whose aim is “to inform educational judgments and decisions in order to improve educational action”.

This coheres with my study’s aim which is to inform educational decisions and contribute to cross-cultural understandings by critically exploring and explaining the roles of early childhood educators in fostering peer relationships by focusing on what they perceive about peer relations, how they practice and under what contexts.

For this the overall research question - *How do early childhood educators perceive and practice peer relationships in their cultural contexts* -has been divided into three-sub - questions.

1. What are the perceptions of early childhood educators on the importance of peer relationships?
2. How do those perceptions translate into practice?
3. Under what cultural contexts?

By focusing on two broad traditions of early childhood education, pre-primary and socio-cultural (Dahlberg et al, 1999; OECD, 2010) and by selecting two diverse cross cultural contexts: Indian case study setting (emergent curriculum and socio-pedagogy focus) and English context (prescriptive curriculum and pre-primary focus) the study particularly aims to contribute to the cross-cultural understanding of educators roles by focusing on the similarities and differences (Rogoff, 2003).

By adopting socio-cultural theoretical perspectives and by framing the data analysis from the conceptual lens of Rogoff's (2003) Three Plane Analysis, this innovative study aims to extend theoretical base in the field of early childhood education especially in relation to relational pedagogy and educators' roles. At the practice level, the present study becomes relevant for educators and policy-makers with an intention to inform and thereby contribute to improved educational policy and practice decisions across the cross-cultural settings.

In order to explain the present study in a systematic way offering a critical and a self-critical inquiry, I will now explain the research process in a way that is both reflective and reflexive. In the first part of the chapter, I provide a rationale for the choice of qualitative research methodology, with particular reference to the use of case study approach; spell out ethical issues and also present my perspectives on accessing entry and gaining acceptance into the English setting as an outsider; in terms of nationality, language and culture and as an insider perspective in Indian setting. In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on the research design; research participants, selection criteria, research settings both in India and England, methods of data collection and will explain the strategy for and the actual process of data analysis.

4.2. Theoretical rationale for the methodological position

Kuhn (1972) put forward the notion of a research paradigm as an overarching framework, which consist of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs, which reduce the complexity of research and guide the thinking and activity of a community of scholars. Ontology is defined as "claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exist, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other" and epistemology is defined as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Mack, 2010: 5).

Grix (2004: 68 cited in Mack (2010: 5) contends that it is important to be clear about one's ontological and epistemological position because:

‘Setting out clearly the relationship between what a researcher thinks can be researched (her ontological position) linking it to what we can know about it (her epistemological position) and how to go about acquiring it (her methodological approach), you can begin to comprehend the impact your ontological position can have on what and how you decide to study’.

Hence one’s ontological and epistemological position determines one’s methodological position. Together both the ontological and epistemological assumptions make up a paradigm and the present research employs an interpretivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) whose main tenet is that research can never be objectively observed from the outside rather it must be observed inside through the direct experiences of the people (Mack, 2010) with others within a shared environment.

Interpretivist researchers adopt a relativist ontology claiming that there is no single way of perceiving the world; so paving the way for multiple realities and multiple interpretations. This relativist epistemology argues for a strong connection between the known and the knower as the known and knower interact and shape each other (Sewell, 2006). This coheres with the social constructivist philosophical approaches which share the notion that reality is a social construction and that lived experiences need to be understood from the perspective of the observed which indicates a convergence with a sociocultural world (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003) and view that knowledge is co-constructed in dialogue and in other forms of collaborative participation (Sewell, 2006). These Socio-Cultural perspectives which forms the basis for theoretical framework informing the study cohere with my motivation to understand the educators’ roles in fostering peer relationships by exploring their lived realities and by co-constructing the knowledge (Daniels, 2001) in a shared environment.

4.3. Qualitative methodology

An interpretative ontological and epistemological position calls for a methodology that enables the researcher to define and make sense of issues from a lived experience, which allows for a negotiated view of meaning and co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). The aim of the qualitative research, which is to

understand the world of participants by situating the researchers with all their values and assumptions in that world helps in understanding and interpretation by using a range of methods (Sewell, 2006) is best suited to the present study whose aim is to explore the role of early childhood educators in fostering peer relationships based in diverse cross-cultural contexts.

Given the cross-cultural nature of the present study (and the socio-cultural nature of learning) involving case studies from one Pre-primary tradition (England case study) and one social pedagogy tradition (Indian setting) the insights from socio-cultural theories that the individual cannot be meaningfully separated from the social and cultural contexts becomes highly relevant for the study.

Socio-cultural theorists (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1988; Rogoff, 2003) emphasis on understanding the socio, cultural contexts to explore educators' roles in fostering peer relationships calls for a researcher position that is active and methodology that is qualitative so as to facilitate the understanding of early childhood practitioners' *perceptions*, to explore their *practice*, and to appreciate the socio cultural *contexts* under which their roles are refined and defined. As Edwards (2004: 86) rightly contends "contexts shapes and is shaped by those who participate in it".

This cultural and contextual understanding is significant for the present study, as Rogoff and Chavajay (1995: 866) argue:

'To understand individual thinking, one needs to understand the social and cultural–historical contexts in which it is used. Researchers cannot just look at individual thinking in a vacuum, as though individual thinking is separate from the kinds of activities in which people engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are part of'.

Hence in order to explore and find answers to the proposed research question, qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for the study. Creswell (1998:15) defines

qualitative study as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. Miles and Huberman (1994) further contend that qualitative inquiry is rich and holistic with its strong potential for revealing complexity nested in a real context. Its focus on searching for patterns and meanings that emerge from the real life context rather than for a specific body of knowledge is useful for the given that the research is carried out in natural settings and explored the views of participants to construct a holistic picture to answer the research question.

As the goal of qualitative research is “to reveal and disclose the world as felt, lived and experienced” (Denzin, 1983: 22) by those experiencing it, this approach is well suited to explore the beliefs, values and attitudes of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations and to analyze how it influences their actual way of fostering peer relations in their real life classroom situations embedded in socio cultural contexts.

The interests of the qualitative inquiry lie very much in rich and accurate descriptions of thoughts and actions of the researched as well as in interpretations of their meanings. This active position of the researcher in shaping and co-constructing and drawing meaningful interpretations from the experienced reality is consistent with the ontological and epistemological position guiding the qualitative research (Denzin, 1983).

4.4. An ethnographic approach

The key principles of the ethnographic approach are the researcher collecting data through spending time in everyday environments to understand the socio cultural contexts and by exploring participants’ perceptions of their social environments (Walford, 2001; Whitehead, 2005) is quite appropriate to this qualitative study. Whitehead (2005) argues that in terms of both ontological and epistemological perspectives, ethnographic approach tends to share the idea of the qualitative research in that what they are studying varies based on environmental factors, and their findings as an inter-subjective product of the researcher and the research. This ethnographic approach also coheres with the socio-cultural theoretical understandings informing the

study in that ethnography also the study of the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems (ibid, pg.4).

The present study of understanding practitioners' roles in fostering peer relationships by exploring their *perceptions*, their *practice* and the overall socio cultural *contexts* under which their roles are defined is consistent with the ethnographic principles of holistic approach to the study of cultural contexts. By venturing into the everyday lives of the participants (Woods, 1996) through participant observations and semi-structured interviews at both the case study contexts, I believe, I have come close to understanding their lived realities in relation to the fostering of peer relationships embedded in specific cultural contexts and contextual realities.

4.5. Case study as a strategy

The study adopts a case study approach as it is recognized for its usefulness as means of investigating an area of concern in detail in order to draw conclusions (Wolcott, 2005) as the research questions asked at the outset demands the same, in terms of holistic understanding of educators' roles.

Albeit the general agreement over the perceived usefulness of a case study approach, there are many and varied definitions on what constitutes a case study approach (Merriam, 1998, Yin, 2003). Stake (1995: 2) describes case study as 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' which is the case with the present study. Yin (1994: 13) wrote that case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. He further adds that case study relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis which is the case with the present study in terms of adopting three plane analysis (Rogoff, 2003).

Lincoln and Guba (1985:360) argue that, while the literature is replete with diverse definitions of case studies, the distinguishing feature of case study is the belief that human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose collection of traits. As a consequence of this belief, case study researchers hold that to understand a case, to explain why things happen as they do, and to generalize or predict from a single example requires an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and of the patterns that emerge (Sturman 1994:61).

This is particularly appropriate to the present research as I am interested in understanding the case and explaining why educators perceive the way they do, how these *perceptions* translate into *practice* and under what *contexts*; thus gaining in-depth understanding of interdependent parts to facilitate a holistic understanding of educators' roles. In socio-cultural theoretical terms it investigates the interdependent parts of the whole i.e. individuals and their *perceptions*; their actual *practice* at the inter-personal level and the cultural *contexts*. Rogoff (2003) talks of personal, inter-personal and cultural planes of analysis with a focus on any one of these having the other planes in the background to ensure the characteristic wholeness or integrity. Understanding the mutuality of planes is essential as what a person said or did is always in relation to the overall contexts. Yin (2003) especially recommends case study when the research is carried out in real life situations and the researcher has little control over the events that are naturally occurring or unfolding, as is the case with the present study.

However, not all the case studies are same. Stenhouse (1985 cited in Bassey, 1999) identified four broad styles of case study: Ethnographic, Evaluative, Educational and Action research case studies. Of ethnographic case study, as is the case with the present study; Stenhouse (1985) states that a single case is studied in depth by participant observation supported by interview after the manner of cultural or social anthropology. Of ethnographic case study it may be said that it calls into question the apparent understandings of the actors in the case and offers, from the outsider's standpoint, explanations that emphasize causal or structural patterns of which participants in the case are unaware, as with my English case study setting where I was considered an outsider given my cultural background. With the Indian case study it can be considered

as an educational case study, where I was viewed very much an insider given my previous association with the school.

Stake (2005:446) differentiates intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies based on the purpose of the study. At the individual level, an intrinsic case study is a study of one specific case and is undertaken when it is the case itself and its particularities that are of interest, which is the case with the Indian case study where the intrinsic interest of providing an alternative view point is the main motive for the selection rather than the mainstream setting where the research is already conclusive about educators' roles vis-à-vis peer relationships as evidenced from a number of research studies (Woodhead et al., 2010; NCERT, 2007).

An instrumental case study chooses the case because it represents a general issue to be studied and serves as a springboard to understand a particular context. The English case study setting is chosen as an instrument to understand and to explore the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations. For the study any reception class in England can be chosen for the study, as it represents a general issue to be studied i.e. exploring educators' roles in restrictive contexts i.e. reception classes (BERA, Early Years SIG, 2003; Broadhead, 2004; Sylva et al., 2010; Dahlberg et al., 2009).

The present study can best be described as a collective case study (Stake, 2005) or at best the multi-site case study that is often used interchangeably with multiple case studies, comparative case studies. According to Bishop (2010), a multi-site case study investigates a defined, contemporary phenomenon that is common to two or more real-world or naturalistic settings which is the case with the present study. The benefits of multi case study lie in its ability to illuminate the experiences, implications, or effects of a phenomenon in more than one setting, because of which wider understandings about a phenomenon can emerge. Typically, the research design in a multi-site case study is the same across all sites. This means the same unit(s) of analysis or phenomenon is studied in light of the same key research questions. In addition, the same or similar data collection, analysis, and reporting approaches are employed across the sites, which is the case with the present study.

The multi-site case studies have a lot to contribute and have become increasingly significant in cross cultural comparative studies due to its ability to analyze the influence of culture and illuminate the expectations on similarities and differences in educational practices (Alexander, 2001; Audet and Anboise, 2001, Rogoff, 2003, Rogoff, 2006). Rogoff (2003) particularly asks cross-cultural researchers to look for similarities and differences in practices, which can further illuminate the contexts of culture. The present case study strategy takes the cognizance of the stand when it explored the cross-cultural contexts of Indian (social pedagogy) and English case study (pre-primary) settings to illuminate educators' roles nested in specific socio- cultural realities.

This cross -cultural focus particularly helps in illuminating similarities and differences with a potential to generalize from the cultural standpoint. However, it is argued that a case study approach does not aspire for universal validity and generalizability in a positivist sense (Guba and Lincoln, 1981); Lincoln and Guba, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (2002: 32) also suggest that “it is far easier and more epistemologically sound, simply to give up on the idea of generalization. If the generalizations are to be accepted, they should be as indeterminate, relative and time and context bound” for which the study aspires to be in both the contexts of India (social pedagogy) and England (pre-primary). However, the findings can be generalized to the extent of their socio-cultural contexts viz. India (social pedagogy) and England (pre-primary).

4.6. Ethical considerations

The current research project aims to address the issue of ethics by conforming to standards of universal ethical principles (Hartas, 2010), which include non-maleficence, fidelity, beneficence and justice. The principle of *non-maleficence* requires the researcher to avoid harm. And the present research has taken all the necessary steps and precautions so as to avoid harm to the participants.

The principle of *fidelity* stresses the need for accuracy, for example, of measures and their interpretations. The present research conforms to this principle by adopting a sound methodology in cognizance with its theoretical framework.

The principle of *beneficence* infers that the researcher should not only refrain from doing harm but also actively seek to do good for which the research actively stands for. In the Indian context, there are two extreme scenarios where both the public and provision of early childhood education and care are actively engaged in the down ward extension of primary schooling with lot of emphasis on academic excellence with little or no space or opportunities for play, endangering the children's opportunities for play and consequently curtailing children's peer relations.

In this context, my selection of a school (in the Indian context) dedicated to child-centered curriculum with collaborative learning curriculum offers new insights into the teacher's role in fostering peer relations in their settings. These insights can be valuable to promote understanding on the part of academicians, practitioners and policy makers. Thus apart from benefiting teachers in understanding and evaluating their role in fostering peer relations this research project has potential to make an active contribution to the greater good by going beyond the settings with the opportunities for replication and increased understanding once findings are disseminated amongst policy makers and within the wider early childhood community.

This, in a way, paves the way for *justice* in a wider context by creating increased awareness and adherence to sound principles of transformative curriculum and relational pedagogy, which the researcher trying to understand through the proposed research. By opting for a cross-cultural study, involving one setting each from India and England, the study contributes to the cross-cultural understanding by illuminating the two cultural contexts viz. pre-primary (England case study) and social pedagogy (Indian case study). It further refutes the notions of universal childhood and enhances the understandings of cross-cultural childhoods and varied ways of fostering peer relations in different cultural contexts with implications for educators' roles.

In the present study, as with all research, there are ethical considerations that need to be addressed which include the responsibility of the researcher to protect the participants, developing trust with participants and promoting the integrity of the research (Creswell, 2009). In line with these concerns, the major considerations in the present research are;

avoiding harm to the participants (see above), respecting privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent is at the heart of ethical research and incorporates issues of clarity of purpose, trust, honesty and integrity. I have aimed to address all these ethical issues in the research ethics application that was approved by the research Ethics Subcommittee of, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom. In this application, I explained the aims and rationale for the study and the issue of informed consent and also enclosed the forms for consent and the participant information sheet (see Appendix A, B, C and D).

As a way of ensuring participants autonomy I have also made it clear in my consent form that the participation in this project is voluntary and that the participants are free to withdraw at any time without citing any reasons. In addition to this I have also applied for and secured the approval from Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) as my indirect subjects for my study are under eighteen years of age. I have also explained to the participants in my research project that the all their information, views expressed will be kept anonymous and that the full confidentiality will be maintained and respected. Having explained and explored the ethical considerations the discussion now moves to the case study settings.

4.7. Case study settings

Empirical setting is defined as a localized region of the empirical field (Brown, 1998). It is a localized region of the field of social relations, cultural practices and cognitive processes. In order to gain understanding of the setting in terms of social relations, cultural practices and cognitive practices I have chosen two settings one from India (Red setting) and one from England (Green setting).

Case study setting: England

In England, early years care and education is offered in a variety of forms, which include: pre-school play groups; not-for-profit centers; state nursery schools; and school nursery and reception classes (Luff, 2010). For this study, a reception class was chosen, as was explained in the rationale at the outset (introductory chapter, page. 20).

I have chosen one community primary school in the East of England which has early years (Reception class) provision in its setting. As noted in 4.5 of this Chapter earlier (on case study methodology), any Reception class in England can be chosen and would serve the purpose in order to explore the broad issue to be studied i.e. the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relationships given the concern being Reception classes as restrictive contexts and the dichotomy between the policy and practice of EYFS in the Reception classes.

The profile of the case study setting

This particular case study, Green is located in Chelmsford, which was granted city status in 2012. It is the county town Essex in East of England. According to the 2011 census, Chelmsford is the third largest district in Essex in terms of population with 168,310 people with percentage of male 49.3% and female 50.7%. The population of 0-14 year olds is 17.4% of total population. According to the census, of the 134,974 people for whom data was collected, 50% were married or registered in a same-sex civil partnership, almost a quarter were single and 12% were separated but still legally married. 6% were divorced but not remarried (Gov.UK, 2011).

As per the census, a married or same-sex civil partnership couple occupied 20% of households in Chelmsford with dependent children. In 2011, there were on average 2.4 persons per household and this figure was equal to the East of England and England average. According to the same census, 11% of Chelmsford's economically active population were working in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations. 20% were working in lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations and 13% in intermediate occupations with many travelling to London for work. 90.3% of the population in Chelmsford in 2011 were white and from the United Kingdom (ibid).

The particular case study setting is a community primary school with a vision that strives for an inclusive environment where happiness and security are a priority for

everyone at the school. The school believes in the principle of *Working together in an honest and respectful partnership is the way forward* and emphasizes the importance of personal, social and emotional development of the children (school website).

According to 2011, Ofsted inspection report (Ofsted, 2011) (which made the evaluation of the Green setting as ‘good’), the school has 342 pupils on roll aged between 4-11. The school is a mixed school, having 51.3% girls and 48.7% boys. This school has a 22:1 teacher/pupil ratio, which is certainly high nationally, and means that class sizes are very large. The schools early years provision, which has 60 children on its roll in two sections, is listed as ‘good’ too.

Regarding early years provision, the Ofsted particularly mentioned the good balance between child-initiated and adult led activities as providing good opportunities for pupils to develop independence. It made note of how start of the day is very positive and children enter the two Reception classes happily and ready to learn. It further commented about the availability of the outside areas, which offer great potential but are yet to be fully developed as an outdoor classroom. This pertains to the fact that the school was completely refurbished in 2002-2003 with a budget of £3 million and constructed seven new class bases, two halls, music room and further enhanced the outdoor space with its wildlife area (school website).

Accessing the setting

Access to the research site is the first issue involved in data collection for a qualitative study (Burgess, 1985). Getting access might prove difficult especially if the teachers are busy with the preparation for Ofsted inspection, as was the case with the early years teachers at the proposed research site. The fact that I come from a different cultural and institutional background also proved to be a challenging issue when gaining entry into the setting. All these factors necessitated the need for the researcher first to negotiate entry into the setting, gaining acceptance both from the pupils and from the teachers, and building relationships. In this part of the chapter I will elaborate further on these issues.

I first went to the research site; Green setting to seek admission to my two daughters who are at the primary school age sometime in September 2010. The Head Teacher, Mr. Wilson cordially invited us introduced us to the various aspects of school. And when I introduced myself as the doctoral researcher in the field of education at Anglia Ruskin University, he appreciated the fact. While introducing my daughters as the new students at the school (to one of the teachers who was present there) he remarked with reference to me, 'their mom is a researcher and is going to do a lot of research about our school'. This I have taken as a welcoming sign and, after a couple of visits in my capacity as a parent, (and after gaining enough confidence from the Head Teacher, I assume) I have requested Mr. Wilson of my intention to do research with the early years once I get the ethics approval. He had readily accepted the proposal and I was glad that I have a research site ready to commence my research and that the major hurdle for my research was overcome successfully.

Habitation Phase-understanding the culture

Given that I am from an altogether different cultural and institutional background, I felt it was imperative to spend some time in the setting to understand the culture and composition of the setting, to enable relationships to develop, and to gain acceptance from the staff, as well as children. This can be termed as a 'Habitation period' (Stake, 2010) which was used by me was to habituate participants to the presence of the researcher. This involved entering the setting a number of times before the collection of data begins. In this way participants become accustomed to my presence around. Although their behavior was initially be affected by the presence of an outsider, it was gradually settled down into customary forms once I became familiar to the participants and to the children in the setting.

I have utilized my initial visits to habituate myself to the setting and to the people over there. It enabled me to gain familiarity with the setting, understand the structure of the day, building relationships and to gain acceptance from the teachers. It also enabled me to reflect deeply on my stance as a non-participant observer, feasibility and appropriateness of that particular stance. It allowed me to modify my methods and gain control and confidence for my work. Since qualitative methodology requires researchers to understand participants' experiences through their lived realities, it is

crucial for me to establish rapport with the participants to understand their viewpoints and appreciate the contexts under which they enact their roles. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) particularly suggest that the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint, rather than superimpose his or her world of academia and preconceptions upon them.

Case study setting: India

As was explained in the introductory chapter, the current pedagogical practices in both public and private provisions are pre-primary in focus with virtual absence of play activities thus endangering children's peer relationships and their social and emotional development as evidenced in studies by NCERT (2008); Swaminathan (2006, Woodhead et al., (2009). Given the two extreme scenarios emphasizing the pre-primary tradition; a choice has been made to conduct the research at an independent school based on the philosophy of Krishnamurthi (1953) whose emphasis is on holistic development and socio-cultural aspects of learning in early years in contrast to mainstream ECE initiatives.

The present setting, Red, falls into this special category as it was started as a reaction and response to address some of the maladies of public and private initiatives and is specially based on the transformative philosophy of Krishnamurti (1953) and Tagore (1929) which in a way shares a philosophical kinship with the Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy. However, it is not to be confused with Rishi Valley School, which was directly founded by JK himself from the same state. Red setting has come into existence in 1983 when several educators concerned with the excessive competition entrenched in mainstream education come together to start an educational institution based on the ideals of cooperation, freedom of mind and joyful learning. It considers holistic development of the child as a society's vital concern and argues that schools should take this responsibility. It considers every child as having unique capacities for creative impulses, exploring imaginatively through live experience (school website).

Profile of the case study setting

The Indian case study setting, Red (pseudonym) is located in the outskirts of Vijayawada city of Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh (AP), India. According to 2011 census, the population of Krishna District is 45.17 lakhs (2011 Census), making it the 34th largest in India and 4th in AP. Krishna has a gender ratio of 997 women for 1000 males and a literacy rate of 74.37 percent. The female child sex ratio in the 0-6 age group children in Krishna district is lower than district average of 953 and even lower than the State average of 940 (gov.in, 2011). Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in this district while business and industry takes precedence in cities. According to the IIPS statewide survey, the average household size is 3.9 to an average Indian size of 4.8. The percentage of widowed/divorced or separated individuals in Andhra Pradesh is at 8.2% with national average of 8.8% (govt.in, 2011).

As was mentioned earlier, the setting was established in 1983 by a group of concerned academic intellectuals determined to provide an alternative education model that is child centered. This is an independent school (run by fees from students and community donations) free from government control and monitoring. However in 2000, the school attained ICSE board affiliation for higher classes. It is to be noted that the school charges high fees (necessitated to maintain its independence from the state and to ensure quality provision) in comparison to both public and private provision which means that access is limited to mostly well off sections of the community. But the school exercises equity in other matters, such as admission of children with special needs and maintains equitable gender ratios in enrollment (school website).

Here the medium of education from early years to primary is the children's mother tongue (Telugu). The children are introduced early to English as a language, transitioning later to the medium of instruction. Punishment of any form is non-existent nor are rewards. The early years section is called Bommarillu (translates as toy house) and the children between ages 3-5 are grouped together to accrue benefits from mixed age groupings. The early years community of (60 children with equal gender ratio) is divided into four sub groups viz. Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow. There are two wings one is Telugu environment and the other English environment and each wing has two Telugu teachers and two English teachers each. The curriculum actively envisions

relational pedagogy, which prioritizes children's relations to everyone around, to the community and to nature itself in an atmosphere of complete freedom. Children spend a lot of time outdoors not only for playing but for learning activities as well. Children (in early years) alternate between indoors and outdoors every 40 minutes and learning activities are framed for outdoor learning including nature walks and gardening activities. Practitioners have complete autonomy in designing and modifying teaching and learning activities so as to facilitate the fluidity of learning processes and accommodate student interests. This also links to the JK's and Tagore's influence and insistence on emergent curricula that evolve organically (in opposition to a factory model) and appreciating nature as the teacher, underscoring eco-pedagogy. It is to be noted that everyone at the school is considered an educator by virtue of their ability to influence the environment (including kitchen staff) and are regularly oriented to JK philosophy to strive for the transformative potential of teaching and learning and behaving.

Insider perspectives

The issue of negotiating access and then habituating to the context posed a small problem for me in the Indian context due to the fact that I was considered as an insider, having worked there as a teacher from 2000-2002, and also for the fact that I hail from the same place and so share the same cultural affinity. The very reason I have chosen this project has stemmed from this association with school, which has influenced me immensely (in post-modernist terms) about the whole purpose of education, notions of learning and the roles of teachers and the ideas about children and childhood. In fact, gaining employment at this setting is an altogether different (and difficult) process in itself as it requires a lot of 'unlearning' on part of the teachers (educators) which is drastically different from the mainstream notions of what the school is for, the purpose of learning, the attitude and aptitude to be a teacher, and the accepting children as active individuals with equal respect and responsibilities and redefining the activity of teaching as something that both the teachers and student partake in doing things together. This 'deconstruction' of mainstream ideas and attitudes itself transforms the teacher as much as the student. This thorough grounding in Krishnamurti's transformative philosophy (among many others), which is considered revolutionary to

an otherwise evolutionary approach to learning in India, already prepared me to an altogether different context of studying teachers' roles in fostering peer relations.

4.8. The Research Population

Bryman (2008) defines the research population as all the people who could potentially be informants for the study. For this study this included any or every early childhood professional who works in a Reception class setting in England and, in India, any early childhood professional who works in the age range of 4-5 year olds in any school or nursery. Generally there is a limit to the amount and the nature of information that one could gather in terms of both subjects and situations. The relationship between setting and field and between information actually gathered and information potentially available is concerned with sampling procedures.

Setting	Participant	Qualifications	Age	Experience
England	FG	B.A	55	30 yrs.
	HI	B.A	48	25 yrs.
	RS	NVQ	35	10 yrs.
	LM	NVQ	40	20 yrs.
India	VI	B.A (English)	29	4 yrs.
	RE	M.A (English)	36	8 yrs.
	SU	B.A, B.Ed.	33	1 yr.
	CH	B.A	30	3 yrs.

Table 4.1. List of main participants in the study.

For this investigation, from the group of four potential informants at the proposed early years setting, all the four were chosen using purposeful selection of informants (Rossman and Rallis, 2003) who met the criteria of research population. For the Indian setting, I have used intrinsic sampling (Stake, 1995) as I have decided to conduct research at a philosophically different site with an intrinsic purpose of providing an example. Hence all the four potential early childhood professionals from the Red setting in India, which is based on Jiddu Krishnamurti and Tagore's philosophy (among others), have been selected for the study (Table 4.1).

4.9. Data Collection Methods

Case study allows for rich and thick description (Holliday, 2002). In order to arrive at thick description 'the researcher will need to consider the many facets which make up its full social complexity. Data must there be collected to reveal all of these aspects. Indeed this is the purpose of data collection' (Holliday, 2002: 79). Case study methodology allows for various data collection methods, including observation and interviews in order to capture the complexity and the present study employs these two research methods. In this section I will describe in detail each method; the justification for choosing the respective method, specific advantages and inherent limitations associated with them. In addition, I will explain how and for what purpose each method has been chosen and the process of data collection pertaining to each method and the strategy for and the process of data analysis.

Participant Observation

One of the important methods of data collection in case study research is observation (Cohen et al., 2007; Stake, 1995). Robson (2002:374) says 'what people do might differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check; observation also enables a researcher to look afresh at everyday behavior that otherwise might be taken for granted, expected or go unnoticed' and provides clear insights into the lived realities of the participants.

The socio-cultural theoretical perspectives emphasize on shared understandings and co-construction of meaning making (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003). Observation allows

for the same by allowing the researcher to capture and record events as they happen in a natural setting. Moyles (2002) argues that observational data are sensitive to contexts and demonstrate strong ecological validity unlike the positivist methods. It allows for researcher to build a complete picture and hence better understanding of a given situation (Cohen et al. 2007) to make qualitative judgments based on rich description and shared understanding.

For my research I have carried out participant observations for the whole spring and summer term for three full days a week in 2011 (approximately 72 days including habituation phase in England and for 5 full days each week for four weeks in the month of July and August, 2011 (a total of 20 days) in India. Habituating myself to the study site and to get acceptance from the participants was necessitated due to my position as an outsider from a different country and culture, in England, whereas in the Indian setting I was readily accepted as an insider having worked there for a few years before (as a teacher from 2000-2002) and also for the reason that I come from the same place. In both the cases, participant observations were carried in order to facilitate the direct experiencing of participants' lived realities.

While observing, I have chosen semi-structured observations, while the kind of observations available to researchers might range from unstructured to structured and responsive to pre-ordinate. A highly structured observation is one where the researcher knows in advance what he is looking for and will have its observation categories worked out in advance. A semi-structured observation will have an agenda and look for illumination of these issues in a far less systematic way. And unstructured observation will have to go into a situation and observe before deciding on its significance to the study in question (Cohen, et. al., 2007). The present study opted for semi-structured in its observations as I was actively looking for the illumination of certain issues like the participants' *perceptions*, their *practice* and the cultural *contexts* under which they enact their roles with regard to peer relationships.

Traditionally, however, observation has been characterized as non-interventionist where researchers do not seek to manipulate the situation or subjects, they do not pose

questions for the subjects, nor do they deliberately create ‘new provocations’ (Adler and Adler, 1994: 378 cited in Cohen, 2007). Still the interviewer is an integral part of the investigation (Jacob, 1988). According to Le Compte and Pressle (1993), there are four main forms of observation in educational research, based on the degree of researcher’s participation in the activity. They range from the complete Participant observer, the Participant as an Observer, the Observer as Participant and to the Complete Observer Participant. My role was that of Observer as Participant in which my position, as observer and participant, was clearly communicated to the participants of the study where I have an opportunity to participate in the daily routine at a superficial level still providing me an opportunity to observe the daily routine fluidly (Adler and Adler, 1998).

However despite specific advantages and inherent limitations associated with each type of observation method, as Foster (1996) suggests the choice should be made depending upon the purpose of the study informed by the appropriate research methodology. Hence in tune with purpose of the research and the ethos of Socio Cultural theory, I have chosen my position as observer as participant. Participant observations provided me reality check and enabled me to triangulate the data by corroborating with the data gathered from interviews with observational data.

While the advantages of observations are well recognized (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2008) there are certain challenges and limitations inherent with this method as an effective research tool (Sadler, 2002; Bryman, 2008) where the partial nature of observations and the potential bias in recording might result in lack of rigor. I have chosen interview method to mitigate and address the limitations associated with observation method and to provide methodological triangulation where I got an opportunity to corroborate and crosscheck what they have said in interviews to what they did through my observations.

Semi-structured interviews

After spending sustained amount of time observing practitioners' daily routines and their ways and means in facilitating peer relationships, I have conducted interviews with them to delve deeper into their perceptions and to corroborate with my observations towards the end of my time at both the settings. Interview is referred to as a 'uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects in everyday world' (Kvale, 2007: 11) who remarks an interview, as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data. Cohen et al (2007) argue that interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their point of view, which helps in co-construction of knowledge. Stake (1995:64) suggests that "interview is the main road to multiple realities", allowing each person to share their unique experiences.

To ensure that participants share their experiences freely; it is suggested that the interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased which I tried to be while conducting interviews. The idea should be to put the respondents at ease, so that he will talk freely and fully. Kitwood (1997, cited in Cohen, 2007) enumerates three conceptions of an interview. The first conception is that of a potential means of pure information transfer. He explains that 'if the interviewer does his job well (establishes rapport, asks questions in an acceptable manner, etc.) and if the respondent is sincere and well motivated accurate data may be obtained.

A second conception of the interview is that of inevitable transactional bias which needs to be recognized and controlled. To this end, Kitwood (1997) explains that each participant in an interview will define the situation in a particular way, which can be handled by building controls into the research design. I have aspired to in terms of conducting participant observations along with semi-structured interviews.

The third conception of interview sees it as an encounter necessarily sharing many of the features of life. Kitwood (1997, cited in Cohen 2007) suggests that what is required as the interview is a social encounter, not simply a site for information exchange. I have kept this in mind and tried my best to eliminate transactional bias by allowing myself to be friendly and at ease with the participants from both the settings and by ensuring that they have understood the questions and that we are speaking in the same language as I seek to understand the meaning from the participants' perspectives. Tuckman (1972) says that by providing access to what is 'inside a person's head, makes it possible to measure what a person knows (Knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks' (attitudes and beliefs) which is helpful to answer the sort of questions that I have posed for the research study in terms of understanding educators' perceptions and their practice with regard to fostering peer relationships.

Researcher might use different types of interviews depending on the nature of the investigation and kind of outcomes anticipated and thus to the general theoretical framework within which the researcher is working and also the empirical setting. But in choosing whatever the type of interview the researcher must be aware of possible pitfalls, disadvantages or problems associated with the type of interview they choose. In a most structured form, an interview can take the form of the questionnaire with the interviewer following a specific set of questions with a standard format in an attempt to make the realization of interview as consistent as possible across the sample. This also ensures maximum amount of control, as the researcher doesn't deviate from the stated questions (Wellington, 2000, Cohen et al., 2007).

At the other extreme, the interview might be relatively unstructured. The unstructured interview might be described as more closely resembling a conversation, with an interviewer working from a relatively loose set of guidelines. Here the questions are open and the format flexible. And the main concern of the interviewer might be to explore the world from the perspective of the interviewee and construct the understanding from the viewpoint of the interviewee and how make sense of the experiences (Brown and Dowling, 1998).

I have used semi-structured interviews, which are situated in between these two approaches. It relied on some form of interview schedule and a set of questions (see Appendix E) relating to the main research question, *Perceptions, Practice and Contexts* but was more flexible with regard to wording of questions and the order (Wellington, 2000) and was open to modify and change the structure as the situation demanded. In both the contexts of India and England interviews were conducted within the settings, withdrawing to a quiet place to avoid distractions and the noise on the recording. I was mindful of the participants' time and their hectic schedule and so kept my interviews short and focused with an average interview lasting 30 minutes (one interview per educator totaling 4 interviews at each setting). With their permission I have used small voice recorder by placing it in an unobtrusive place within the voice range. Once the interview was completed, I have transferred the data to my laptop and listening to it several times during transcription and analysis time.

While interview is definitely an effective method it also suffers from certain limitations. It only "informs us of what the person interviewed is prepared to say about the topic in the social context time and place of that interview" (Walford, 2001:95). For this reason interview content is further corroborated with the participant observations, which ensured methodological triangulation. Cohen et al., (2007) further cautioned for the bias and subjectivity on the part of the researcher. It is important that the researcher is aware of these risks and pitfalls and should avoid leading, loaded and restrictive questions (Wellington, 2000:82), which I have avoided during the interview. In all the interviews attention was placed on understanding the attitudes, cognitions, comments and thought processes of participants as they discuss the issue at hand (Kruger and Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1998). Interview questions were framed in a phenomenological context to allow the teachers to share their way of thinking and to describe their behaviors as lived experiences.

4.10. Triangulation

This qualitative inquiry strategy proved helpful in triangulation of data so as to have a balanced picture of the situation under consideration, as well as the biases in any single method being neutralized by the other method (Hughes, 2001, Creswell, 1998, 2003, Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2000; Wolcott, 1994). Denzin (1978) has

identified several types of triangulation. One type involves the convergence of multiple data sources. Another type is methodological triangulation, which involves the convergence of data drawn from multiple data collection sources which is the case with the present study where I have addressed the biases and limitations inherent in participant observations with semi-structured interviews and vice versa.

Richardson (2000: 934) critique triangulation and contest the assumption that there is a “fixed point” or “object” that can be triangulated. But in post-modernistic mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate; we *crystallize*. We recognize that there are far more than “three sides” from which to approach the world... [With the crystal metaphor] what we see depends upon our angle of repose...Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

4.11. Reflexivity in research: The role of the researcher

The researcher is considered as the principal research tool in a qualitative study and hence is the inseparable part of the research process (Patton, 2000; Merriam, 1998). This involvement itself presents ethical issues and hence a need to investigate the role of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Maxwell (1996) explains that there are personal, practical, and research purposes. Researchers first of all need to be aware of their personal reasons for carrying out a study -- their subjective motives -- for these will have important consequences for the trustworthiness of a project (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Rubin and Rubin (1995) contend that researchers especially qualitative researchers are incapable of neutrality. Stake (1995) complexity of researcher roles while Denzin (1998: 319) maintains that ‘the other who is presented in the text is always a version of the writer’s self’.

In order to ensure trustworthiness and minimize researcher’s bias reflection and reflexivity form an integral part in defining my research with both Indian and England contexts. Coghlan and Brannick (2005:7 cited in Ryan, 2005) contend that while “Reflective knowledge has to do with normative states in social, economic and political realms. It concerns a vision of what ought to be” and the reflexive process involves introspection. A deep inward gaze into every interaction whether it be in teaching or any

other interaction in life. For example in my own case, being a teacher before in a school dedicated for child centered pedagogy based on transformative curriculum (which is the Indian case study setting), I bring my own set of values, expectations and experiences to the research process which needs to be acknowledge in order to ensure trustworthiness.

David and Lopes (2002) argue that the researcher's beliefs, values; experiences and expectations normally impact upon the research process right from the research design, and data gathering to reporting and disseminating and it is difficult to eliminate the researcher's effect fully. Hence, it is considered important that researcher is reflexive about his or her own set of values and personal assumptions at all stages of the research. Since the researcher is the primary "instrument" of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Russell and Kelly, 2002; Stake, 1995).

My previous experience of working for an organization that recognizes and values multiple childhoods and diverse childhood experiences and the environments and cultures that shape individuals means that I am sensitive to different cultures and contexts and the role and impact of these influences on the ways and means adopted by early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations in their settings. This cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity to different ways of being and doing inspired me to take up this project with a comparative focus (See preface). As Russell and Kelly (2002:5) rightly suggest "Good research questions spring from [a researcher's]...values, passions, and preoccupations". According to Ruby (1980: 154):

... As we see it, the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it. ... For us, being reflexive in doing research is part of being honest and ethically mature in research practice that requires researchers to 'stop being "shamans" of objectivity'.

This position of being explicit about researcher's beliefs and values helps in the trustworthiness of the research project. Hence in order to be open and honest about my own set of values and minimize personal bias and authenticate findings it is important to be *reflexive* throughout the research process. As (Ely et al, 1991: 179) contends '*Doing qualitative research is by nature a reflective and recursive process*'. And being reflective and reflexive about one's own position as a researcher enhances credibility. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) identify three types of reflexivity; Epistemological, Methodological and Post-Modern.

Epistemological reflexivity requires researchers to engage with questions like how has the research question been defined there by illuminating the epistemological reflexivity which encourages us to reflect on our assumptions about the world and the knowledge and helps us to think about the implications of those assumptions for the research and findings. This epistemological reflexivity forms an integral part in any qualitative research, as the researcher who is the main research instrument has to constantly be reflective and reflexive about one's own assumptions. For the present study, having worked in a school based on JK's philosophy with its post-modernist approach envisions differing images of children and childhood, different roles for teachers and altogether different purposes of education has undeniable impact on the whole process of research.

The *methodological reflexivity* emphasizes on the fluidity and flexibility of the qualitative research methods as the research unfolds which happened with the present research. Having initially opted for non-participant observation for its inherent advantages of non-obtrusion and minimal impact of researcher's presence on the activities of the setting; it became apparent that the non-participant stance is inadequate to understand the subjective processes that the participants undergo. Hence after spending sometime in the setting the researcher has to be reflective about this stance and its apparent limitations, a decision has been made to be a participant observant.

This deconstruction of praxis by asking constant questions and understanding concerns has been labeled as hyper-reflexivity. As Ryan, (2005:8) contends, 'Teaching, changing and being reflexive often requires the deconstruction of praxis. As we examine and uncover layers of concern, we actually change because of our efforts'. This *hyper-*

reflexivity (Ryan, 2005: 81), which involves constant questioning, deconstructing and changing as the result, is termed as a post-modern stance. The constant questioning of my own assumptions resulting from my own social, cultural and historical background with a potential to have a bearing on the research process conducted in two cross-cultural settings assisted me in becoming a better researcher by improving credibility of the study (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005).

4.12. The process of data analysis

“Each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 433). Data analysis involves organizing what has been seen, heard, and read so that sense can be made of what is learned (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Qualitative content analysis has been defined as: “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005 cited in Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009:1) illustrates the integrated view of the text within the context and brings out the subjective yet the systematic nature of the process. And while doing so it endeavors to capture the meanings and relationships across the themes to build and present a coherent view of the picture. Patton (2002: 453) states “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”.

Given the subjective interpretative nature of the qualitative data analysis has been variously and aptly described by some as craftsmanship, others as an art, and still others as a process of detective work (Patton, 2002). The subjective connotations arising from the definitions and descriptions illustrates a relationship between data and the researcher, what Strauss and Corbin (1998: 13) describe qualitative analysis as “... the interplay between researchers and data”. This description rightly mirrors and acknowledges the extent of researchers role in the qualitative enquiry. In this context what Patton (1988) views about researcher being the main instrument of qualitative enquiry brings into fore the inherent contradictions in the researcher’s position. He succinctly sums up the strengths and weaknesses inherent when the researcher becomes the instrument of data analysis. He says that its strength is fully using human insight and

experience while it's weakness is being heavily dependent on the researcher's skill, training, intellect, discipline and creativity. As the researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry, the quality of the research depends heavily on the qualities of that human being.

The iterative nature of qualitative inquiry further adds to the complexity of the task (Holliday, 2002) as has been noted from my experience. Utilizing the insights and skills; qualitative researchers strive to "seek strategies of empirical inquiry that will allow them to make connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and here and now" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 199). This process is quite distinct in its aim to bring meaning to a situation rather than the search for truth focused on by quantitative research. This aspect of making connections among lived experience and bringing meaning through the subjective lens proves to be difficult to have a shared understanding of what constitutes qualitative data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1984: 16) capture the difficulty and put it succinctly: "We have few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness".

Inductive vs. deductive reasoning

Qualitative analysis is led by an inductive approach. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). It involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). However, the process needn't be exclusively inductive as is the case with the present study. Patton (2002) argues that the qualitative content analysis does not need to exclude deductive reasoning. Generating concepts or variables from theory or previous studies is also very useful for qualitative research, especially at the beginning of the data analysis process (Berg, 2001 cited in Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009:2) as has been the case with the study.

In any case, the qualitative data analyst is constantly on the search for concepts and themes that, when pieced together will provide the best explanation of “what’s going on” in an inquiry. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) discussed three approaches to qualitative content analysis, based on the degree of involvement of inductive reasoning. The first is *conventional qualitative content analysis*, in which coding categories are derived directly and inductively from the raw data. This is the approach used for grounded theory development.

The second approach is *directed content analysis*, in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings. Then, during data analysis, the researchers immerse themselves in the data and allow themes and sub themes to emerge from the data. The purpose of this approach usually is to validate or extend a conceptual framework or theory. The present study followed this kind of directed content analysis and all the research data was initially coded/categorized and sorted according to Rogoff (2003)’s three planes of analysis i.e. Personal, Inter-personal and Institutional planes. After generating an initial list of coding categories from the model or theory, we may modify the model or theory within the course of the analysis as new categories emerge inductively (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The third approach is summative content analysis, which starts with the counting of words or manifest content, and then extends the analysis to include latent meanings and themes. This approach seems quantitative in the early stages, but its goal is to explore the usage of the words/indicators in an inductive manner.

For the present study, the main research question: *How do early childhood educators perceive and practice peer relationships in their cultural contexts* is broken into three sub questions. The first sub question focuses on the *perceptions* of early childhood practitioners on the significance of peer relations. The second sub question focuses on exploring the *practice* by early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relations. And the third sub question seeks to explore the *contexts* under which early childhood practitioners enact their practice.

Three Planes of Analysis	Data sources	Research Question(s)
		Main Q: How do early childhood educators perceive and practice peer relationships in their socio-cultural contexts?
Intra-Personal Plane (Perceptions)	Interviews Observations	SQ.1 What are the <i>perceptions</i> of the practitioners on the significance of peer relations?
Inter-Personal Plane (Practice)	Observations Interviews	SQ2. What are the <i>ways and means</i> adopted by practitioners to foster peer relationships?
Institutional/Community Plane (Contexts)	Interviews Observations	SQ3. What are the cultural <i>contexts</i> under which practitioners enact their practice?

Table 4.2. Integrating Theory with Data: Rogoff's three planes of analysis with Thematic Content analysis.

Basing on the three planes as three broad categories, the researcher has identified themes and sub-themes within each plane. In-order to analyze the data and present the findings the main research question is divided into three parts as was mentioned (see Table 4.2). First part concerns with the participants *perceptions* of the significance of peer relations and how they envisage their role in fostering peer relationships (*individual foci*) evidenced from their interview responses and is corroborated with participant observations elicited through sustained periods of engagement at both the settings. The second part of the research question concerns the discussion of the ways

and means adopted by early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relations. This has been achieved with evidence from the participant observations arising from *inter-personal plane*, which are then corroborated, compared and clarified with what early childhood practitioners had said when interviewed. This in essence, explores the *practice* aspect of practitioner's roles vis a vis peer relationships. And the final part of the research question explores the contexts under which early childhood practitioners enact their practice (*Institutional foci*) while keeping the other two lenses in the background. For this the analysis begins with the participants viewpoints expressed during the interviews and were then considered in relation to their everyday practice what was observed through participant observation.

The Process of thematic content analysis

Yin (1989) points out that data analysis consists of a number of stages, i.e. examining, categorizing and tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence, in order to address the initial goal of a study. Constat (1992) argues that researchers should describe their methods of analysis and identify the origin of categories. The first step in the analysis of data is the collection and preparation of the data for the analysis. For this I have transcribed all the data gathered from the observations, field notes and interviews from both the research sites from England and from India. From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences, behaviors are listed using the directed content analysis. This stage is followed by familiarization phase with the data, which has been achieved by listening to tapes, reading the transcripts in their entirety several times and reading the observational notes taken during interview and summary notes written immediately after the interview. The aim is to immerse in the details and get a sense of the observations and interviews as a whole before breaking it into parts. During this process the major themes begin to emerge.

The next step is identifying the unit of analysis: the unit of analysis refers to the basic unit of text to be classified during content analysis. Messages have to be unitized before they can be coded, and differences in the unit definition can affect coding decisions as well as the comparability of outcomes with other similar studies (De Wever et al., 2006 cited in Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis usually uses individual themes as the unit for analysis, rather than the physical linguistic units (e.g., word, sentence, or paragraph) most often used in quantitative content analysis. An

instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document. When using theme as the coding unit, you are primarily looking for the expressions of an idea (Minichiello et al., 1990 cited in Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009: 3).

Rogoff's (1998) three planes of analysis is used as an analytical framework for the study and provided lens with which to scrutinize and analyze the research data. Rogoff (1998) has argued that the unit of analysis must go beyond the individual, and examine the inter-personal and contextual planes in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding. Hence the three planes lend itself to form the main categories for the study: the *personal plane*, *inter-personal plane* and *community/institutional plane*. The empirical data derived from the participant observations and the semi-structured interviews is colour coded into the three categories, Personal foci-Red; Inter-personal foci-Orange; Institutional-Brown. And all the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study are grouped/sorted into these three planes using the thematic content analysis of data (Smith, 1995). The next step to a thematic analysis is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns. To continue the above example, the identified patterns are then expounded on. All of the talk that fits under the specific pattern is identified and placed with the corresponding pattern. The next step is to combine and catalogue related patterns into sub-themes. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1989: 131, cited in Aronson, 1994). The themes are identified by, "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985: 60). When gathering sub-themes to obtain a comprehensive view of the information, it is easy to see a pattern emerging. Themes that emerge from the field observations and the participant's interviews are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (Aronson, 1994). Table 4.3 presents a data sample in which the themes and the sub-themes inferred from the data are sorted into three broad categories drawn from Rogoff's three planes.

Table. 4.3. Data sample: Sorting and assigning themes to the data using Rogoff's (1998) three planes of analysis and thematic content analysis: (Smith, 1995)

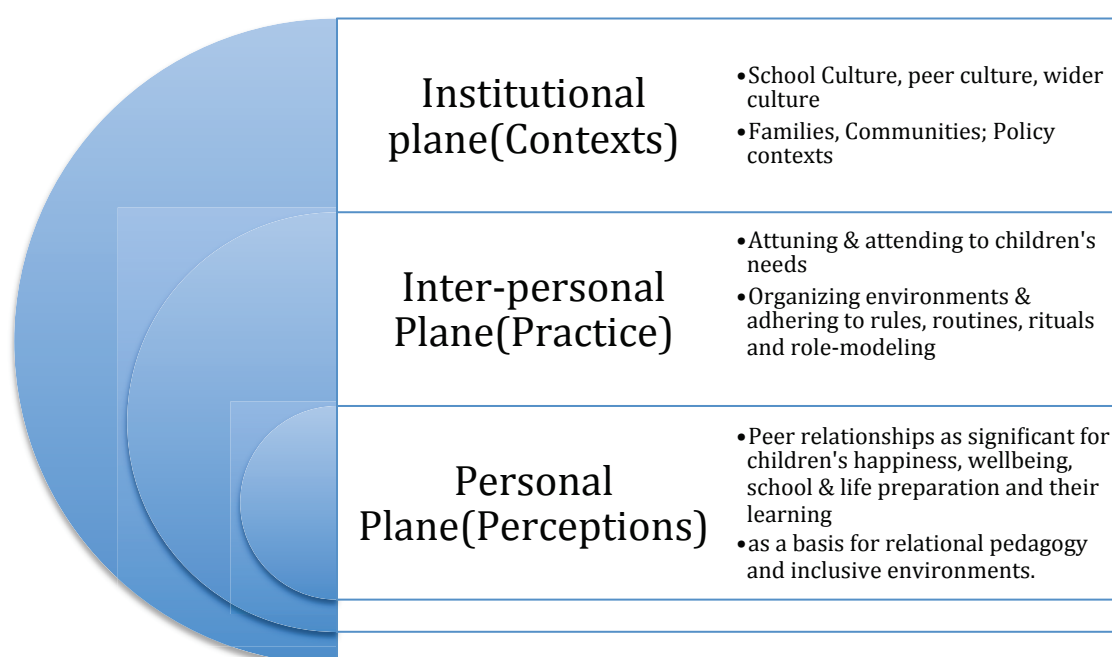
Planes of Analysis	Excerpts from the interviews & observations	Themes
Participatory Appropriation - The process by which individuals transform their understanding of & responsibility for activities through their active and dynamically changing, inter-dependent processes of participation (Rogoff, 1993:150).	<p>* The problem is most schools here see early years as preparation for school. I think it is inhuman to give loads of homework to small kids and not leaving them to play. They need to enjoy their childhood. It's important for everything for their happiness, wellbeing, friendships feeling good about themselves and everything'. VI, India</p>	<p>Personal plane (Perceptions)</p> <p>Peer relationships as a precondition for children's happiness, wellbeing, school & life preparation, context for learning and as a basis for inclusive settings and relational pedagogy</p>
Guided Participation - refers to the processes and systems of inter-personal arrangements & complex inter-personal engagements between people while participating in culturally valued activity (Rogoff, 1993).	<p>*It was a carpet time and Miss Joyce was sharing with the group that it is Harry's birthday that day. And everyone started singing happy birthday Harry. Harry spoke in a happy voice that he has received a puppy as a gift from his parents. After the carpet time, children Miss Joyce set the table for the children to make greeting cards for Harry". (Notes from the field, England, June 2011).</p> <p>* Ok now it's a tidy up time, announced Miss LE. Everyone stopped playing at once and some started arranging things in order while others are busy wiping, cleaning in the outside play area'- (notes from the observational record, England: May, 2011).</p>	<p>Inter-Personal Plane (Practice)</p> <p>* Attuning and attending to children's physical, social & emotional and security and cognitive needs</p> <p>* Organizing physical, social, learning and play environments.</p> <p>* Adhering to rules, routines, rituals and role-modeling.</p>
Apprenticeship is a "system of inter-personal involvements and arrangements in which people engage in culturally organized activity in which apprentices become more responsible participants" (Rogoff, 1993: 143)	<p>*Our school motto is 'Together we achieve more. So giving attention to social aspect of children like a group is very much part of the culture'- LM, England</p> <p>*Our school as you know works differently from other mainstream schools. We are even called as 'different school' because we do things differently here from the rest of the schools-RE, India</p>	<p>Peer culture, school culture, family and community factors; wider ecology</p>

Personal foci of *analysis* looked closely at the *individual*. It has concentrated upon the early childhood practitioner's appropriation of beliefs, values, and assumptions about the significance of peer relations and also explored on how they have perceived their

role in it. Rogoff (1998) uses the term '*appropriation*' to refer to the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation. *The inter-personal plane* examined how the practitioner's appropriation of *perceptions* translated into their day- to- day practice of fostering peer relations in a learning community. In essence it focuses on the actual arrangements and engagements i.e. ways and means adopted by early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relations. Here the lens concentrated upon the actual ways (routine & tacit; implicit and explicit) and means adopted by early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relations. As Rogoff (1998: 6) argues, "the interpersonal plane of analysis represented by guided participation is made up of the events of everyday life as individuals engage with others and with materials and arrangements collaboratively managed by themselves and others". It is thus an interpersonal process in which people manage their own and others roles, and structure situations (whether by facilitating or limiting) in which they observe and participate in cultural activities.

The third plane focused on the cultural or institutional dimensions of the context under which early childhood educators enact their practice. Most precisely it concentrated on the institutionalized practices, rules, regulations or culture that either contributes or constricts their role in fostering peer relationships. And this plane further moves to the wider policy and political, societal contexts beyond the immediate institutional and cultural contexts of the learning community. According to Rogoff (1998: 4) "research that focuses on the community plane using the metaphor of apprenticeship examines the institutional structures and cultural technologies of intellectual activity (say in school or work). For example, it encourages the recognition that endeavors involve purposes, cultural constraints, resources, values relating to what means are appropriate for reaching goals and the cultural tools such as maps and language". However, as Rogoff (1998) rightly points out, -understanding the processes that become the focus at each plane of analysis –individual, interpersonal and institutional-relies on understanding the processes in the background as well those in the foreground of analysis. It brings out the inherent mutuality of the individual and the social and cultural worlds that he/she is part of and enacts their practice. What is crucial here is in understanding how three planes interact with each other as all three lenses are applied to the same data set. One lens is fore-grounded whilst the other two are put in the background as it is very important to consider what an individual said or did is always in relation to the others

(inter-personal) and to the wider context i.e. institutions/community (Rogoff, 2003). “One cannot understand what the individual is doing without understanding how it fits with on-going events. It is not as if the individual could be taken outside of the activity to have their development analyzed. They are involved-part of the activity” (Rogoff, 1998: 688). The present research takes note of this inherent mutuality embedded across the planes and explores the practitioners’ roles in fostering peer relationships by choosing the unit of analysis that preserves the mutuality.



4.1. Figure depicting the mutuality and inter-connectedness of the three planes

Wertsch (1998: 24) contends that: “the task of a socio-cultural approach is to explicate the relationship between human action, on the one hand and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs on the other”. In line with Wertsch’s contention, I have collected and organized the data according to the three planes in order to understand and analyze the relationship between early childhood educators’ roles in fostering peer relationships and the explicit or implicit linkages to the personal, inter-personal institutional and community planes in which these roles occur (Rogoff, 1995).

Having organized the data according to the three planes, my next step is to build a valid argument for choosing the themes. By referring back to the literature, I have gained information that allowed me to make inferences from the interview or an observation. Once the themes have been collected and the literature has been studied, I am ready to formulate theme statements to develop a story line. When the literature is interwoven with the findings, the story that is constructed is one that stands with merit. Richardson (2000: 923) refers to writing as “a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic”. A developed story line helps the reader to comprehend the process, understanding, and motivation of the interviewer (Aronson, 1994) like a “personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 741 cited in Watt, 2007: 83).

4.13. The trustworthiness of the study

Ensuring trustworthiness of research is an important aspect in any research. Rolfe and McNaughton (2010: 10) argue that the research ‘always has to be ethical, purposeful, well-designed, transparent, contextualized, credible, careful, imaginative and equitable’ to be considered as high quality research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for evaluating interpretive research work: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* and I discuss my research in relation to this criterion. In order to ensure the *transparency* of the procedure and analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) I have kept carefully the records of data collection, including a field diary, tape recordings and transcripts, in a secure place. This helped me in being accurate while doing my data analysis and helped in being transparent about how I have reached certain decisions during the data collection stage and will also explain how I arrive at certain research conclusions and findings. This notion of *transparency* is very crucial in qualitative research where it can be very difficult to ensure either internal reliability or external reliability and are actually considered inappropriate given that the researcher’s analytic angle is seen as important for how an analytic ‘story’ is told (Guba and Lincoln, 1982).

Dependability and *confirm ability* are achieved when the written accounts of the research study are perceived to be internally coherent and plausible based on the

knowledge of their experiences and knowledge from other texts (Mertens, 2005). I have achieved this by being explicit about my ontological, epistemological and methodological positions to improve the validity of my findings, which further helps in *transferability* of my research findings to the specific cultural contexts, pre-primary and social pedagogy. I have further ensured *dependability* and *transferability* by sharing the initial expressions and preliminary findings from the study (towards the end of my data collection time at both the settings) with educators from both the contexts (highlighting their caring pedagogy across the cultural contexts) in relation to their roles in fostering peer relationships. I have shared the final conclusions with the head teacher from the English setting and am planning to organize a seminar at the Indian setting exploring the research findings with its cross-cultural conclusions.

4.14. Chapter summary

In this chapter I have explained the rationale for my ontological, epistemological and methodological orientation for the study. I have argued that by adopting interpretative ontological and epistemological orientation and by adhering to qualitative approach and by using case study methodology I have endeavored to get close to the lived realities of participant roles in terms of peer relationships. Participant observations combined with semi-structured interviews facilitated methodological triangulation of the data and allowed for cross-checking and collaborating of evidence gathered via both the methods and facilitated an understanding of practitioners perceptions, their everyday practice and the socio-cultural contexts that they inhabit which were analyzed through the thematic content analysis to provide answers to the research questions. The following chapters present the data analysis; answers the research question and discuss the findings in relation to the extant research and literature.

Part Four - Data analysis and presentation of the findings

Having explored and explained the research methodology, methods and the process of data analysis in Chapter 4, in this part of the thesis I present the key findings that emerged from study. Chapters Five and Six and Seven present and discuss these findings in the context of relevant literature and research while Chapter Eight sums up the thesis by presenting the conclusions. The three sub questions are answered in these three chapters (5,6 and 7) being guided and analyzed through the socio-cultural theoretical framework informing the study. In understanding the *perceptions* of the early childhood practitioners which can potentially influence their *practice* in fostering peer relations and in exploring the overall socio cultural *contexts* under which their roles are defined, it has been understood that the specific *perceptions*, *practices* are embedded and are interpreted within their particular social and cultural *contexts* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Rogoff, 1998, 2003, 1992, Bruner, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The research relating to peer relations and educators roles emanating mostly from developmental psychology and clinical psychology rarely brought the individual and the contexts together in successive time frames. Rogoff (2008:1) contends, “developmental research has commonly limited attention to either the individual or the environment – for example, examining how adults teach children or how children construct reality, with an emphasis on either separate individuals or independent environmental elements as the basic unit of analysis. Even when both the individual and the environment are considered, they are often regarded as separate entities rather than being mutually defined and interdependent in ways that preclude their separation as units or elements”.

This study effectively aims to address this limitation by considering the mutuality of the individual that is the early childhood educator and the sociocultural contexts within which their roles are defined. For this purpose, I have considered an unit of analysis which preserved the essence of the events and allows for a reformulation of the relation between the individual and the social and cultural environments in which each is inherently involved (Rogoff, 1998). This innovative approach to data analysis addressed

the methodological limitations inherent in traditional research thereby strengthening the validity of the findings.

The present study, being informed by the socio-cultural theoretical framework and aided by the thematic interpretative analysis of the data obtained by adopting the ethnographic methodology and the methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, contributes to the effective understanding of the early childhood practitioners roles in fostering peer relationships and further illuminates the embedded relationships between these roles in fostering peer relations and the contexts- within and beyond the settings, in which those roles are developed, defined, enacted, interpreted and appraised.

The subsequent chapters, Chapter Five, Six, and Seven analyze and discuss the findings from both the England and Indian case study settings. Chapter Five exclusively focuses on the Personal plane of analysis (*perceptions*) of the educators; presents and discusses the main findings in the context of extant literature and research while Chapter Six focuses on Inter-Personal Plane (*Practice*). Chapter Seven focuses on the Institutional Plane (*Contexts*) of Rogoff's three plane analysis while Chapter Eight brings everything together, presents the conclusions and sums up the thesis.

Chapter Five- Exploring the *perceptions* of early childhood educators: Cross-cultural Insights from India and England through the lens of Personal Plane

5.1. Introduction

Following the organization and sorting of data according to three categories: *personal*, *inter-personal* and *Institutional planes*; the *personal plane* identified sub-themes relating to attitudes, understandings, beliefs and values all merged into a theme: *perceptions* (as was explained in the Methods Chapter, 4).

Rogoff (1993) defined the personal plane of analysis as:

‘The process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their active and dynamically changing, inter-dependent processes of participation’ (Rogoff, 1993: 150)

She terms it *participatory appropriation* by which skills, beliefs, values, understandings and competences become automated and guide ways to respond (*perceptions*) in an on-going practice of being an Early childhood practitioner in the community of learners (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

According to Rogoff, the concept of *Participatory Appropriation* refers to ‘how individuals change through their involvement in the socio cultural activity and in the process get prepared for the subsequent involvement in related activities’. Rogoff (2003) considers *Participatory appropriation* essentially as a personal process by which, through engagement in an activity individuals transform and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation.

As Rogoff (1993) contends, we need to conceive the focus of the planes not as separate or as hierarchical but simply as involving different grains of focus within the whole socio-cultural activity. To understand each grain requires the involvement of the other

planes and distinguishing them serves the function of clarifying the plane of focus simultaneously holding the other planes of focus in the background but not separated.

The following Figure 5.1 depicts the organization of data according to the three planes and situates the findings relating to *perceptions* in the personal plane of analysis. As has been argued it is to preserve the mutuality of the planes and to underscore the interconnectedness of each plane and the impossibility of studying them independently.

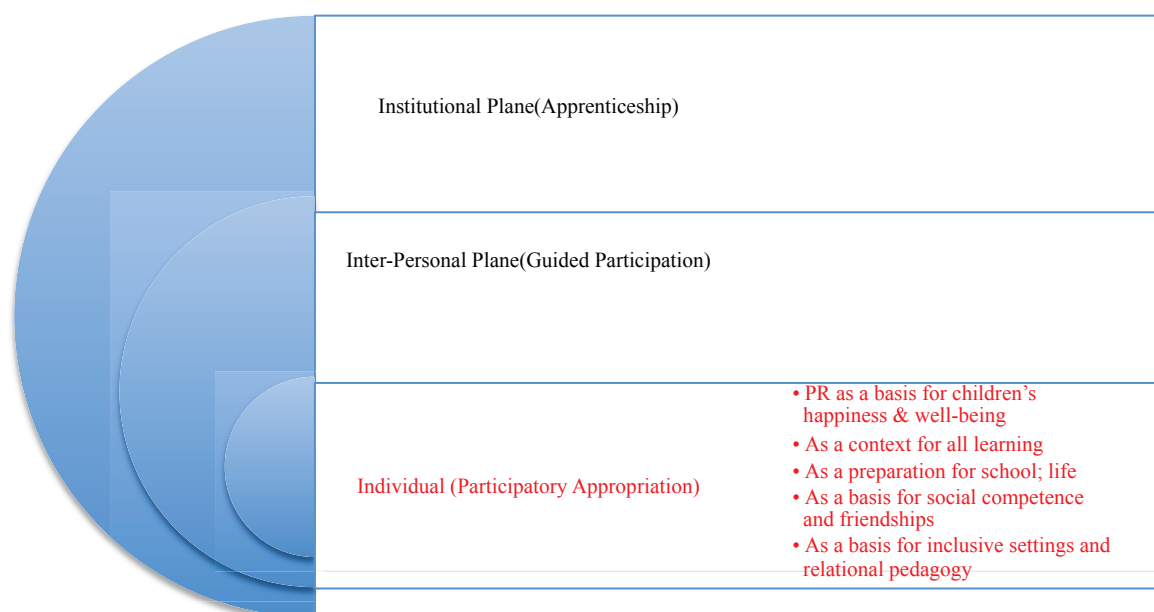


Figure 5.1. Personal Plane of Analysis (Perceptions)

The following excerpts taken from the interviews with the practitioners represent their understandings and perceptions as to why they consider fostering peer relations as significant to children. As shown in the Table 5.1 below, these are the broad understandings voiced by practitioners when asked about the importance of fostering peer relations. The practitioners used the synonyms of *getting along with others*, *social relations*, *social competence*, *sociability* and *relationships* to describe inter-changeably what they perceive/understand the term -peer relationships.

Over-arching theme: Perceptions	Examples from interviews and observations	Explanation
5.1.1. Happiness & well-being & social competence	<p>‘The feeling is that without these children will not score on other areas of curriculum. If they don’t feel happy, if they don’t form relationships they might not do well in other areas of learning as well though they are exceptions to that like autistic children’-FG, England</p> <p>‘What’s the point of coming to school if he can’t talk to his friends, make friendships and be happy and enjoy the learning. Children should be happy to be ready for anything else. That’s why relationships are important’-SH, India</p> <p>‘Seeing it through somebody else’s eyes is important. At this age it’s a hard thing to see from somebody else’s eyes, as they are very young. We try and give them the skills they need to do that’-HB, England</p>	Peer relations as a pre-condition & means to children’s happiness, (social & emotional) wellbeing & social-competence.
5.1.2. Preparation for school; later life	<p>‘It is lovely to educate each child individually whom we try to do but socially you couldn’t do and that it wouldn’t be helpful for its future career as well. When they go out to work wherever they go these peer relations are going to be there’-HB, England</p> <p>‘We have tech schools here which advertise if you join your child in our school we will give him back as a doctor or an engineer and the child will undergo immense pressure. Nobody is thinking about child anymore whether he is happy or learning with joy. It’s always about getting ready for school or for future. At VVV we let a child to be his own self. No hurry no worry’-VI, India</p>	School readiness; preparation for later life
5.1.3. Language & Cognitive development	<p>‘If they don’t know if you don’t teach them peer relations I think when the children start school, they don’t have friendships, if they don’t develop peer relations I don’t think learning happens’-HB, England</p> <p>‘I think language works both ways. For a child to learn language he needs to talk to others and maintain relationships. And to maintain relationships also he need language. So it works both ways. That’s why we have activities to promote interaction’-SU, India</p>	Belief that peer relationships provides a context for all learning
5.1.4. Inclusive environments	<p>‘For the children to learn that we are all different, we all have problems and teach them how to help someone. Not to be critical. Not to be cross and angry...Children actually accepting each other and there is feeling of wanting to help. Being part of the team-FG, England</p> <p>The relationships with their peers is a big part of if they don’t feel they have friends, if they can’t join in a game if they don’t have the skills to be doing that nothing else is going to work really’-HB, England</p>	Peer relationships facilitating inclusion of children with diversity.
5.1.5. Relational pedagogy	<p>‘It is all about relating to others. Your classmates, teachers, community, environment. Everyone is important and environment is also equally important. That’s why we do a lot of nature walks, gardening etc. and have talks on environment protection’-VI, India</p>	Peer relationships as an aspect of relational pedagogy

Table. 5.1 *Perceptions* of Early Childhood Practitioners as to the significance of peer relations

5.2. Presentation of findings

Now the discussion moves on to present the research findings arising from the *personal plane* across the two case study settings. The simultaneous presentation of findings helps in illuminating any similarities present and variations observed across the two diverse cultural contexts. This facilitates the greater understanding of and appreciation for the roles of practitioners as embedded in the wider socio-cultural historical contexts under which the study is conducted.

5.2.1. Peer relations as a pre-condition for children's happiness; social & emotional wellbeing & social competence

Peer relationships as a basis for children's happiness and their social and emotional wellbeing and competence had been voiced prominently during the interviews with the practitioners and corroborated from participant observations from across the contexts. Almost all the participants in the study both from Indian and English case settings have voiced this opinion, which was also demonstrated in their everyday practice. Their opinions also resonate with the EYFS curriculum, which recognizes the social and emotional development as one of the core aspect of the curriculum and with an independent curriculum followed by Indian case study setting which is based on Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophy which strives to provide an environment where children learn happily without being deprived of the pleasures of the childhood' (noted from school website).

At the setting in England, when asked about why she thinks peer relations are significant, Ms. LM contends:

'I think...Generally you just make sure that you have good peer relations so that otherwise the children won't be happy and unhappy children won't learn. If children come to school and if people are not being so kind perhaps and not taking other peoples and others feelings into consideration that makes children unhappyIt's all about keeping everyone happy and happy children learn better. (Laughs)- Ms. LM (England).

The idea that peer relationships go beyond mere peer-to-peer relationships but should include relationships with adults as well in order to ensure social and emotional wellbeing is voiced by Ms. HB who strives to achieve that by paying attention to the social and emotional aspect of the curriculum before anything else:

'I think probably social and emotional development is the first area we focus on. Not only relations with children but relations with the adults as well, showing respect to them likewise with their friends as well and also being able to expect respect from the adults that relationships has to be a two- way thing'.

Ms. HB, England.

Ms. HB further contends that social and emotional development should be the area that one should focus on first as nothing else is going to work –meaning other areas of the curriculum viz. literacy, Numeracy etc. and hence she considers it as more important than other subjects even though there is equal weightage to all the subjects in the EYFS. This was later changed following the Tickell Review (DfE, 2011), which has reduced the number of learning targets and has placed the social and emotional development in the prime area.

'Actually very much almost as more important than other subjects, but I know that each subject is equally weighted in the EYFS. I just think if you don't have those personal and social bits as a base nothing else is going to work'.

Ms. HB, England.

The perception that practitioners should continually observe children to make sure that they are happy and intervene as the situation demands is voiced by Ms. LM. According to her *'peer relations is all about continuing to watch and intervene whenever necessary; tackling any problems that arise to make sure that children are happy.* This assumption on the part of Ms. LM conveys that the first and foremost importance of peer relationships is to make and keep children happy.

At the same time not all children are endowed with sufficient levels of social competence to be able to initiate and to maintain effective peer relationships. In that situation the practitioners' proactive role is more called for. According to Ms. RS, peer relationships is a sure way of making children happy and as a teacher they take a proactive role in finding friends or companions for the children in case the child lacks the necessary social competence to be able to make friendships on their own. She finds it amazing that the little children understand well if any particular child is unhappy and provide them companionship to foster a sense of belongingness in the children. The researcher has noticed how her year 5 partners; who make time to visit her during lunchtime befriended a particular child Lucy (who doesn't have siblings at home) and also accompanies her on their picnics or other outings.

'If we see any children sad and lonely and encourage them try and find a little friend for them, matching them with their partner. It is amazing how they look after them; take them under their wings. You probably might have noticed with year 5 partners looking after young ones always look up to them and they just find it amazing I think it helps the older ones as well. You are achieving several of things'.
RS, England.

Furthermore, peer relationships are seen to be providing a basis to foster friendships as well not only in the class but across the school.

'And it also (peer relations) helps them to build lots of friendships amongst each other. And it's even some children are not friendly who encourage them to play with those children'. Ms. LM, England.

Ms. HB further contends that peer relationships are important from practitioners' perspective as well, without which it is very difficult to achieve anything else. So she considers fostering peer relationships as a starting point of her job.

'But personally I had a strong belief that that is the starting of my job. If that is not there that's makes my life difficult and its makes child's much more difficult.'

Ms. HB, England.

In all the answers listed above what has come prominently either explicitly or implicitly is the assumption that peer relations enhances children's sense of happiness and it greatly contributes to their overall social and emotional well-being.

The same view is echoed by their Indian counterparts who prioritize children's happiness and enjoyment of learning in everything they do. It is also important to understand the traditional view of child-rearing practices in India where period of childhood up to eight years is considered very valuable for inculcating social skills and children are supposed to enjoy the joys of childhood without any pressures in the company of parents and family members. Thus traditional child rearing practices have slowly given way to institutionalized early childhood due to changes in wider social and economic contexts impacting children in diverse ways.

The pressures of downward extension of the primary curriculum into the early years is one of the main concerns with regard to the children in mainstream schools and their happiness and social and emotional wellbeing in particular. In this backdrop and as a response to reclaim childhood as a distinctive phase, the Indian setting is solely dedicated to the holistic development of young children in an atmosphere of happiness and democratic living. It is not surprising that all the teachers who participated in the study expressed this view and prioritized children's happiness at every stage of learning.

When asked about whether peer relations are important at all and if yes, for what reasons Ms. RE explains what she thinks is the priority:

'Here we want children to be happy. Their happiness comes first. Some children might be outgoing and make friendships but if some children are only single child

it's difficult to make friendships or relationships. We give them time and space for them so that they can relate to others. Slowly they will'.

Ms. RE, India.

Ms. RE's perceptions brought into focus the importance of peer relationships for children's happiness and also recognizes the inherent challenges and hence the need for proactive role on the part of the practitioners especially when a particular child has a different temperament and also the fact that children come from different backgrounds where they experience limited opportunities for relationships.

Emphasis on peer relations as a basis to foster social and emotional development and social competence is echoed in Ms. VI's words who expressed that children need to make good relationships not only with other children but with everyone around:

'Relationships not only with other children but also with everyone is important. You can't be really happy if are all alone and nobody is talking to you. It's not only among their classmates but also with children from their senior classes with teachers and with everyone. It helps in their friendships and their self-esteem'.

Ms. VI, India.

The idea that peer relationships are important not only for children's happiness and wellbeing but to have a sense of self-esteem is expressed from practitioners in general.

'Peer relationships and relationships in general makes everyone feel good about themselves. It is a good feeling to be a part of the team with a sense of belongingness. Nobody likes to be alone or nobody to talk to'. Ms. SU, India.

When asked about how and why she thinks fostering peer relations is beneficial for children Ms. FG from English setting explains:

'I guess, children benefit from social skills learning about ways to work together, and having friendships, feeling good about themselves, for their own and social personal development' which encapsulates the multi-faceted significance of peer relations for the social and emotional well-being of the children.

'And it also (peer relationships) helps them to build lots of friendships amongst each other. And it's even some children are not friendly who encourage them to play with those children'. Ms. LM.

As an aspect of social and emotional development peer relations also helps to promote social-competence to form friendships and relationships. Practitioners felt that it is important for a child to be able to maintain positive relationships with adults as well as with other children and to be able to form friendships.

Practitioners from both the contexts felt actively that happiness and wellbeing is the first and foremost thing that they give attention to giving secondary importance to everything else. They feel that being happy, emotionally and socially well is the first and foremost thing they wish for and work for which is quite evident from their everyday practice albeit the presence of cultural variations across contexts of India and England.

5.2.2. Peer relationships as crucial for school readiness; for later life

The aspect of peer relationships as crucial in their preparation for school and also in preparation for life is evident in English educators responses. But it is unsurprising as EYFS with its mandatory developmental outcomes to be achieved by the time children enter year one has children's social and emotional development as one of the prime learning area. It recognizes how important for children to attain social and emotional development and practitioners are required to chart their developmental progression according to what age and stage they are in by ticking the prescriptive outcomes in relation to social and emotional development. Although not explicit in the EYFS curriculum practitioners also felt fostering of peer relations is important for children's

future as the ability to maintain effective relationships is crucial at inter-personal level and also at work places.

Two practitioners Ms. FG and Ms. HI strongly felt that maintaining positive peer relations is important not just in the setting but beyond that later on in life, in work and family situations as well.

‘How to accept, how to work out, how to resolve problems between yourself and your peers. You will have a great deal of difficulty going out in the adult world, you should be able to understand you have a different role and others have different role and otherwise just be pleasant. At home I am a mom with single parent and is difficult for socialization. And it’s all preparation for the later life’. Ms. HI, England.

‘Yes. Not just in school, outside the school as well. Our own families and work places as well. You work without it and it will be a difficult class to work with as everything depends so much on it not only in school, at home at family work place and it is so important’. Ms. FG, England.

The understanding that the children’s social competence and social and emotional development as a preparation for the primary school is voiced in the opinions of two practitioners. It is not surprising as the reception stage is seen as a preparation for the school as the EYFS curriculum comes with a pre-determined prescriptive list of what to achieve in the seven learning areas of foundation stage (which was later changed to four prime areas) profiles by the time children enter primary school.

‘Especially in early years it is about preparing them for school, they are in school already but in early years it’s quiet unstructured about children and a lot of it is learning through play which is brilliant way for them to learn’. Ms. LM, England.

That the EYFS curriculum is explicitly designed to achieve learning outcomes for each individual child is evident in the words Ms. HB who contends that though they educate each child individually (mostly numeracy and literacy) socially it should be in relation to the other children:

'It is lovely to educate each child individually which we try to do but socially you couldn't do and that it wouldn't be helpful for their future career as well. When they go out to work wherever they go these peer relations are going to be there'. Ms. HB, England.

Indian educators expressed an altogether different standpoint and recognized childhood as a distinct phase and are more pre-occupied with the present. They didn't (all four of them) consider or unduly worry or concerned about peer relations and early childhood education neither as a preparation for school or a preparation for a later or a future career. This finding is was not surprising given the background context – of prevalent competitive culture and the need for alternate ethos on which the school functions. The founding fathers of the particular setting are clear about letting children enjoying their distinct phase of life with a focus on the 'here and now'. They considered it is important to inculcate a sense of co-operation and simple living and appreciation of fairness and a concern for the protection of environment.

'The school philosophy and everyone values here values simple living and in secondary school we have a boarding school where children do all the work themselves right from raising farms to cooking and washing cloths etc. We have a children council here where all children participate and make decisions. It is amazing to watch how children share their ideas freely and make decision concerning their life at school. It doesn't happen in outside schools. Here we practice what we teach. In early years we don't have boarding and they leave at 2pm. But again co-operation is the big value'. Ms. SH, India.

They are especially critical of the school preparation given the widespread practice in almost all the mainstream schools in the locality and everywhere else in India.

'We have some children coming from private schools. Parents move them here saying they can't cope with the demands from private schools, homework and all. There is too much pressure on poor children to do well for their future. It's bad. I think we should let them enjoy their childhood joyfully'. SU, India.

There is a real concern about the downward extension of primary curriculum into early years in mainstream early childhood education in India and the negative effects are well documented (NCERT, 2007, Young Lives, 2006). This is an important reason why this school came into existence as a reaction against the two extreme scenarios where in both the public and private schools engage in pre-primary pedagogic practices whose main purpose is to prepare future careerists.

Though they voiced that peer relations are important and are practicing relational pedagogy they didn't actively feel it's very important for their careers etc. Again it is related to the cultural context of foundation father's valuing on cultivating integrative individuals in the contexts of democratic living with the focus on the 'here and now'.

'Relationships are important everywhere not only here with friends, teachers and outside in the community and home and at work place. Our aim is to prepare integrated individuals who can relate emphatically with others. That's what we value here. How helpful one is how good one at relating to others'. Ms. VI, India.

Inculcating empathy is an important consideration in the day-to-day living as well and the founding fathers of school actively endorsed for the pedagogy of sensitivity and relationships as observed from the participant observations as well.

5.2.3. Language and Cognitive development: Belief that peer relationships provide a context for all learning

Peer relations as a context and as an important pre-condition for all other learning is voiced by three practitioners from the setting in England who brought out the dynamic and multi-directional nature of the peer relations and mutuality of language ability and peer relationships.

When asked about in what ways peer relations are important Ms. FG narrated how she believes peer relations are important as children work in small groups:

‘Quite a long time ago, we did some research into collaborative learning. The reason was because at school we work a lot with children in groups. While doing so some children seemed to lack social skills, to interact together and the group work was not effective’. Ms. FG, England.

According to Ms. LM peer relationships are important to ensure the mixed ability groupings in the setting. She thinks children aspire more when mixed with children who are more able.

‘We will still make less abled children and more abled children sit together and that actually helps peer relations children who are not doing well might aspire to do well’. Ms. LM, England.

A similar view is expressed by Ms. RS who thinks due to the natural inherent differences in children in terms of abilities and by bringing the more abled and less abled children together it is beneficial for the children’s learning underscoring the importance of social nature of learning.

‘You got to remember how different the children are; some children are more able than others and can help less able in their work and help and it is just mix it up and it is sort of makes it better for their learning’. Ms. RS, England.

The notion of peer relationships providing a context for all the learning, whether it is language or cognitive based, is explicitly expressed by all the four participants from the setting in India, whether it is language or cognitive based, explicitly express a context for all the learning. Their views have taken concrete expression the way they are organizing the classroom in terms of incorporating the principles of collaboration, exploration and discovery. The school’s philosophy explicitly calls for a collaborative and activity based curriculum. Again the cultural context under which the school came into existence is important as a reaction against the mainstream schools behaviorist pedagogic practices where rewards and punishments are rampant but not group work and hands on activities.

There was and still is a widespread concern regarding the harmful effects of behaviorist pedagogic practices, which only tests individual child’s memory and mostly disregards their social and emotional development (NCERT, 2007) Hence the Indian setting explicitly calls for a collaborative classroom that recognizes the socio cultural nature of learning with an emphasis on community and collaboration. Teachers are regularly oriented to JK’s and Tagore’s philosophy among others and are given training in designing and organizing the activities incorporating the three R’s – exploration, discovery and reasoning.

Ms. SH explains why and how she thinks collaborative classroom is essential and also provides a rationale for organizing the outdoor activities as children rotate between indoors and outdoors every forty minutes:

‘Of course peer relationships are important, important for everything. That’s how we have activity-based curriculum which involves a lot of collaboration among children. It helps in their learning. If you see in most other schools whether public or private, children are simply not allowed to talk. Only copy

from the boards and book and reproduce the same. Rote learning. I don't think learning happens there. Children should enjoy learning. They should explore outdoors so we have a lot of activities planned outdoors'. Ms. SH, India

Ms. VI considers that peer relations as crucial for children's language development and felt that children learn language well in the presence of and while working with their peers in a collaborative way.

'Yes, peer relationships are important for language development as well. Some children for different reasons will not actively play and talk with others. Sometimes they don't have the right vocabulary. Sometimes they are too afraid to talk in beginning especially when they come from schools where they were not allowed to talk. So encourage them to approach others on their own to get a toy or turn take in the game etc. slowly they develop necessary skills in language and vocabulary'.

Ms. VI, India.

Practitioners at the Indian setting also felt that their arrangement of mixing the children of age four and five years has benefits as children learn from the mixed age groups and benefit from the relationships:

'We have mixed age grouping here we have age four and five in the same setting. It helps them with role models and they can learn from their seniors'. Ms. SH, India.

'We plan activities in a collaborative way. That is the guiding principle for activity-based curriculum. For example we have an activity on animals we plan activities in such a way that children will have a role play dressing up as different animals like the other day we had cow and lion story and children acted well. That story also brings out the discussion about domesticated animals, wild animals etc. Then we plan a visit to the local park in which we have some animals and introduce those animals to the children. We also plan songs fitting those themes and also some card games. All these activities will engage children in the activities and this

collaboration helps in their learning. It's difficult doing one by one we won't get the same outcome'. VI, India.

Participants from both the contexts actively felt peer relationships play an important context for all learning whether it is cognitive or language development. They felt that children learn from being in the groups especially with the mixed age groupings (in India) and mixed ability groupings (in England). That is to see that less ability children will get motivated from higher ability children and it mostly helps both ways. But the main variation is the way Indian educators are designing and organizing the collaborative activities which entails the participation of all the children while their English counter parts are providing on the spot support along with occasional team activities, which doesn't have collaboration as the underlying principle although they recognize that teamwork is important. An outcome based EYFS curriculum with mandatory prescription is definitely a limiting factor for organizing learning environments on collaborative ethos as evident from the field- based observations in England.

5.2.4. Peer relations facilitating inclusion of children with diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds

Participants in this study across the settings perceived peer relationships to be facilitating inclusive classrooms. What is important to recognize here is the reciprocal nature of the peer relationships and the inclusive nature of the classrooms.

When asked about whether or not a particular child, Ramaya (who has a statement of special needs) gets any benefit from peer relations (as she apparently cannot communicate much) Ms. FG felt that she benefits from an inclusive setting as it gives scope for peer relationships:

'Ramaya is interesting. She has autistic tendencies but she does want to make relationships. She has one or two special friends. She is building the relationships not so much through talk. She doesn't have the vocabulary, through her expressions and actions feelings she is building up her relationships, which is very interesting'. Ms. FG, England.

Ms. HI, who thinks Ramaya was benefiting from the relationships with her peers, expressed the similar view.

‘She is doing extremely well at school. It is lovely having her in the school and to accept that child has a special need and lovely they look after her, and teach her give her time and attention, and Ramaya is learning from them. For her situation it works well here’. Ms. HI, England.

Peer relationships addressing several facets of diversity like, physical, cultural, language and religious diversity and promoting respect for each other’s differences is succinctly put by Ms. RS at the English setting:

‘At Greenland’s we are very multi-cultural school and we have to respect different religions as well; it (peer relations) helps also with their learning. They respect the other children, to develop and is part of the behaviour as well, to help them to understand. Some children have special needs and some children get a bit scared from different environment put them where there is like one of the boys here who has special needs and when he started he was very crying and very loud’.

Ms. RS, England.

Indian educators echo similar views as of their English counterparts. They believe that peer relationship contribute to a more inclusive setting. As teachers they felt it is their responsibility to see that children are open to differences among them and cultivate a feeling of appreciation and respect for the differences whether the differences are language based, cultural, religious or disability based.

‘I think we have an inclusive setting. No child is excluded here. If you see some other schools we have instances of abuse and neglect with regard to differently abled children, tribal children or SC ST children. But here all children are equal and they will be treated with dignity as every other child. Our activity based

curriculum helps in bringing every child together to participate in the activities which is good'. Ms. VI, India.

Ms. VI's views cohere with my participant observations where children irrespective of their physical issues, language barriers and cultural differences take part in the activities and collaborate among themselves in the problem solving and in team activities.

'They are at different developmental stages, socially and emotionally and so it's our job to help them understand to each other to accept the differences of each other and also to show them how they can resolve conflicts and things and so that the next time when they face a situation they know'. Ms. HB, England.

5.2.5. Peer relations as an important aspect of relational pedagogy

Peer relationships were considered as an important aspect of relational pedagogy and this finding too was consistent across the settings. For example, Ms. FG feels that peer relationships and working together in groups is so important that without that practitioners cannot move forward:

'Without that we can't move forward. Partly because of sheer numbers, we have 60 children in the early years. Unless we share and we work together, we can't relate to people and same in the class relational way so without that we can't move forward and work together'. Ms. FG, England

Relationships as the basis for pedagogy and the need for practitioners to go beyond their prescribed roles to be a child's carer and even mother brings into focus how practitioners look beyond their immediate prescriptive outcomes and engage in a caring pedagogy which is the basis for relational pedagogy.

'...Look after the children help them learn and encourage and keep asking questions keep them stimulated and care and intellectual basis it's a bit of

everything. It's a big thing for children and parents they care as well. You got to be their teacher, mother, carer everything all rolled into one'. Ms. RS, England.

Ms. FG extends this further by saying:

'It's important, otherwise they are not going to have friends, they need to know how to develop those kind of relationships. Especially here at Green...; perhaps we have more parents who are not lucky themselves, may not have the social skills, need to know how to develop relationships with children, we do step in and help and teach the value and importance of relationships with other children'. Ms. FG, England

The Indian setting has this relational pedagogy as its core principle. Here instead of competition, co-operation and simple democratic living by focusing on relationships is the guiding principle in all facets of the school life. It is the relational pedagogy in a much wider and broader sense as co-operation here only the guiding principle but a way of living- with others, with peers, with seniors, teachers and with the community and to the wider environment.

This view is echoed in the words of Ms.VI who expresses contempt for the severe competition that is manifest in all the stages of education system right from early years with a complete disregard for values:

'Some private and government schools too they don't worry about a child being relating to others or teachers being respectful to students. They only concern is about marks and ranks. It's severe competition. Even small children have health and mental problems because of that. Here we don't have a concept of competition only co-operation. You are not competing with anyone. And we don't value that. We appreciate when a child helps another child etc. Children like it here and it is a punishment if we ask them don't come to school tomorrow'. Ms. VI, India.

This is in complete contrast to the situation outside both in public and private provisions who engage in down ward extension of primary schooling thereby putting a lot of pressure on the children.

‘We also play with them, eat with them participate in activities with them. It’s not like we know everything. We do everything alongside them. I like it here it’s like doing things together. They know they can be free and ask anything without fear. But they are responsible as well’. Ms. SU, India.

There is also evidence of emphasis on wider relationships with the wider community; to the nature and caring for the environment is evident in the everyday practice. Nature walks, watering and weeding the plants is also the part of the curriculum. It is to inculcate how embedded the relationships are in the universe and to develop integrated personalities in harmony with the nature.

‘It’s also about taking care of the environment and our community. It’s not only about us only. Children are fair-minded. If we say something that we should take care of the environment water the plants etc. they do it. They also understand how to take care of the environment in little ways like recycling not using the plastic etc. They try to tell at home as well’. Ms.SH, India.

This emphasis on relational aspects with others, emphasis on nature, protection of the environment and the linkages to the wider community underscores the founder father’s view of education, i.e. to prepare integrated human beings and usher in good society based on relationships.

As was evidenced in the excerpts above the *personal plane* of the analysis looked closely at *the individual* and their *perceptions* –how practitioners from India and England have perceived the significance of peer relations. Findings indicate that at the personal level, practitioners hold attitudes, assumptions and perceptions close to their heart which in turn impact their everyday practice. Practitioners from both the case

study settings expressed similar views regarding why peer relationships are significant. They expressed that peer relations are important for children's happiness, wellbeing their learning for their social competence and also felt that peer relationships provide a basis for inclusive setting and consider as an aspect of relational pedagogy. The multi-faceted significance of peer relationships is evident from the participants' interviews and participant observations.

The main variation found across the setting is that Indian educators didn't consider peer relationships either as a preparation for school or as a preparation for success in later life unlike their English counterparts. They have considered early childhood as a distinct phase where the values of co-operation, democratic simple living and relational aspects should take precedence over school or life preparation with a focus on here and now.

5.3. Discussion of findings

Having analyzed and presented findings from the personal Plane focusing on the *perceptions* of the practitioners, this part of the chapter endeavors to situate the findings in the context of extant literature and the relevant research studies and answers the first part of the main research question: What are the *perceptions* of the practitioners on the significance of peer relationships?

Rogoff (1998) uses the term '*appropriation*' to refer to the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation. It is the process by which individuals transform their understanding of & by which skills, beliefs, values, understandings and competences become automated and influence their ways and responses while fostering peer relationships. However, this transformation is not simply an individual act where practitioners 'are in a position to say *'When I use a word, it means whatever I want it to mean'* (Carroll. 1872, p. 189), but made possible by practitioners appropriating the cultural, conceptual tools and discourses available within the communities resulting in their 'enculturation' Fler (2006: 128).

As was explained in the first part of this chapter, *Personal foci of analysis* looked closely at the *individual*, in this case the practitioners who are embedded in the social and cultural context of the community. The personal foci concentrated upon the early childhood practitioner's appropriation of beliefs, values, and assumptions about the significance of peer relations and also explores on how they have perceived their role in it. This is very important as what practitioners practice will be inevitably defined by what they consider as significant for children and their relationships. Gary (2003) particularly cites that teacher's own behavior and attitudes are influencing children's social and emotional competence and wellbeing, which inevitably has consequences for children's peer relationships. The following Table 5.2 summarizes the findings and conclusions drawn from the personal plane of analysis from across the case study settings by focusing on the similarities and differences (Rogoff, 2003).

Table 5.2: *Perceptions* of practitioners from across the settings in India and England on the significance of peer relations

England	India
As a pre-condition for children's happiness & well-being & social competence	Same
As a preparation for school; for life	Not mentioned explicit or implicit (Linked to the cultural context)
As a context for all learning	Same
As a pre-requisite for inclusive classroom	Same
As an aspect of relational pedagogy	Same

As was discussed in the data analysis part of this chapter, practitioners have expressed different understandings in line with their values and beliefs (as presented in the Table

5.1). As seen from table, there were regularities in what they are considering as important reasons for fostering peer relationships. However, there are certain variations especially in relation to emphasizing peer relationships are important basis for next stage of learning or its future focus. Rogoff (2003) particularly recommends cross-cultural researchers to look for regularities and differences foregrounding their cultural contexts in order to contribute to the cross-cultural understandings.

Given that practitioners bring in their own beliefs, values, attitudes which are inevitably going to influence the task of fostering peer relations; it is important to discuss their perceptions in relation to the extant literature and the relevant studies for which the next part of the discussion now moves. This research challenges the view that practitioners face difficulties in surfacing their rationale for their practice (Moyle et al., 2002) as practitioners in this study were clear about why they consider peer relationships are very important.

As has been elucidated in the data analysis part of this chapter there are certain regularities and similarities in the way practitioners have perceived of peer relationships. The first and foremost as evident from the participant observations and semi-structured interviews is that practitioners prioritize children's happiness and wellbeing before anything else.

5.3.1. Peer relationships as a pre-condition for children's happiness, social and emotional wellbeing & social competence

As has been explained in the preceding data analysis, this is the predominant understanding explained implicitly and explicitly by the early childhood educators across the settings when asked about the significance of peer relationships. This understanding is central to the practitioners work across the settings. This has been one of the key outcomes in the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) policy documents, which emphasize on children's happiness and wellbeing. Similar is the case with the Indian setting where the foundation fathers have explicitly recognized the importance of children learning with happiness and considered as one of the important goal where children 'learn with

joy' in an free and co-operative environment free from external rewards and punishments (Online on the school website)

Practitioners further contend that peer relationships are essential for children's social and emotional well-being however there are certain ambiguities in terms of what constitutes as wellbeing as practitioners from both India and England have used these words inter-changeably yet conveying the similar meaning of social competence and emotional wellbeing. This coheres with Barblett and Maloney's (2010) contention that there is considerable debate in the children wellbeing literature emanating from health and education on what constitutes social competence and wellbeing. Terms such as social competence, emotional intelligence and mental health pervade health literature, while education uses the similar aspects as social and emotional development.

This finding of practitioners giving importance to children's peer relationships for their overall wellbeing and social competence cohere with a number of studies. For example, Dunsmore (2004) emphasized on the importance of peer interactions for children's emotional development. Likewise Trowell and Bower (1995) consider emotional wellbeing as embedded within relationships with others. A number of studies have emphasized on the positive co-relationship between children participating in early childhood and their cognitive and social outcomes (Schweinhart, 2002; OECD, 2001; Sylva et al., 2004).

Practitioners' preoccupation with children's happiness and wellbeing and considering early years as a critical phase is consistent with a number of previous studies which have established the importance of peer relationships throughout the life span. According to Denham (2006), there is ample evidence showing that social and emotional development during the early years affect health, wellbeing and social competence of children, which impact children throughout their life span. Given its significance throughout the life span, early years are considered to be the sensitive period for the development of social competence, which placed huge emphasis on practitioner's roles. Katz and McClellan (1991) actively emphasizing the active intervention from the practitioners, which further cohere with the practitioners' views

on its importance. This understanding as the early years to be the sensitive and critical period to foster peer relationships and enhance children's social competence has been well articulated by the practitioners in the study.

From the participant observations and interviews it became evident that practitioners attach a lot of importance to children's social and emotional development. English practitioners felt that although there are six learning areas viz. Communication, language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World etc. to be covered; Social and Emotional development should be the priority area and is most important than the other learning areas. EYFS (DCSF, 2008) gives equal emphasis on the social and emotional wellbeing of children (which was later made into a prime area following the Tickell Review) and explicitly acknowledges and emphasizes on the practitioners role in facilitating this skill.

This mutuality and inter-connectedness of each of the areas as stated in the EYFS (DfES, 2007) is exemplified in practitioner HB's words (as explained in the first part of the Chapter) who recognizes that each subject is important but feels that it is important to first attend to the personal and social bits in place before anything else is going to work. This same understanding voiced by HB and others underscoring the importance of positive relationships and warm inter-personal interactions for children's social and emotional development is consistently reiterated in research. The Effective provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE), the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children's development between the ages 3 and 7 studied the impact of pre-school on children's intellectual and social/behavioral development. It studied a range of different types of pre-schools and 3,000 children from differing social backgrounds came up with a finding that high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual, social and emotional development. And it has placed the warm interactional relationships with peers and 'sustained shared thinking' cultivated by teachers with the students at the heart of the effective pedagogy (Sylva et al., 2004). Another key finding emerged from the study is that 'where settings view educational and social development as complimentary and equal in importance children make better all-around progress (Sylva et al., 2004) which is reflected in practitioners understandings.

Furthermore practitioners' assumptions that peer relationships contribute to children's happiness and self-esteem corroborates with the study of Danielson and Phelps (2003), who concluded that effective social skills and peer relationships are attributed to overall happiness and high self-esteem. It is not surprising that practitioners from across the settings voiced great importance to children's happiness and wellbeing and prioritized the task of fostering peer relationships in their practice. As Barblett and Maloney (2010) contend, developing positive social and emotional growth in young children has always been a fundamental priority of early childhood educators' and was reflected from both the perceptions and practice of educators in this study, which is consistent across the case study settings. However the specific *practices* that they engage in and what exactly they do and how they do it is inevitably influenced by their respective cultural contexts, which is the focus of the next chapter.

5.3.2. Peer Relationships as a basis for all learning: cognitive and language

Peer relationships, as a basis for all learning, be it language or cognitive is sufficiently expressed by all the practitioners across the settings. This understanding is the basis for the Indian setting based on the JK curriculum, which explicitly recognizes social nature of learning and actively envisions and practices collaborative and activity based curriculum. However, these understandings are not central to the EYFS which focuses on the development of individual skills and competences which need to be monitored and assessed through individual checklist based on the understandings of developmental sequentialism (Kwon, 2002). However, the EYFS in policy actively endorses and recognizes the value of friendships and peer relationships and the importance of play and has recently introduced some changes reducing the number of learning areas (Tickell Review, DFE, 2011). However, as explained at the outset of the thesis, the essential and prescriptive nature of curriculum remains along with the underlying assumptions about the linear and evolutionary nature of learning focusing on the individual unique child and his abilities and skills in the atmosphere of enabling environments.

As evidenced from the participant observations at the Indian setting, which is explicitly based on the collaborative pedagogy and mixed age groupings, peer interactions and

collaboration remains the core of the curriculum. The emphasis on collaboration, in practice gives a lot of importance to not only peer –peer relationships but relationships in general. This coheres with the findings from the aforementioned EPPE study advocating the importance of peer relationships and teacher’s role in scaffolding (Bruner, 1985) the same. It’s concept, sustained shared thinking (Blatchford, 2002) occurs when two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative, which helps in both parties ‘partaking’/contributing to the thinking which results in extending the child’s understanding in relation to peer relationships.

It also resonates with Katz (1997)’s ‘continuous contingent interactions’ where practitioners actively engage in extending the understanding of the children and their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). However certain limitations were observed in the English setting where the learning is not explicitly based on collaborative and activity based curriculum although there is evidence of group work at times. What is to be noted is that practitioners perceived peer relationships as very important for children’s learning be it language or cognitive and made steps to ensure that this happens even in the presence of prescriptive curriculum focusing on ‘unique child’ (see the Practice aspect in the following chapter).

There are several studies, which have recognized the importance of peer relationships and collaborative learning and peer interaction strategies as a basis for learning (Kutnick, 2002; Ortega, 1999; Gettinger, 2003). Cohen et al., (2005) and Denham (2006), for example, have focused on the social and emotional development and explored how children’s ability to make effective relationships affects other domains of development especially language, communication, numeracy, and early literacy and so important in its own right. This understanding is consistent across the settings although practice aspect differs across the cultural contexts, which is the focus of the next chapter, which looks at the practice aspect of the practitioner’s roles in fostering peer relationships.

This emphasis on collaborative learning is central to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social nature of development, which envisions how learning happens from inter-psychological to the intra-psychological. He further explains through the concept of More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) how practitioners and more abled peers contribute and extend children's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), advocating the active roles for practitioners in fostering peer relationships. This understanding was implicitly and explicitly came out in the present study in which practitioners are found to be intuitively and intentionally shaping the environments and adopting cultural tools so as to facilitate peer relationships albeit in their respective cultural contexts of enabling or restrictive environments.

Practitioners from across the settings are seen to be actively scaffolding children's peer relationships in diverse ways and slowly withdrawing their support so as to let children manage their own behaviours and relationships as evidenced from the participant observations and interviews. This active position of the educators' cohere with Bruner's (1986) concept of scaffolding extending upon Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which means assisting the child in their efforts to initiate and maintain peer relationships and realize their ZPD which is not possible without the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).

Rogoff (2003, 2005) further extended this understanding by stressing how children learn and transform by participating in the related on going activities. In her view the three planes-Personal, Inter-personal and Community interact and inter relate with each other bringing out the mutuality of all the three planes. This extends the focus from solely individualistic or maturationist interpretations of peer relationships or from the ecological focus which would attribute the same to the children's temperament or the individual likes and dislikes or their environment. Rather than seeing the individual dispositions and environmental contexts as two separate entities Rogoff (2003) through her cross-cultural research synthesized the same and emphasized the interconnectedness and the mutuality of the planes in children's cognition. Rogoff's social cultural approach towards children's development vis a vis peer relationships recognizes them as embedded across the planes. This position has come out strongly in the study where practitioners are seen to be attending to children's personal needs while organizing their

inter-personal interactions and environments. This coheres with Rogoff, (1990: 8) argument that ‘Learning and development is inextricably intertwined and are *embedded in the context of social relationships*’. This further coincides with Scarr and McCartney’s (1983) theory of genotype environment interaction where both the biological maturation and ecological contexts act as an interface for children’s peer relationships.

Apart from the evidence of cognitive, behaviorist and socio cultural theories influencing the practitioners in fostering peer relationships, there is evidence of other theorists in the study. In this study, practitioners are actively seen to be modeling their own behaviours and at times peer modeling to facilitate children to learn from each other and develop their social and intellectual competencies. A particular example is Bandura’s social learning model (1977) which recognizes the social nature of the peer relationships in which children learn from each other the skills and competences of initiating and maintaining peer relationships by modeling the behaviours from their peers and significant others. Bandura (1977) maintains that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. He explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences and is considered as a bridge between diverse theoretical standpoints.

However, this concept of peer/adult modeling has limitations in Indian context where modeling behaviours is neither advocated nor encouraged. Children are not supposed to simply follow and model their behavior or opinions just because their More Knowledgeable Others told them or the tradition expects them. Both the children and practitioners are continuously supposed to be reflexive on their own behaviours and be critical or challenge the established patterns or assumptions. This has further implications for power relationships and authority issues as the Indian setting believes and practices egalitarianism and democracy in true spirit. Practitioners are seen to be reflexive in their own *perceptions* and *practice* in terms of bringing in their own assumptions and belief systems into the setting and children are free to question any practice without any fear of censure rather than simply modeling somebody else’s

behavior. However Indian setting actively recognizes the social nature of learning and explicitly base children's learning on the principles of collaboration and exploration exemplifying the relational pedagogy and community.

Apart from the social cultural aspects of collaboration and community, what is striking in Indian setting is the aspect of 'reflection' on the part of educators as well as students who are required to question, challenge, change the inherent power dynamics, authority issues, the issues that we acquire out of habit of or tradition. Questioning the taken for granted notions, assumptions and theories lend a post-modernist touch by questioning the 'regimes of truth' as (Foucault, 1991) calls it. This is considered quite important and is revolutionary in Indian context where strict obedience to the authority is considered a hallmark of a good behavior and continuation of hierarchical structures of a stratified society is considered as following tradition.

JK particularly considers education as a vehicle to usher in a 'good society based on good relations' rather than maintaining the status quo and inherited power structures. This has implications for practitioner's roles as they are seen as 'co-learners' in the process of learning rather than authority figures. This post-modernist aspect to peer relationships is quite innovative and evident in curriculum like Reggio Emilia where the genesis relates to the Malaguzzi's (1998) desire for cultivating an integrated human being who can question and challenge rather than mere conform.

Certainly Post-modernist perspectives have potential to enrich and expand our understanding of relationships and educator's roles. In a way this research synthesizes the developmental theories with focus on individual to the socio-cultural theories with emphasis on community to the post-modernist perspectives which looks at the inherent power structures and taken for granted notions embedded in the environments. Through participant observations and in depth interviews with the practitioners it became evident that knowing how peer relationships provide contexts for children's learning be it language, cognitive or intellectual, they attach a lot of importance to the task of fostering peer relationships.

5.3.3. Peer relationships as a preparation for school; later life

Children's social and emotional development and their ability to initiate and maintain peer relationships as a necessary condition for their school readiness and for future success is actively voiced in this study by English educators. However, this understanding is neither voiced nor practiced in the Indian case study, which again links to the cultural context of the setting and the genesis of its foundation.

A number of studies recognize the importance of peer relationships in ensuring school success for the children. For example, Wentzel and Asher (1995), Stipek, (2006) and Raver, (2002) explicitly link children's school success to the firm foundation of their social and emotional skills. This understanding has received further boosting from a longitudinal study 'From Neurons to Neighborhoods', which conclusively linked children's school success to a firm foundation of children's social and emotional skills (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

Also, studies on early schooling further demonstrate that children's relationships with teachers and peers are important to school success (Raver and Knite, 2002; Raver and Zigler, 2004, McLane, 2003). Satisfying reciprocal relationships have been strongly linked to high levels of self-esteem and socialization with great potential to influence their future life trajectory failing which more difficult to modify (Farrar, Goldfield and Moore, 2007). Research conducted by Dunham (2006) shows the importance of social and emotional competence to school readiness, future academic performance and success in participation and interactions with peers and adults.

This understanding is quite implicit and explicit in the philosophy and practice of the English practitioners who consider peer relationships as crucial for children's school readiness and for future success. This is unsurprising given that the EYFS curriculum is especially formulated to prepare children for the primary school, which was evident from the mandatory maintenance of children's profiles (DCSF, 2008). Children's profiles with six learning areas (which later changed into four prime areas) with the social and emotional development as one of the areas are maintained throughout the year to be assessed at the end of the year and when they start the primary school. Giving

equal importance to the all the learning areas, this profile lists children's skills and competencies in a linear and evolutionary manner specifying ages and stages theoretical understanding and is based on developmental sequentialism (Kwon, 2002). Practitioners need to adhere to this profile and observe and register changes accordingly.

However during the Tickell Review (DFE, 2011) (which was instigated to study the effects of EYFS one year into practice) found out that nearly 70 percent of the practitioners felt the profiles were not at all useful tools when the children start their schools. Some 40 found that it is not a useful tool to observe children and given them titles and treat them as deficient even before they start the school. There were certain changes like reduction in number of learning goals following the Tickell Review; however the essential nature of prescription and the underlying developmental understandings are still central to the EYFS. The EYFS (DfES, 2007; 2009) also considers relationships as very crucial for successful development of personality and it is not surprising that practitioners felt strongly that peer relationships are very much needed for several reasons: to succeed in their professional and personal lives.

However, it is in stark contrast to their counter-parts in India who didn't explicitly or implicitly considered peer relationships as important for their school preparation or for future preparation. This again links to the wider social, historical and cultural context of the school where as explained at the outset the genesis of the school itself which was disenchanted with the highly competitive environment of the public and private provision with undue focus on school readiness and future orientation. The particular school which is based on the JK philosophy among others is highly critical of the narrow focus of the education as preparation for future career and came as a strong reaction to the narrow school readiness curriculum widely prevalent in the mainstream schools. Here children are not being prepared for some unknown future or unduly pre occupied with the school preparation and engage in three R's –but focus on 'here and now' itself and the child as a protagonist. Here the emphasis was on children collaborating in creative activities in an atmosphere of co-operation and democracy.

This understanding reflects in the philosophy and practice of the educators who enjoy higher degrees of autonomy in devising their activities and transforming them according to the needs and tastes of the children. This focus on the present without worrying about the future focus or the school readiness focus helps practitioners engage in constructive and creative activities in a collaborative spirit which is helping the peer relationships in a natural embedded way. This shows a different understanding of the children as protagonists of their own learning working on the principle of freedom and responsibility than on the external rewards and punishments. This focus on 'here and now' coheres with and is also reflected in the Nordic context (Finland and Sweden) where social pedagogues are actively seen to be working with children in collaborative projects in an environment free from prescription and evaluation while the practitioners from England are seen to be working at the individual level in an atmosphere characterized by prescriptive curriculum Kutnick (2007).

These two trends of pre- primary focus versus social pedagogy is what Dahlberg (2009) contend as two contemporary trends in early childhood curriculum worldwide. One is pre-primary trend where practitioners are expected to prepare children for their next stage of school i.e. primary school and they do so by focusing on Literacy and Numeracy as is the case with the Indian mainstream early childhood care and education provision and reception classes of the English early years. Another trend is social pedagogue focus where practitioners prioritize children's happiness, wellbeing and focus on their social and emotional development based on the Socio-Cultural approach. This is more explicit in the curriculum and pedagogic practices of Nordic practitioners especially Sweden, Denmark, and Finland and also in Netherlands which has Basic Curriculum in place based on the explicit principles of socio-cultural approach (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003).

There is a much criticism and concern raised against the schoolification trend in early years Dahlberg, (2009), Moss, (2004), OECD, (2004). This has been linked to the governmental focus on managerial systems and accountability with purpose of education being economic prosperity and the image of children as future workers who can contribute to the future prosperity of the nation.

5.3.4. Peer relationships as a basis for inclusive environments

Peer relationships providing a basis for inclusive environments has come out strongly across the settings. Practitioners strongly felt that children with disabilities or language problems or with different educational needs will greatly benefit from the peer relationships. This finding correlates with EPPE study finding that the settings which put emphasis on children's diversity catering to children of different genders, cultural backgrounds and abilities or interests promoted better social and intellectual outcomes for children (Sylva et al., 2004) which has positive consequences for children's peer relationships.

Practitioner's perceptions of peer relationships as a basis for inclusive classroom and recognizing their role in ensuring it cohere with a number of studies. According to Ashiabi (2007) early childhood educators have a huge role to play in facilitating the inclusive classrooms. This is especially important as a lot of studies emphasize that young children from a very young age can form political and cultural preferences as evidenced from the works of Connolly and Kelly, (2002); MacNaughton, (1999); Connolly, (2005). Attending to gender inclusiveness is another aspect where practitioners have a huge role to play and it is crucial children are aware of the gender differences very early and concluded that children can label each other by their sex (Honig, 1983). Developmental significance of children peer competence for peer relationships in children with disabilities is emphasized in the works of Odom, McConnell and McEvoy (1992).

Retig (1995) contends that practitioner's attention to diversity aspects in the setting is important as it gives an indication of how children interact with each other, prefer to play which will have consequences for their peer relationships. I have observed in the settings how practitioners are organizing the physical setting, social and emotional setting and the learning environment to address the diversity issues. As the practitioners have noted it is important that children with disabilities are included in the regular classroom activities. This is important considering that in a study by Gerber (1977) children in early years as young as three and a half to five years are aware of the disabilities of other children and without proper intervention children will not be able to participate actively in the activities emphasizing the active intervention from the

practitioners. According to Gulalnick (1980), without active intervention from the teacher non-disabled children tend to play with other non-disabled children, which have implications for an inclusive setting. How practitioners are able to devise inclusive strategies is again a cultural question defined by the overall contexts, which will be explored in the following chapter.

The United Nations Charter on Children's Rights (1989) emphasis on the participatory rights of children and considers children as individuals with rights rather than needs which is further emphasized in the works of Nutbrown and Clough, (2009). The fact that many countries are now experiencing increased immigration resulting in classrooms becoming increasingly diverse be it physical, linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversities is calling for more active and inclusive approaches on the part of the practitioners as noted from both the English and Indian contexts. For example, the case study setting in England actively addresses racial diversity in the school by organizing multi-cultural week which gives an opportunity to children to learn more about different cultures and races and appreciate their diverse ways.

At the Indian setting too, respecting diversity issues is an important aspect as everyone not only the practitioners are required to respect the inclusive ethos of the institution. I have noted from participant observations how practitioners engage in activities that allow for discussion debate and understanding of various diversity issues. Practitioners from across the settings consistently felt they have to pay attention to in order to ensure an inclusive setting where everyone can have equal opportunities to initiate and maintain peer relationships. This emphasis on equal opportunities is important as research notes in a study of black and white children's ethnic/racial awareness conducted by Finkelstein and Haskin (1983) it's been concluded that that awareness influence their playmate preferences.

Indian setting is quite radical in its approach with complete adherence to inclusive pedagogy and democratic way of living where everyone's views are listened to and respected. Here practitioners too are required to actively and critically reflect on their roles and behaviours resulting in the transforming of their roles and accepting every

child as an individual. This is considered a revolution in Indian context, which traditionally has a hierarchical and stratified social system with clear demarcation of higher caste and lower caste distinctions.

Often mainstream media reports glaring examples of negligence and mis-treatment meted out towards children from low caste backgrounds especially from the teachers coming from higher caste. Hence educator's adopting a critical attitude towards their own behaviours is supposed to be a pre-condition to usher in truly inclusive classrooms. This aspect of questioning the inherent power structures and taken for granted notions forms the central basis JK's philosophy which aspires to bring in a 'good society' by questioning the taken for 'granted discourses' and the 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1991).

JK especially considers right education based on relationships in an environment free from censure is important to question the taken for granted notions of society and question its 'regimes of truth' as Foucault (1991) calls it. He actively abhors mere conforming to the society but calls for an integrated individual who can question who can think for themselves in an atmosphere of freedom based on well-meaning relationships with their peers, teachers, wider community and wider cultures and cosmos. This emphasis on well-meaning relationships based on co-operation is central to Rabindranath Tagore's vision who envisioned the global village and the need to educate children in a way that roots them in their own cultural history, yet enables them to personally identify with other races and cultures, as well as the different strata within a given society focusing on the Being and belonging aspects.

This definitely holds true for all settings across the cultural contexts where practitioners are seen to be aware of the differences in children be it racial, ethnic, linguistic, language, ability or culture and are seen to be actively devising strategies to embrace the differences by adopting the pedagogy of inclusion defined by their contexts. How far they are able to and exactly are they doing it is again a cultural question, which will be addressed, in the next Chapter 6, which looks at the *practice* aspects of educators roles in facilitating peer relationships to which our discussion now moves.

5.3.5. Peer relationships as a basis for relational pedagogy

The notion of peer relationships as an aspect of relational pedagogy has come out strongly across the settings although in a more integrated and extended manner in Indian setting. Practitioners felt that learning is not an isolated process and hence peer relationships are especially important to engage in the group work. As Ms. FG points out it is difficult to engage in a group work if a child doesn't know how to relate to others, ask questions and engage in relationships. She maintains that from her research and her everyday experience she found that learning simply doesn't happen if peer relationships are not attended to. Ms. FG's position foregrounds the importance of proactive role in scaffolding (Bruner, 1986) children's Zone of Proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which is not possible without their active support.

There are certain qualitative differences in how practitioners engage in both the contexts. EYFS though explicitly recognizes the importance of learning in relation to others and the importance of environment in it, however the learning profiles are individual in nature and hence all the observation, assessment and evaluation is in relation to the individual child and how he or she doing in terms of prescriptive outcomes. Moreover, though there is some occasional group work, collaboration as a learning strategy was not evident from the English setting (Kutnick, 2007) except for the times where children come together during circle times, socio dramatic play and free play. Most of the time practitioners are seen to be working individually with each child and focusing on their literacy and numeracy as was noticed from the participant observations. This corroborates with findings from Kutnick's et al., (2007) study, which suggests that English practitioners are seen to be individual in their approach with regard to the task of fostering peer relationships rather than adopting a whole class learning approach.

The aforementioned study further noted, this relational pedagogy is more clearly explored in certain curricula like Swedish curricula where practitioners are seen to be promoting and adopting whole group strategies in a collaborative way and are focused on social and emotional development. This has been linked to their overall social pedagogue model where the 'pedagogue as practitioner sees herself as a person in relationship with the child as a whole person, supporting the child's overall

development' (Boddy et al., 2006: 3). There are certain studies from English context, which have explored the relational pedagogy in the settings and have explored how practitioners giving attention to social and emotional development prepare children for their subsequent learning (Luff, 2009). Waller's (2006) study on outdoor learning further demonstrates how practitioners can engage in relational pedagogy and socio cultural aspects of learning by attending to children's voices by adopting participatory methods of research like Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) where children become partners in the learning through the process of documentation and learning stories.

There is increasing critique over the narrow focus of curriculum on 'Becoming' aspect of children and emphasize attention to the Being and Belonging aspects of childhood (Papatheodorou, 2006, 2010; Moyles, 2001; Miller, 2003, 2006; Katz and McClellan 1997; Lens Taguchi (2010). They consider relationships as very crucial to the effective classroom environments and advocated the adoption of relational pedagogy, which is underpinned by cognitive and social pedagogy. This relational pedagogy is the basis of Reggio Emilia preschools in Italy, which emphasize on relationships where the pedagogy transforms into pedagogy *of relationships* (Malaguzzi, 1993b) and pedagogy *of listening* (Rinaldi, 2005).

Similarly Indian setting is based on relational pedagogy as JK considers learning in relation to the wider community, and to the cosmos as a whole with a lot of importance to the nature and preservation of the environment. According to him to be is to be related with relations not only to the community but also to the wider cosmos. This way JK has extended and broadened the concept of relational pedagogy paving the roots for eco pedagogy. His Indian counterpart, Tagore too believes in mutuality of human beings and extends the notion of relational pedagogy by emphasizing on the embedded nature of relationships. According to him "Its truth is not the mass of materials, but their universal relatedness. A drop of water is not a particular assortment of elements, it is their mutuality" (Tagore, 1994: 401). Like JK, he too abhors training though only through books and cut and dried methods which is a secondary experience and places a premium on shaping children's learning experiences firsthand experience though people and the natural processes especially during early childhood.

Both JK and Tagore argue that academic learning becomes joyless and purely mechanical if it is looked upon merely as an instrument for getting jobs and for material and financial gains. In order to ensure the posit of becoming a total man, the aims of education should be not only as a means to a livelihood, but more importantly to promote awareness of human identity, where one comes into well-balanced relations with others. It means that the end of education is to lead us into how to live meaningfully vis-à-vis the people around us. This has been significantly noticed with the Indian setting both implicitly and explicitly through participant observations and interviews the practitioners with its emphasis on co-operation and simple democratic living as the core philosophy.

This notion of relational pedagogy has endorsement from the pragmatist Dewey (1938) who argued for a relational pedagogy based on experiential learning. According to him, children learn more by doing things together. By choosing what their group would like to do, planning their work, helping one another do it, trying out various ways and means of performing the tasks, involved and discovering what will forward the project, comparing and appraising the results, the youngsters would best develop their latent powers, their skill, understanding, self-reliance and cooperative habits which is possible only in a setting which recognizes collaboration and co-operation as the guiding principles like Reggio Emilia and the Indian case study. I will explain more on how collaborative environments acts as the process and product of peer relationships in the following Chapter 6.

5.4. Chapter summary

This chapter has situated the findings that emerged from the personal plane of analysis which has focused on the question: ‘what are the *perceptions* of practitioners on the significance of peer relationships’ in the context of relevant literature and research. Practitioners from across the settings have actively endorsed the importance of peer relationships for a variety of reasons. First and foremost they perceived peer relationships as very important for children’s happiness and wellbeing, for their social competence and as necessary to make friendships. They also consider it as very important for children’s learning be it language or cognitive. They consider it as very important for a relational pedagogy and as an aspect of inclusive setting. Practitioners

from England have also seen it as a precondition for school preparation and also for future success.

One important variation is that Indian educators didn't consider it as a must for future preparation or preoccupied with the school readiness. This only variation has been linked to the wider socio cultural context of the settings, which have defined their perceptions. Having foregrounded the practitioners understandings as to the importance of peer relationships, now the discussion moves on to their *practice* aspect as gleaned from the participant observations and semi-structured interviews. The next Chapter 6 situates the findings emerged from the Inter-Personal Plane of analysis in the context of relevant studies and literature and explicates the link between the perceptions of the practitioners and their actual practice. Are the *perceptions* automatically and readily translate into the *practice* and under what *contexts*??

Chapter Six: Exploring the *practice* aspect of early childhood educators: Cross-cultural Insights from India and England through the lens of Inter-Personal Plane

6.1. Introduction

This chapter endeavors to present the findings relating to the *practice* aspect of peer relationships and discuss in relation to the extant studies and related research. The exploration into their *practice* is important given that what practitioners think and perceive might not automatically translate into *practice* and what they have said has to be corroborated through what they are doing or able to do. Moreover, as noted from the cross-cultural contexts of India and England, though there are many similarities with regard to practitioners' *perceptions* as to the significance of peer relationships how they do it is most often defined by their respective cultural contexts. The chapter explores, analyzes and discusses the *practice* aspect from the lens of Inter-Personal plane of the Three Planes Analysis of Rogoff (1995, 2003).

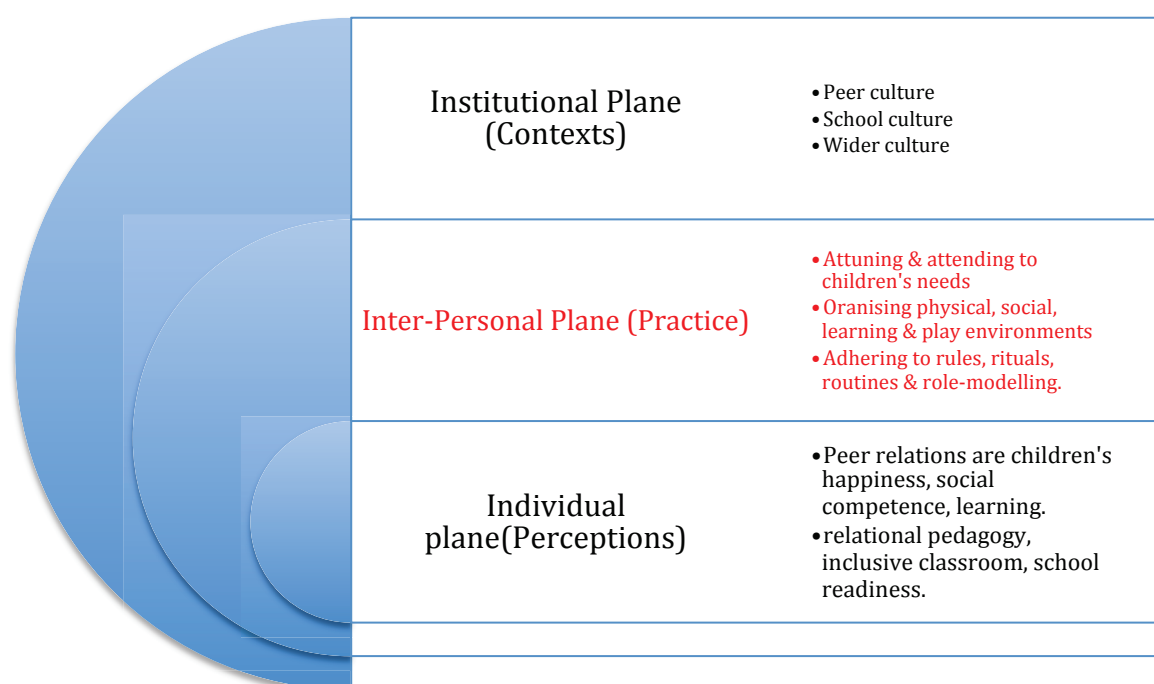
Rogoff (1993) correlates the Inter-Personal plane with the concept of Guided Participation, which refers to the '*processes and systems of inter-personal arrangements & complex inter-personal engagements between people while participating in culturally valued activity*' (Rogoff, 1993). In a way the inter-personal plane refers to the day-to-day arrangements and engagements at the inter-personal level that facilitate peer relationships. The 'guidance' referred to in guided participation involves the direction offered by cultural and social values, as well as social partners and the 'participation' in guided participation refers to observation as well as hands on involvement in the socio cultural activity.

Drawing from participant observations and semi-structured interviews, collating and corroborating evidence with one another this *inter-personal plane* explores the ways and means adopted by early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relationships and by looking at the '*interpersonal engagements and arrangements as they fit in socio-cultural processes*' of fostering peer relationships. Essentially it explores the 'events of everyday life as individuals engage with others and with materials and arrangements collaboratively managed by themselves and others ... as people direct their activity

toward implicit, explicit, or emerging goals’ which in this case the task of fostering peer relationships.

Here I first present the findings (as shown in the Figure 6.1) drawn from the Inter-Personal Plane of Three Plane analysis of data followed by discussion of these findings in the context of relevant literature and research in the second part of the chapter.

Figure 6.1. Findings from the Inter-personal Plane: the *Practice* aspect of educator’s roles



The findings, as represented in Figure 6.1 above, suggest that at the inter-personal level, practitioners engage in three broad ways to engage in fostering of peer relationships. *First*, they attune themselves and attend to the children’s needs be it physical, social, emotional and cognitive. *Secondly*, they organize environments in such a way that contribute to children’s relationships with others around, by organizing the physical setting of the classroom, by setting the emotional tone of the classroom, by structuring the learning activities and also by organizing play environment. *Thirdly*, by adhering to

rules, routines, rituals and role modeling which attunes and ‘en-culturate’ children to be the members of a learning community and promote the feeling of ‘we’.

However, though these patterns are the same across the settings, what distinguishes the actual ‘*practice*’ of HOW they are able to do it, which again is a cultural question. Vygotsky (1978, 1998) particularly talks about the role of ‘cultural tools’ -both material and psychological which guide the human mind and behavior. According to Vygotsky, tools mediate social and individual functioning and connect the external and the internal, the social and the individual. Nevertheless, Rogoff (1995) contests this aspect of connecting the internal and external and argues for a mutuality of the social and psychological planes and the impossibility of drawing a boundary between the social and the individual; technical and the psychological tools (Robbins 2005) which ensures the transformation.

This research particularly has taken note of Cole and Wretch’s (1996) assertion that the cultural tools not only direct the human behavior but also essentially shape and transform individual functioning as has been noticed from the *practice* aspect of practitioners in fostering peer relationships. My argument is that although there are regularities and patterns as evident from the participant observations what accounted for the qualitatively different manifestation of how they do it –is essentially mediated by the use of cultural tools - both physical and mental (Rogoff, 1995) that are available to the participants which have structured and transformed their actual *practice*.

6.2. Presentation of findings from the inter-personal plane

The Figure 6.2 summarizes the ways and means adopted by early childhood practitioners’ in fostering peer relationships at the Inter-Personal level, which is similar across the cross-cultural contexts. However HOW they do again is a *cultural* question. As was evident from the participant observations and the semi-structured interviews, fostering peer relationships is an on-going process and happens all the time in the settings not only when resolving the peer conflicts.

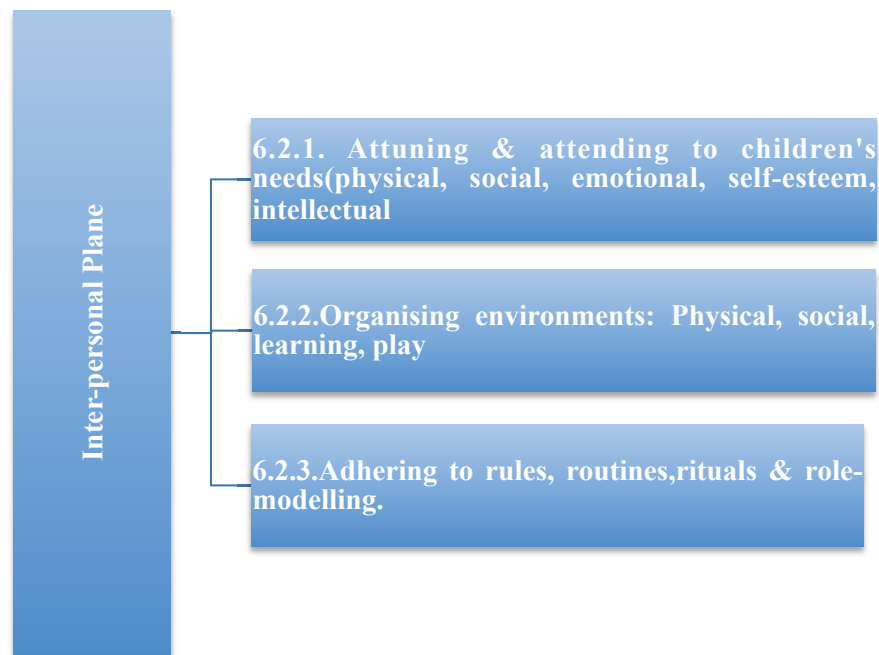


Figure: 6.2. Ways and means adopted by practitioners in fostering peer relationships at the Inter-Personal level

Ms. FG succinctly captured this by saying practitioners are doing it all the time even when sitting on the carpet. This shows the implicit and explicit nature of the task of fostering peer relationships:

‘I suppose we are doing it all the time, even when we are sitting on the carpet. It’s about respecting each other. When a child is talking, importance of listening to him, showing interest and asking questions. I think we are doing in everything we are doing at school’. Ms. FG, England.

6.2.1. Attuning and attending to children’s needs

As shown in the Figure 6.2, at the inter-personal level, the researcher had identified three distinct ways of fostering peer relations. One is by *intuitively attuning and attending to children’s needs* viz. psychological, belonging, safety, self-esteem or intellectual needs though not necessarily in the same order all the time.

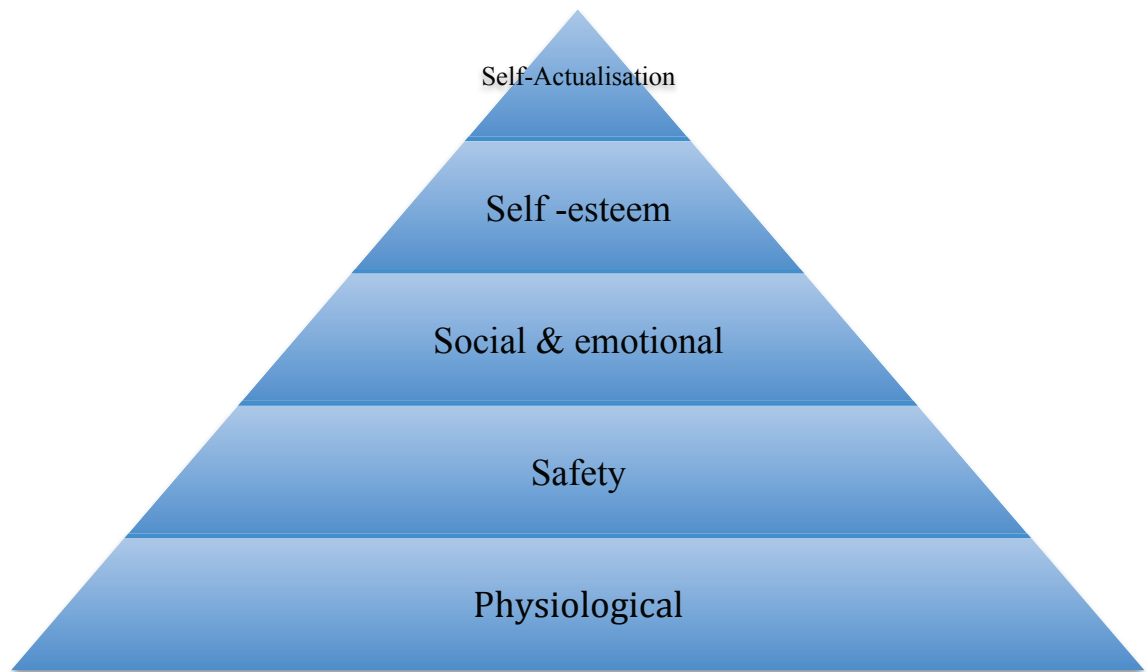


Figure 6.3. Educators attuning and attending to children's needs: Adopted from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

What was evident from the interviews and participant observations is that the physical and safety needs get precedence over the other higher order needs which was represented in the following Figure 6.3. Although the underlying theory is not explicitly understood or explained by all the practitioners in their interview responses, it is quite evident in their practice in both implicit and explicit ways. It is interesting how one practitioner explicitly mentioned Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (1943) and found it immensely relevant to her everyday practice:

'I have on the back of my mind Maslow's hierarchy of needs all the time. I feel that is the base. I see it every day, if they are not happy, not feeling safe and settled and you are fighting a losing battle trying to get their concentration and learn anything else'. Ms. HB, England.

This implicit understanding is evident in the everyday practice across the settings. The way tables are set for snacks and water, the way lunch times are organized during lunch

time and the facility children have to attend to their thirst and hunger at any point of the day is apparent at the English setting. The way safety checks are done at the playground before they have play time and before and during their picnic times to local places exemplifies this understanding that children need to be safe and secure at all times. The EYFS (DfES, 2008) guidance notes also explicit about the safety procedures need to be followed indoors, outdoors and also during local visits.

Yet at times the safety can be from an unruly child whose behavior is a concern to the fellow students. Most of the practitioners agree that peer conflicts are an issue especially if a child happens to be a single child and has issues with sharing. If a child gets too noisy and threatens fellow students, Ms. RS confides the child will be taken to a different place and will be talked to as safety is the most important priority at all the times. This brings out the importance of safety regarding the physical environment but the emotional environment as well and the important role practitioners have in organizing the safe physical and emotional environments.

A similar kind of understanding and arrangement is observed in Indian setting. When children arrive at 9.30am in the morning they have time for 'sattuva' English equivalent being 'nourishment' where children are given cups of java (porridge equivalent made with a combination of eight nutritious pulses, jiggery and milk) made straight from the schools kitchen. This is to make sure that all the children are well fed (in practice everyone at the school takes this in the morning but children have it twice also in the evening) and are physically ready for the day. This was necessitated because some children come to school travelling quite a long distance coupled with the school's explicit emphasis on healthy organic food. Furthermore, the school management has a strict policy on children consuming certain foods especially processed and it is to be noted that for the higher classes who live in school campus they mostly grow the vegetables and prepare their food by sharing responsibilities in a democratic environment that values simple living. Safety needs also given a priority indoors or when travelling to local places for study visits.

As one teacher, VI puts it-

‘Small children if they fear for anything they cannot be happy and be comfortable with others. Again they are also not afraid to talk to us whatever their opinions etc. without fear or censure. You have to see at the assembly or at council how they express their opinions. We value questioning here. You know how our society is and the outside schools. You are not allowed to question grown-ups. It’s like disobedience’.

Ms. VI captures the essence of safety and has actually broadens its perspective. Here safety is not only about ensuring physical environment where children feel safe and secure it is also about providing emotional tone where children can talk freely without any fear of censure. This is considered important rebellion in Indian context where traditionally children are supposed to obey adults (especially parents and teachers) without any question and the larger society and mainstream schools rely and anticipate physical manifestation of respect. For example, when a teacher enters the classroom all the children will get up, salute and says good morning which is a very regular practice in mainstream schools where non-compliance often leads to strict punishments. In this setting, this kind of tokenism won’t find a place and nobody is allowed to say or do anything just because of habit or tradition.

As Ms.VI confides, when children from this school go out and talk to others at the first instance they come across as rude because they are not engaging in some outward behaviours what society traditionally expects everyone to do but they will soon appreciate the positive and free thinking they have got. This, she has linked to the censure-free environment that the school explicitly practices to ensure freedom of thought and expression. As evidenced from observations and interviews from across the settings, feeling safe and secure is an important need to be taken care of by the practitioners. It is very important for peer relationships because only when a child is feeling physically and emotionally secure can he make effective relationships with others.

As was evident from the participant observations from across the settings; practitioners also engage in promoting the feeling of belonging to a community; the feeling of

togetherness in the children which is essential for peer relationships to develop which links to their social and emotional needs. It is evident through the activities like assembly, carpet time and having rules and regulations exact starting and finishing times for the class to name some. Also rituals like preparing a birthday card for some child's birthday in the setting, singing songs and giving farewell to somebody who is moving to other school or welcoming activity when somebody new joins. All these activities carried out by practitioners foster a sense of community and belongingness essential for relationships to develop.

There is evidence of practitioners engaging in self-esteem needs and intellectual needs of the community in their everyday practice. Fostering a gradual sense of independence in the tasks, giving a degree of autonomy with respect to which the activity to unfold, putting a child in perspective regarding a peer conflict, assisting children to find answers relating an activity and extending their understanding and scaffolding them to the task of initiating and maintaining peer relationships and assisting them when they need help -all relate to addressing a child's esteem and intellectual needs.

Although not necessarily in the same order of Hierarchy of Needs, it is evident that practitioners attune themselves to children's needs and *intuitively* attend to them from across the settings although there are cultural variations on how they do it under the constraints of given curriculum and the availability of cultural tools.

6.2.2. Organizing the classroom environments (both indoors and outdoors) of a learning community: Evolutionary versus revolutionary

At the *inter-personal level*, practitioners further engage in fostering peer relationships by *intentionally* shaping the classroom environments albeit under the cultural contexts which either constrain them or afford them more to the task. Shaping and organizing classroom environments is an encompassing task and includes the facets of *physical, social and emotional, learning and play* environments as summarized in the Figure 6.4.

From the classroom observations, it became apparent that how practitioners arrange and organize the classroom environment hugely matters in terms of facilitating/obstructing the flow of peer relationships. Whether the classroom is set up according to behavioral approach where in the understanding that children will make sense of the world individually or recognizing that cognition as collaboration process makes a huge difference. Here the practitioners understandings of how children learn and how peer relationships develop and beneficial for learning determined the organization of the environment in both the settings across the Indian and English context.

Once again how they are actually doing it is defined by the respective cultural contexts mediated by the availability of the cultural tools. For example, the kind of theoretical underpinnings underlying the curriculum frameworks; EYFS, Age and Stage evolutionary perspectives (Piaget, 1983) and the Krishnamurti curriculum (1953) based on revolutionary social pedagogy determined how the environments are organized.

The following Figure 6.4 explains the relationships between different aspects of environments, be it indoors or outdoors and explicates the influence of culture and the cultural tools for example theoretical understandings of evolutionary (ages and stages, EYFS) or revolutionary (social pedagogy, JK); emphasis on indoor or outdoor learning in refining and defining the actual practice of the practitioners, which accounts for the variations in their roles. As demonstrated from the participant observations, the environment doesn't just limit to the physical environment (whether it is sufficiently inclusive or exclusive in attention to diverse needs of children) but very well goes beyond that. The social and emotional tempo of the setting depending how educator's are able to deal with conflicts among children and ensure harmonious atmosphere; the learning environment and the fact that whether it is based on individual school readiness focus or on collaborative social pedagogy focus; and the play environments whether they are engaging in child initiated free play or adult led – all have consequences for how children are fostering peer relationships and how far are educators' able to foster them.

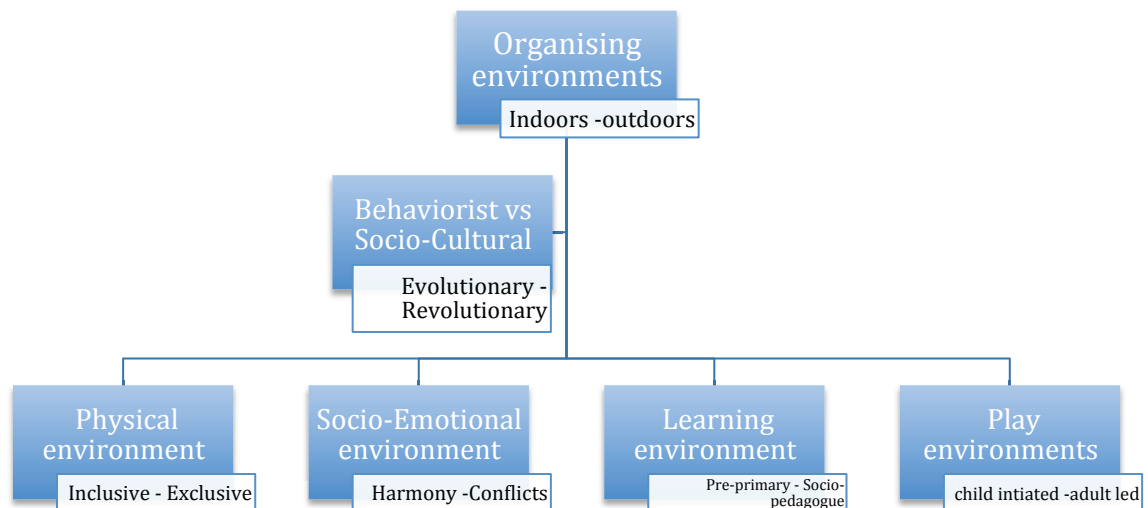


Figure 6.4: Educators’ organizing environments in their settings to facilitate peer relationships: Evolutionary/Developmental Sequentialism - Revolutionary/Socio-cultural

Physical environments: Inclusion-exclusion; indoor-outdoors

As has been observed through participant observations, the way environments are organized makes a huge difference to the way peer relationships are facilitated which is again based on the underlying theoretical assumptions on how learning happens or how peer relationships develop. For example, Ms. FG sees classroom organization as a crucial first step in seeing that children work together in small groups, which facilitates interaction among children.

‘It is conducive to working together. I think we put out materials in such a way that children can share and also encourages small world play and also to live through their experiences they have had at home. Yes, environment, to encourage some of their creativity we can listen and help them’. Ms. FG, England.

The same view is echoed in the words of Ms. HB who says that the fact that children come from different settings and different backgrounds necessitates them to promote a feeling of togetherness as a community among the children:

'First when they join the school, we have children coming from lots of different settings. So the important thing is to be part of the community. First thing is the ducks and owls community and also early years community and lot of work to be done, also beyond that there is this school community and lot of bridges to build'.
HB, England.

This remark from Ms. HB demonstrates the understanding that there is no such thing as a single learning community. Children belong to their group as learners, and to the early years community and then the school community. Taken further children also belong to the wider social community, religious community etc. This remark exemplifies the presence of multiple communities in any supposedly homogenous community of children. The fact that children belong to varied socio, cultural and learning communities will have consequences how they progress is not in linear manner as opposed to the understandings implicit in EYFS, which is underpinned by developmental sequentialism (Kwon 2002).

Hence in order to build bridges and to foster a sense of belongingness to the community, practitioners plan and organize a number of activities for children to become familiar with other children and also equip them with necessary language skills. Ms. FG explains how they organize activities to foster community feelings and to develop necessary language skills:

'In September, when children come back, we do tropical ---nursery rhymes, poems, playground games, which make kind of language which they need are very important and helping with the kind of language, help with reading and developing social skills, we think of things like ringa ringa roses, London bridge is falling down'. Ms. FG, England.

‘I work in the afternoon and it’s different to morning; less of a routine in the afternoon. There is a lot of free play and the activities are set up for groups and the role play area those kind of activities are social activities and various tables and various sections of the classroom and children need to know what different parts of the classroom are for and they need guidelines what the rules are they are social activities that are created for the children. Even if they are doing by themselves they also engage in conversation with others’. Ms. HI, England.

Organization of the classroom and arrangement of the physical space and learning environments are important considerations in the Indian context too and are given due attention by the teachers.

Adhering to JK’s philosophy that children grasp concepts better in their Mother Tongue it has incorporated both the elements and divided the classroom environment into Telugu and English atmosphere and children get to spend equal amount of time at both the environments. Each student group spends one week each with each teacher and they rotate every week. In my interactions with the practitioners and from the observations it became evident that this kind of planning actually helps children as each child gets to spend time with every other group. And this helps in a lot of collaboration and community feeling.

Unlike their English counterparts, Indian educators have relative degrees of autonomy to design activities and the curriculum doesn’t come with prescription. As was evidenced by the researcher the fact that Indian educators do not have mandatory pre-determined curriculum to strictly adhere to made all the difference to the fluidity of the learning environment. Even though the learning goals are discussed with the Principal one-month in advance, it is evident they have freedom in terms of extending an activity, spending considerable amount of time and resources; allowing time and space for children’s creativity and extending and modifying it without having to bother about the next task or time constraints.

In the English setting too, educators are clearly aware of the importance of inclusive setting for children's peer relationships. When talking about an autistic child Sana (who has a statement for special needs) Ms. FG thinks it is best for her to be part of an inclusive classroom as she can benefit from how other children are relating, building relationships with others which is kind of role-modeling for her as she is also striving to relate to others and build friendships although through gestures and signals. Ms. FG contends that inclusive classrooms are good for children with diverse needs and good for their relationships:

'They see other children building relationships. They see how others are relating, role- modelling how to deal with her which is very powerful, which makes easier for them its ok to make relationships with her. If she doesn't have anybody, if she is alone, that is more of a problem. But yes, some children find it harder than others'.
Ms. FG, England.

How practitioners themselves are open to the issues of diversity whether it is religious, cultural or linguistic or abilities made huge difference to the way the curriculum is shaped, pedagogy is transformed as children get signals and subtle messages from the way things are organized. It is quite evident how practitioners give attention to these issues in order to inculcate respect for diversity, which facilitates inclusive setting and inclusive relationships.

As Ms. FG explains:

'And we take the ideas from them, find what they know as well especially if they come from different cultures; we have a quiet a few in Greenland's it's quiet interesting may be to get some parents to sharing some poems from their own country'.

Linguistic inclusion was also evident from the classroom observations when Ms. FG is accommodating Ramaya whose first language is not English. She says that when

Ramaya first joined the school she doesn't know English at all and since she doesn't know language she is unable to make relationships with other children and looked uncomfortable and out of place initially. But it is at this stage that the teachers need to play a huge role in bringing children together and cultivating respect for each other's language. According to her:

'So we have to say that it's not a bad thing that she doesn't speak English, we show them interest, respect and try to learn some words from their language and show to other children, the way we do is important, as it is the way we treat them deal with them is the role model for other children. This role modelling is important. The way we deal with them is important'. Ms. FG, England.

This is kind of a proactive role from the practitioner in recognizing the issue and organizing an activity where children (whose first language is not English) can share poems and songs from their mother tongue to all the children of the setting. It helped in mutual respect for each other's language and not seeing the child in point not as deficient but as proficient in her own language and culture empowering the child in question. This further paves way for embracing differences and respecting diversities while promoting the feeling of community and belonging among the children. Same is the case with the Indian setting where practitioners are required to be reflective and reflexive about their own practice in organizing inclusive practices.

Social & emotional environments: Harmony - conflict

Reflecting from my observations, the fact that whether or not practitioners are giving due attention to the social and emotional environment, immensely shapes the dynamics and hence the quality of peer relationships of the given classroom. Giving due attention to peer conflicts which arise from time to time in the setting, how the practitioner approaches the issue whether she is following the democratic style or the authoritarian style arbitrarily sets the emotional tone of the classroom. The fact that children fall out as much as adults for different reasons has been duly noted by the practitioners from the study who accepted it as a normal developmental process. But how conflict resolution

strategies are inbuilt into the classroom processes is quite different from across the settings, which again links, to the cultural contexts and the availability of cultural tools.

‘There are obviously are issues where behaviour of children or the peer relations influences behaviour. Children fall out just as adults do. And again we would be working may be using stories as examples because we need to do is giving skills to manage those situations. It’s not the only time it’s going to happen, develop the ability to solve it in the future through a story, songs just role play examples and that sort of the thing’. Ms. HB, England.

This approach of practitioners negotiating children’s conflicts and putting them in perspective about their behaviours and providing them with the necessary skills to manage similar situations is apparent in the Indian context as well -who consider it as a regular but a normal occurrence. They think children learn from these situations as well the issues of fairness, justice, equality, sharing and co-operation. This is apparent when a child doesn’t want to share the jug that he is carrying to another child to water the plants. The other child came running to the Ms. VI and complained about the other child not giving the jug so that he too can water the plants. This involved Ms. VI talking to both parties and explaining to the other child whether it is fair or unfair not to share etc. Later on she shared with me that it is quite common for them to fall out, although they are very much aware that co-operation is a highly accepted and enforced value in the school. But she thinks peer conflicts are necessary part of a learning process as children who are not well versed in the values of co-operation, justice, fairness etc. will get to understand from an experience. According to her, this is especially true for single children who do not have siblings at home and hence don’t have to share.

Learning environment: Prescriptive - Emergent

From the observations made from two diverse settings it became evident that how far curriculum is prescriptive or emergent can make huge difference to the way peer relationships are facilitated and sustained. From the EYFS document in the section identified as ‘Enabling environments: The learning environments’ it is suggested that

'When children feel confident in the environment they are willing to try things out, knowing that effort is valued. (DfES, 2008; Para, 3.3). Although there is a recognition of learning environments being enabling and children trying out things it becomes quite contradictory as English practitioners are required to shape their learning according to the pre-determined learning outcomes. But even in that seemingly limiting environment, practitioners in this study were trying hard to reconcile the apparently contradictory learning goals. But the frustration arising from this dichotomy is quite evident from the observations and also from the views of learning supports assistant Ms. RS who feels frustrated as she tries hard to bring children together to do some reading and writing.

'I think we do try to sit down and do a bit of writing with them jack and beans. Yes, again some children are more abled than others we set a task for that group. And another group who are a bit abled will actually writing and white boards are amazing, but again we do find it frustrating. We do set a certain activity with the child and he moves on to other things. We don't try to make the child sit too long. We try to make it as short as possible. They take Maths activities to home and we encourage them'. Ms. RS, England.

But the more experienced teachers especially Ms. FG feels the curriculum is good in its present albeit the presence of prescriptive outcomes.

'Yeah, I think it is about getting the balance 80 percent child initiatives and 20 teacher led. The idea is that we come up with activities, basing on our experiences we know children will enjoy. And then children are allowed to take in such a direction that is interesting for them. Stimulus is coming initially from us though not always. If children are putting the puddles of water, we would like at it that is so exciting, maybe we can do some science. Let's use science. Talk about dissolving and from them come the activities that we extend'. Ms. FG, England.

Although Ms. FG is adept at mediating the apparently contradictory positions of policy and practice and is organizing the free flow activities to match up to the pre-determined

outcomes it is quite a challenge and at times is a limiting factor in terms of practitioners enjoying the autonomy to shape the classroom creative environment without having to worry about adhering to the pre-determined outcomes and guiding the children according to a pre-determined path.

This contradiction apparent in the EYFS top down prescriptive curriculum is not evident at the Indian case study setting. Since it is an independent school, it has the facility to have its own curriculum which is emergent with just a few guidelines and without any assessment or evaluation involved. This is necessary in order to give practitioners the facility to work with the curriculum and make it emergent taking into consideration children's interests and ideas to take the activity forward in a co-operative and collaborative way.

The collaborative classroom environment with the activities being designed to incorporate children's exploration and discovery appeared to automatically ensure a great deal of interaction among the children without teachers having to separately plan for the peer relationships activities. Since the school curriculum entails a different view of children- as capable and knowledgeable beings (this situation is quite different from what the EYFS envisages about children) and an altogether different role for its teacher's role as a co-learner in the learning process. Through participant observations it became apparent how an activity based curriculum with collaboration as an underlying organizing principle, facilitated inclusive environments for children to initiate, engage in and sustain peer relationships.

Despite the presence of a given curriculum with mandatory learning outcomes leaving a little room for creative processes to unfold and sustain combined with OFSTED quality assurance pressures it is apparent that English educators do play a mediating role in putting the child before the chart. Although EYFS has seven learning areas and social and emotional learning is one of them (which later made into a Prime area following Tickell Review) practitioners Ms. HB felt it's not an isolated area which can be thought separately but an all-encompassing one which need to be incorporated in whatever the practitioner does:

'You have to be creative with your planning and with activities every learning situation has some aspects of peer relations learning too. Whatever you are doing one to one with the child. You are working with a small group'. Ms. HB, England.

The Play environment: Teacher directed vs. self-initiated

Play emerged as an important context where children develop peer relationships. Practitioners foster peer relationships by organizing the play environment, whether it is teacher directed or child initiated. The following excerpts from the interviews with practitioners portray play as an important context for peer relationships.

'You might be looking at running around playing a game, learning through play is a very positive thing for peer relationships'. Ms. HB, England.

'When there are outside, they have got lots of space to run around and play just outside and enjoy being outside. It's is a well-known fact that children learn better when they are outside. They got the freedom to go wherever they want outside and when inside are inside also they have a choice to go whichever table they want to go. And when they are outside, there are a lot of running around and laughter outside'. Ms. LM, England.

'And some children absolutely love outdoors doing all the activities.' RS, England.

'Yes, it is more freer outside, space. They can choose whatever the activities they want to do'. HI, England.

'There is a lot of interaction and children absolutely love outdoor play'. VI, India.

'We need to design activities, indoors as well as outdoors in a such a way that there is an element of play and movement as children love play way method'. SU, India.

It is quite evident from the interview responses and participant observations that children enjoy outdoor play a lot and it entails a lot of interaction among children, which is good for their peer relationships. This finding is similar across the settings; it is widely observed that at the Indian setting, children get to spend a lot of time outdoors not only playing but doing a lot of curriculum related activities. This again relates to the cultural context of the Indian setting, which gives a primacy to the outdoors and to Nature in general. Practitioners from both the contexts have strongly felt that outdoors are more associated with freedom than indoors. The sense of freedom and the flexibility to choose their own activities make it a favorite time for children to enjoy being outside and engage in free play activities.

6.2.3. Adhering to Rules, Rituals, Routines and Role modeling (4R model).

Inter-personal plane further identified how institutional rules, rituals, routines and role modelling (Four R's) adopted by practitioners assist in developing peer relationships as was summarized in the following Figure 6.5. As evidenced from the participant observations across the settings, the simple everyday rules like set times for registration, carpet time, timings for teacher directed and child initiated times, specific times lunch and snacks, turn-taking and sharing tune children into community beings and builds a sense of belongingness among them.

‘Just simple things like, when register children can sing the register it helps them to remember and children get hooked into it’. HB, England.

Rules also help children and teachers in determining the boundaries which is important for fair play: *‘In the school you have a responsibility for all of the children so you can’t be looking at it just from one person’s point of view you have to see the whole picture and also in school you know what the rules and what the boundaries are’.* Ms. HB.

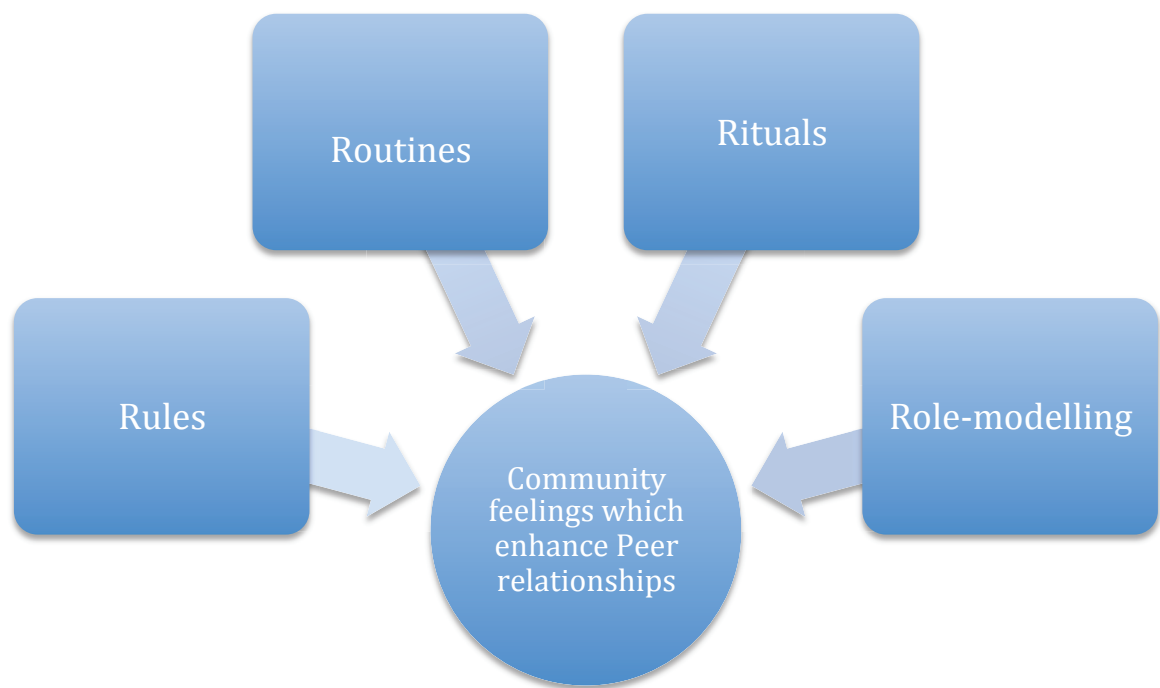


Figure 6.5: The 4R's approach to foster community feelings (source: self)

Adhering to rules actually helps in setting the boundaries of what to do and what not to do and it helps in giving a sense of certainty and security to children.

‘As a teacher you are very secure you have rules in place and it is very good for the children to be with the boundaries and if they know that those rules do not move it’s their security. Its makes sense?’ HB, England.

As evidenced from participant observations from across the case study settings, the rituals like celebrating birthday parties, welcoming new students and giving farewell to students who are transferring also inculcate the sense of community feeling which is required for fostering peer relationships. This clear adherence to set rules is quite evident in Indian setting as well which engage in a lot of rituals to initiate children into different aspects of school life. But one variation is they don’t have any rewards and punishments in place, which again relates to the cultural context of the setting, which values intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.

Providing role models and also acting as role models for children is a way of fostering peer relationships as children try to model their behaviours.

‘The way we do is important, as it is the way we treat them deal with them is the role model for other children. This role modelling is important. The way we deal with them is important’. Ms. FG, England.

‘Obviously sometimes outside the classroom I am observing the children playing sometimes joining them with games. A lot of times, Children, if you are playing with the children, it sets an example it shows the other children how you should be playing. It is about being fair saying please and thank you saying sorry, when they need to. Sometimes I am starting the game joining in the games and playing with the children and showing to other children how should be playing a lot of times’. Ms. LM, England.

‘As I said before you are role –modelling, you are showing children how you talk to the children how they should be talking, setting the table example saying please, thanks by showing children how you talk to other children/ they should talk to other children’. Ms. LM, England.

While being reflective in their manner and behavior is noticed across the settings and practitioners often engage in reflection about their own practice what differs in Indian context is that they are supposed to *reflexive* about their own behaviours and often engage in questioning some of the taken for granted notions of authority and hierarchy. This again relates to the cultural context of the community where practitioners are seen as co-learners equal in their pursuit of knowledge and learning rather than seeing as experts and authority figures. This has implications for children’s relations with the practitioners and others as they themselves as equal and competent beings, which is evident in the way they voice their concerns and participate in the decisions about the activities.

'Everyone is equal here. And children know that they can question and voice their concerns. They have children parliament and even the early years attend the sessions. They learn a lot from others'. Ms. VI, India.

'Occasionally you get some children might bit unhappy or occasionally some children might be naughty and some children might copy them so then it is important we explain to them that it is not good to copy when others are not doing good things. So it's very important relationships growing perhaps are conducive to learning'. Ms. LM, England.

Practitioners initially scaffold children's ability to make relationships but gradually withdraw so that children themselves will be able to resolve their disagreements themselves is voiced by Ms. HI:

'Yes, I do, I work in partners, working groups, as a whole class. Yes we have a part to play. They do their assembly, yes we have a part to play, when we resolving their arguments, and at times, at some point though we need to back off, but at times we should leave to the children to work on, we set role models, we need to resolve and same time we should be leave to the children, first teach them how and then leave to children so that they can sort out themselves'. Ms. HI, England.

Practitioners also engage in reinforcing good behaviours especially when the children displayed exemplary behavior or when they have done some good work. These stickers will be given to children during the carpet time.

At the Indian setting too there is clear adherence to set rules. As one practitioner feels having freedom doesn't mean that not having responsibilities but taking responsibility for one's actions.

'We have freedom here. But it means responsibilities. Children knew that they have freedom to question and all at the same time they are expected to follow set rules and regulations etc. Freedom is being more responsible. Not freedom to do everything they want'. Ms. SU, India.

Children meet periodically as a group along with other members of the school for the assembly and also when they have some dance or music or any activity is organized with artist and resourceful people from the community.

'We have assembly you know that Harivillu (local name for rainbow) where in children can share their ideas, sing and dance etc. It's good they develop feeling of belongingness to the school'. Ms.SH, India.

From the participant observations and with the interviews from the practitioners across the case study settings, it became evident that the practitioners collaborate with their colleagues to resolve an issue regarding a child, share information among themselves, take pride and pleasure in children's achievements. They also make partnership with parents and professionals from time to time and discuss about children's behaviours and to share whatever they consider as important to child's physical, social or emotional wellbeing. This is especially important for children's peer relationships, as only happy and healthy children will be in a position to maintain effective relationships.

The findings emerging from the data analysis of the *inter-personal plane* indicate that the task of fostering peer relationships is both an implicit and explicit process. Practitioners across the contexts display *intuitive* understandings into children's needs and emotions and attend to them. As one practitioner explicitly mentions Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; unless children's basic needs are met they will not ready for any learning. They *intentionally* organize the environments in such a way that the physical environment is all inclusive catering to and respecting different abilities and diverse backgrounds; social and emotional environment is happy, harmonious and conducive for positive relationships; negotiate the learning environment to be less prescriptive and more creative; and play environment to find a balance between adult

initiated and child initiated free play. However, there are subtle variations in how they do it, which again links to the cultural contexts.

At the *inter-personal level*, the findings indicate that practitioners from across the case study settings *intuitively* attune themselves to children's needs and attend to those needs. Very basic needs like physical and safety needs take immediate precedence over the higher order needs. Practitioners also displayed behaviours not so in norm with the professionalism but in line with the caring pedagogy. This aspect of attuning and attending to children's needs very similar across the case study settings. At the inter-personal level, practitioners *intentionally* shaped the classroom environment be it physical, social & emotional, learning and play environments so as to facilitate group work (England) collaborative activities (India) although there are subtle variations in how they actually do it. This intentional shaping of the learning environments has consequences for initiation and maintenance of peer relationships.

One variation found in the Indian case study setting is their adherence to collaborative and activity based curriculum. Evidenced from participant observations and interviews it became clear that the collaborative classroom environment entails a lot of interaction and provides scope for inbuilt, *embedded* relationships. It further explores how institutional rules, rituals and role-modeling techniques helps in fostering peer relationships by inculcating a sense of community and a feeling of belongingness among children. One variation found in Indian setting is that there is no adherence to positive or negative reinforcement as the school's philosophy doesn't believe in rewards and punishments to reinforce the behaviours but actively emphasizes on self-regulation.

6.3. Discussion of findings

Having presented the findings drawn from Inter-Personal plane addressing the second part of the research question (i.e. *practice*), this part of the chapter focuses on situating the findings in the context of extant literature and research: on how practitioners enact their *practice* in their settings.

As was explained in the data analysis chapter, the practice aspect relates to the second plane of Rogoff's three planes of analysis, i.e. Inter-Personal Plane. According to Rogoff (2003) the inter-personal plane of analysis represented by guided participation constitutes events of everyday life as individuals engage with others and with materials and arrangements collaboratively managed by themselves and others which includes direct interaction with others as well as engaging in or avoiding activities assigned, made possible, or constrained by others, whether or not they are in each other's presence or even know of each other's existence. Guided participation may be tacit or explicit, face-to-face or distal, involved in shared endeavors. This understanding is an extension from Vygotsky (1978) who emphasized the social nature of learning and maintained that all the higher mental functions are the result of relations between the people. According to Vygotsky: "*An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one.*" (1978:57).

For this to happen he emphasized on the role of More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) either peers, adults or even computers who can extend children's understanding and realize their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). All this happens with the help of 'cultural tools' or what Levine (1994) terms as cultural software. Bruner (1996) further explored the importance of social and collaborative nature of learning and insisted on practitioners scaffolding children's learning which foregrounds the importance of practitioner's roles in fostering peer relationships.

Practitioners' roles in building a community of learners are further explored in the works of Wenger (1998); Lave and Wenger (1991), Rogoff (1998), (2003) and Blatchford (2002) who emphasized on the importance of practitioners engaging in 'sustained share interactions'. I now present the summary of findings and conclusions derived from inter-personal plane of analysis from across the case study settings by focusing on the similarities and variations as advocated by Rogoff (2003) to illuminate the contextual in opposition to universal understandings (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Findings and conclusions from the Inter-personal plane of analysis

England	India
<p>6.3.1. Findings: <i>Attuning to & attending to children's physical, social, emotional, security and cognitive needs</i></p> <p>Conclusions: <i>Practitioners engage in caring pedagogy underpinned by maternal thinking.</i></p> <p><i>Evidence of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in operation.</i></p>	<p>Findings: <i>What they do is the same but how they do it is defined by cultural context.</i></p> <p>Conclusions: <i>the same (as in England).</i></p>
<p>6.3.2. Findings: <i>Organizing physical, social, learning and play environments.</i></p> <p>Conclusions:</p> <p><i>Child centered vs. collaborative view of peer relationships</i></p> <p><i>Prescriptive curriculum proves to be a limitation yet practitioners mediate the given curriculum.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings: <i>What they do is the same but how they do it is defined by the cultural context.</i> <p>Conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Peer relationships as the process and product of collaborative environments.</i> <i>Embedded nature of peer relationships in a social cultural environment.</i>
<p>6.3.3. Findings: <i>Adhering to three R's-Rules, Rituals & Role-modeling</i></p> <p>Conclusions: <i>Emphasis on external markers of conformity with rewards and punishments in place</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Findings: <i>What they do is the same but how they do it is defined by the cultural context.</i> Conclusions: <i>Self-regulation as the key in an environment that values freedom</i>

As shown in the diagram, although there are similarities in the way the practitioners enact their practice all that happens in the context of culture mediated by cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978) which accounts for the variations in practitioners understandings and the translation of the same into the everyday practice of fostering peer relationships. However, as evident from the participant observations and practitioners accounts it is clear that peer relationships won't happen on their own foregrounding the important role that practitioners have in the task. It coheres with Kemple and Hartle (1997) assertion that teachers have a huge role to play as the positive and satisfying peer relationships do not magically occur on their own. According to the authors, it requires the attention of the practitioner who knows how to provide appropriate support when needed. And they state that educators can foster peer relationships by organizing the physical space, by attending to the emotional climate, by providing right materials and equipment, by schedules and routines and by planned activities and also by providing on the spot support. Findings from this study too showed the similar patterns (and more) in terms of their practice, which is true across the settings as discussed in the early part of this chapter. These are some of the ways in which practitioners enact their practice.

6.3.1. Attuning and Attending to children's needs: Physical, social, emotional and learning needs

As was evident from the participant observations and in-depth interviews, it is very clear that practitioner first and foremost attune themselves to children's needs and attends wherever possible. The needs of the children range from their physical needs like water and food to social and emotional needs like harmony in the setting, help with resolving peer conflicts to the security needs like protection risks inherent in the environment to the emotional security in terms of being and belonging needs; to the higher order needs like cognitive and intellectual needs. In all this practitioners have to manoeuvre around and display different roles befitting the requirement along with the fulfillment of their formal roles like adherence to the given curriculum and assess children's performance in line with the children profiles. This coheres with Luff's (2010) study on teacher observations where practitioners are seen to be adept at attending to statutory and formal requirements at the same time attuning themselves to the children in ways that can be termed as 'informal' underpinned by the caring pedagogy (Noddings, 2004; 2005) and maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1989).

As Ms. RS explained when asked about her role in fostering peer relationships she sums up what transpires in everyday settings across the settings:

‘Look after the children help them learn and encourage and keep asking questions keep them stimulated and care and intellectual basis it’s a bit of everything. It’s a big thing for children and parents they care as well. You got to be their teacher, mother, carer everything all rolled into one’. RS, England.

This encapsulates what practitioners consider themselves and their roles with regard to children, which is drastically different from their roles envisioned in the EYFS as ‘technicians’ who can administer manuals handed down to them (Moss, 2004). Albeit the presence of constricting environment that the prescriptive curriculum entails still practitioners bring in their own set of values and attitudes and consider themselves as ‘carers’ and ‘mothers’ and ‘educators’ all rolled into one with the boundaries blurred at times. This finding coheres with SPEEL study, which concluded that practitioners are reluctant to use the word ‘teacher’ but see themselves as facilitators and enablers (Moyle, 2002). Apart from their own perceptions of what a practitioner should be in terms of ‘educare’ bringing in the aspects of formal pedagogy underpinned by Developmental Sequentialism (Kwon, 2002) and Caring Pedagogy (Noddings, 2005; Ruddick, 1989) practitioners are not only seen to be aware of the children’s needs but implicitly aware of ‘priority’ needs. This point has even come out explicitly when HI linked her practice to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) and considers her first and foremost duty is to attend to children’s physical, social, emotional and social needs before they will be ready for any learning (as explained earlier) and which is consistent across the settings.

It is interesting how practitioners across the settings attune themselves to the children’s needs before they can attend to their higher order needs, which was both implicit and explicit in their practice. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) certainly provides valuable insights into this aspect of practitioner’s everyday practice in facilitating peer relationships and more research is definitely called for in terms of building a solid research base in this aspect. This is the same case with both the settings who are seen to

attune themselves to the children's needs and prioritize their wellbeing over the curriculum demands. This practice of prioritizing care is in line with the caring pedagogy as envisioned by Ruddick (1989), which is underpinned by maternal thinking.

This caring and nurturing pedagogy has further leanings in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) where secure attachment develops when there is a healthy reciprocal relationship between child and a practitioner. This aspect is important as children base their relationship with adults on the basis of trust and respect, which they further use as a secure base to engage in relationships with others. It is a difficult scenario when children are not in well-meaning relationships with the practitioner and don't get emotional security in place for them to initiate and engage in peer relationships with others. I have observed how practitioners spend considerable amount of time in attending to children's emotional needs especially when they were in conflict with others or when some children get anxious or emotionally insecure. As has been argued earlier, children feeling secure in an environment free from censure and practitioner being sensitive and caring towards to children is exemplified as pedagogy of sensitivity at the Indian setting.

This notion is in line with what Hayes (2005) calls as 'nurturing pedagogy' that is interactive, dynamic, ethical, educational and caring. It has been observed that practitioners across the settings do engage in caring pedagogy albeit dictated or defined by their respective cultural contexts. Denham and Weissberg (2004) contend that it is important that early childhood educators develop warm and trusting and responsive relationships with children. According to the authors, these relationships provide the child with an internal working model of positive social relationships as has been noted from the study.

6.3.2. Educators organizing the environments: Physical, social and emotional, learning and play

Practitioners further attend to children's needs and foster peer relationships by *intentionally* shaping and organizing the environments be it physical, social and emotional, learning and play environments. This finding is similar across the contexts

however *how* they do it is again defined by their respective cultural contexts and is mediated by cultural tools. And how they organize the environment will be defined by how they can consider learning happens.

The EYFS explicitly states that children learn in relation to the environment and emphasize on the enabling environments. It states that practitioners have to frame their environments. EYFS explicitly states that: It is essential that children are provided with safe and secure environments in which to interact and explore rich and diverse learning and development opportunities. Providers need to ensure that, as well as conducting a formal risk assessment, they constantly reappraise both the environments and activities to which children are being exposed and make necessary adjustments to secure their safety at all times (DCSF, 2008: 21).

At the Indian setting the term environment takes a whole new meaning. JK radically states that ‘you are the environment’ explicitly stating how practitioners and children themselves add to the human element of the environment. JK curriculum gives a lot of importance to the physical setting of the school where aesthetics play a lot of role. It’s not surprising that the Indian setting too is close to Nature amid fields with a lot of greenery and outdoor space for children not only to play but also to engage in gardening and learning. It is worth mentioning JK’s secondary school comprises of dormitory living where children engage in simple and democratic living with clear demarcation of rights and duties in an environment free from rewards and punishments. Children manage all the aspects cooking, cleaning, gardening, and washing on their own epitomizing the true sense of simple community living.

This coheres with Tagore’s (1929) argument that education should seek to develop sensitivity in a child through a direct experience of nature when her/his consciousness is at its freshest level. He recognized early childhood as the most critical time for developing empathy and the ability to connect with one’s surroundings (O’ Connell, 2007). Indian setting actively endorses eco pedagogy and organizes learning around the nature and outdoor activities in order to develop relational aspects as well as empathy and sensitivity in the children. It is not surprising that JK Foundation schools (run

directly by JK Trust) and Tagore's Poet School, Shantiniketan are established in the locations of great natural beauty. The Indian case study setting is located purposely outside the city limits surrounded by beautiful nature. JK explicitly states that only when one establishes a relationship with nature then one has relationship with mankind. But if one has no relationship with the living things on this earth, one may lose whatever relationship you have with humanity, with human beings (Krishnamurti, 1987). Like Reggio Emilia, the Indian setting too considers environment as the third teacher.

EPPE (2003) emphasized good quality learning environments as important criteria for effective pedagogy. However the physical setting, the relevant materials, how the materials are organized, the staff student ratios all have implications for peer relationships. Finch (1996) argues that physical environment, both indoors and outdoors, encourages positive growth and development for children through opportunities to explore and learn safe, clean, spacious, bright, welcoming, warm, and accessible environments for children and adults, including those with additional needs, should afford opportunities to rest and play. As evidenced from the participant observations, it's not only the physical environment but also the social and emotional environment too makes all the difference to how children initiate and maintain peer relationships and how practitioners can help or hinder in the task.

Educators in Indian context are particularly concerned with providing collaborative learning environments with co-operation as the basis. As has been observed it has positive consequences for children's peer relationships as they are able to interact with each other in an environment based on co-operation and trust free from competition and envy. De Vries (2001) particularly emphasize the educator's need for co-operative relationships, as he believes that atmosphere based on mutual trust helps in optimizing learning. This understanding further corresponds with Kontos et al., (2002) eco-behavioral approach to understanding preschool environments. They have suggested activities, teacher interactions and social configuration as key components of the ecology of the classroom, which have implications for children's peer relationships.

For Dewey (1939), pupil's learning is no static one-way process and had stressed the way in which the pupil constructs their learning environment, which impacts their learning experiences. Dewey (1916) argues that 'the social environment is truly educative in its effects in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing this his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit (cited in Rogoff, 2008: 2).

The EPPE project also emphasized the importance of quality social and emotional environment where staff interacted warmly and responsively to children's needs and children make good progress there not only intellectually but also emotionally (Sylva, 2004). As evidenced from the study practitioners attune themselves to the children's needs and attend readily to address the issues be it social or emotional, physical or cognitive. As explained in the data analysis part, practitioners spend good amount of time resolving the peer conflicts, which they consider as very normal and important for children to learn the concepts of empathy, sympathy, fairness etc. Conflict, disagreement and change are considered an integral part of the peer relationships dynamics (Degirmencioglu et al, 1998; Howes et al. 2009). Their role in mediating conflicts also resonates with the studies of Edwards (1992) and Bernat (1997) who emphasize on the roles educators can play by resolving conflicts and bringing in harmonious environments.

As Ms. FG contends, good quality learning environments affect the quality of interactions and facilitate peer relationships. This further coheres with Kemple and Hartle (1997) argument that the way the classroom is arranged influences both the amount and nature of children's interactions. The presence and quality of a dramatic play center and a block center can influence the kinds of interactions in the setting as children tend to spend a great deal of time with in the context of socio dramatic play. According to them practitioners can further encourage peer interaction by arranging the classroom into interest areas that accommodate small groups in well-defined spaces which coheres with the participant observations where children are seen to be actively engage in and interact with each other. As noticed from the study a well-stocked writing

table where children make cards and share with each other, children's participation in the socio dramatic play has positive implications for children's initiation of peer relationships.

Practitioners from both the settings are seen to be aware of and actively seen to be making provision for diversity issues in the setting be it language diversity, physical diversity, racial or cultural diversity. It coheres with the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007 Para. 2.1) which states 'Positive relationships: Respecting each other, that: "When each person is valued for who they are and differences appreciated, everyone feels included and understood, whatever their personality, abilities, ethnic background or culture". Furthermore, Articles 29 and 30 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) state clearly that respect and recognition for the child's own cultural identity, values and language (and that of others), should be part of his/her education.

As explained in the first part of this Chapter, practitioners are seen to be making special arrangements for addressing diversity in their settings be it addressing children whose first language is not English, to children from diverse ethnic, cultural and ability backgrounds. As explained earlier, without active mediation and intervention from practitioners these diversities will prove to be a challenge. Guralnick and Groom (1987; 1985) demonstrate that children with disabilities experience more problems in terms of peer relationships. This coheres with Connolly and Kelly's (2002) large-scale survey of children aged three to six in Northern Ireland who identified the detail of cultural and political awareness of young children. Hence active involvement of practitioners is considered important to mediate and bring together children with diverse needs and abilities, which helps them in their relationships.

Indian setting has addressed the diversity issues at various levels as evidenced from participant observations and practitioner's accounts. By consciously adopting a democratic and co-operative environment abhorring the competition, the setting has actively embraced the diversity inculcating in children a sense of openness to diversity issues and with constant questioning and enquiry a sense of belongingness and

democratic spirit. Here early childhood education setting is not seen as a site for preparing children for the next stage of school or future career but as a democratic living and sharing in a co-operative environment. This particular setting, which was explicitly based on JK and Tagore's philosophy, considers schools as places where flowering of the individuals take place and the educator's roles as nurturing the innate goodness in an integrated way as co-learners in a true democratic environment. This coheres with Clarke and Moss (2001) assumption that inclusive practice is best supported in settings where democracy is a guiding principle and where strategies for capturing children's voices are adopted which is the case with the Indian setting.

New (1999) has particularly emphasized the importance of inclusive physical, social and intellectual environments as they support the learning and development of all young children, including those of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as those with special needs which is further exemplified in the writings of Mallory (1998); New (1998a). New et al., (2005) have argued for a risk rich curriculum in line with Nordic and Reggio Emilia to enable new discoveries and new relationships. This coheres with censure free pedagogy of the Indian setting, which doesn't believe in rewards and punishments but children learning in an environment of freedom and responsibility not concerned about rewards and punishments. As has been noted from the participant observations (discussed in the first part of this chapter) collaborative learning environment provided an embedded and inclusive setting for children to initiate, engage and sustain peer relationships.

The emphasis on collaborative learning environment is in contrast to the English setting, which has mostly individual focus with occasional teamwork. Here too practitioners are seen to be fostering peer relationships by engaging in occasional teamwork although collaboration as a learning strategy was not evidenced as discussed in the earlier part of the chapter. This corroborates with Kutnick et al., (2007) finding that English educators are fostering peer relationships at the individual level than organizing as a whole class strategy. It is in contrast to the Indian setting where educators facilitate collective/collaborative-learning environments where all the children get to participate in the activity and engage in interactions. This has been linked to the existence of cultural context where EYFS with its clear outcome based

prescriptive learning outcomes is essentially aims to develop individuals skills and abilities and focuses on the unique child. Whereas the Indian setting, with its enabling emerging curriculum and relational pedagogy prioritize learning in a collaborative and co-operative environment. Though the presence of a curriculum can define practitioner's roles to a large extent, there is consistent demand for active roles of educators' in facilitating peer interactions and relationships. Han and Kemple (2006) contend that teachers should provide opportunities for peer interactions during work activities and suggest that collaborative techniques will prove to be effective. Ortega et al., (2009) too argue for an active teacher intervention techniques to promote peer interaction and peer relationships.

As explained in the data analysis, play emerged as a very important context for children's peer relationships. Practitioners from across the contexts are unanimous about the importance of play for children's peer relationships. This stand coheres with the socio-constructivist perspective, which considers play as beneficial for children's social emotional development and their relationships with other children (Glover, 1999; Sturges, 2003; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997; Hughes, 1999; Ashiabi, 2007). Play is considered as providing opportunities for peer interaction and for their social and emotional development (Ortega, 2003a, 1994).

Though there is general agreement about the significance of play and its importance in children's social and emotional development, there is variation on how it is significant across the settings. During my participant observations I have noticed a lot of interaction while children are engaging in free play outdoors in English context while practitioners are engaging with literacy and numeracy indoors at the individual level and except for the times during circle time, role play etc. This coheres with Leseman, Rollenberg and Rispen (2001) study finding that there is a lot of interactions among children during free play and teachers involvement was greater in work related activities than during free play. This is in contrast with the Indian setting where interaction was noticed in both pedagogic worlds –both with practitioners who organize collaborative classrooms and engage in activity based pedagogy mostly outdoors and also during the free play where children choose and initiate play on their own terms.

Another variation noticed is to why play is important. Educators from the English setting have expressed concern that children lack opportunities to play and engage in peer relationships at home due to single parent households or parents lacking time to provide opportunities for their children to engage in relationships. Since children lack opportunities practitioners consider that they have responsibility for giving those opportunities and see it as their role too. However, this aspect of children not having opportunities to play at home front didn't arise as an issue at the Indian setting, where the principle of cognition as a collaborative process is recognized and followed as an every operating pedagogic principle. Moreover, most of the children in India still get to spend time in large family environments with relatively more opportunities to roam around and spend time with their friends in their neighborhoods though there have been changes due to demographic shifts (Sharma, 1998).

6.3.3. Educators adhering to four R's: Rules, Routines, Rituals and Role-modeling

Practitioners further engage in fostering peer relationships by adhering to the 4 R approach (as shown in the Figure 6.4) i.e. by adhering to rules, by establishing routines and by engaging rituals and in role modeling. As shared by practitioners and as observed from participant observations, clear rules help children in establishing boundaries and in being explicit about what the ground rules are and what to expect if they engage in certain behaviours etc. There are a few studies, which established the importance of clear rules for children to have a sense of clarity and purpose that helps in harmonious environments.

Routines are helpful in bringing in the feelings of community and together among the students. Children get together during circle time, reading time snack time etc. that helps in bringing out community feelings among the children. Kemple and Hartle (1997) contend that snack time can be a time to enjoy and practice conversation that is not mediated by materials or projects. According to practitioners from both the contexts, having established rules and routines help children what to expect next and gives a clear sense of boundary and security, which is important for their social and emotional wellbeing. As Ms. HB contends when children know that there are fixed rules and they won't change for any single student it gives them a sense of security.

Organizing rituals is another way of fostering peer relationships among the children as has been observed from across the settings. Organizing birthday parties and asking children to prepare birthday cards for their friends, giving farewell when somebody is leaving, organizing assemblies et al initiate and engage children in group activities and further bring in 'we' feelings among the children. This adhering to rules and rituals to foster peer relationships is well recognized in the research (Blatchford and Kutnick, 2003). Furthermore practitioners engage in fostering peer relationships by acting as role models as evidenced from the participant observations and corroborated with the interviews. Practitioners are actively seen to be engaging in these behaviours and are seem to be aware of the benefits of doing so. For ex. Ms. FG actively seeks help from the higher-class students to spend some time with the early years' students. I have noticed how Lucy who has some family issues at home was befriended by a year 5 student, who gives her emotional support she needed. Ms. FG thinks this is beneficial for both of them as it gives sense of responsibility to the senior students and a sense of emotional security to children who needed that. Social rules for behaving are in the forefront of teachers' agenda as envisioned in the works of Thornberg, (2007), Johansson and Johansson, (2003), Ohnstad, (2008) and Nucci, (2005). The practitioner's emphasis on modeling behaviours to facilitate peer relationships has theoretical leanings in the Social Learning theory developed by Bandura (1977).

However, the Indian setting doesn't actively or explicitly subscribe to modeling of behaviors, as it actively abhors conforming to authority or traditions. Instead it actively promotes freethinking and questioning and challenging in an atmosphere that doesn't censure free thinking. JK considers authority or mere modeling, conforming as detriments to the freedom of the mind, which is important to develop integrated and independent individuals who can question the status quo of society and usher in 'good society'. JK considers freedom to be at the beginning of education not something that you get in the end. As has been noted earlier, Indian setting doesn't adhere to rewards and punishments policy as it doesn't believe in extrinsic motivation instead prioritizes learning for the joy of learning. The emphasis is on learner self-regulation without linking it to rewards and punishments. This is a significant departure from most of the mainstream provision in India as well in the English context where practitioners model behaviours and organize environments to 'condition' children to get certain desired outcomes (Thornberg, 2007; Ohnstad, 2008)

6.4. Chapter summary

This chapter explored the *practice* aspect of practitioners roles in fostering peer relationships through the lenses of Inter-personal plane and answered the second part of the research question: How and in what ways do early childhood educators foster peer relationships? Findings focused on illuminating similarities and variations (Rogoff, 2003) indicate that practitioners from across the contexts foster peer relationships in three broad ways. *Firstly*, they attune themselves and attend to children's peer relationships displaying maternal thinking underpinning by caring pedagogy. This finding is similar across the contexts concluding that educators do mediate a given curriculum and prioritize caring pedagogy.

Secondly, they foster peer relationships by organizing environments be it physical, social & emotional, learning or play environments. However, the existence and the availability of cultural tools impact on how they do it. For example it's been observed that theoretical underpinnings of a given curriculum for example, EYFS on evolutionary (ages and stages) and JK on revolutionary (socio cultural) influenced the way educators' organized the environments. It's been concluded that Indian case study setting, having explicitly organized on the social pedagogy principle of *cognition as a collaboration*, proved peer relationships to be a process and product of collaborative classrooms -as opposed to the child centered understanding embedded in the EYFS.

Thirdly, findings from across the contexts indicate that practitioners further engage in fostering of peer relationships by adhering to rules, rituals and by adopting routines and role modeling. However how they do it a qualitatively different manifestation of cultural contexts impacted by the availability of cultural tools that in this case is the presence of rewards and punishments in English setting while the Indian case study setting valued the learner self-regulation in an environment of freedom that has impacted the educators' roles.

Chapter Seven: Exploring the *contexts* under which practitioners enact their practice: Cross-cultural insights from India and England through the lens of Institutional Plane

7.1. Introduction

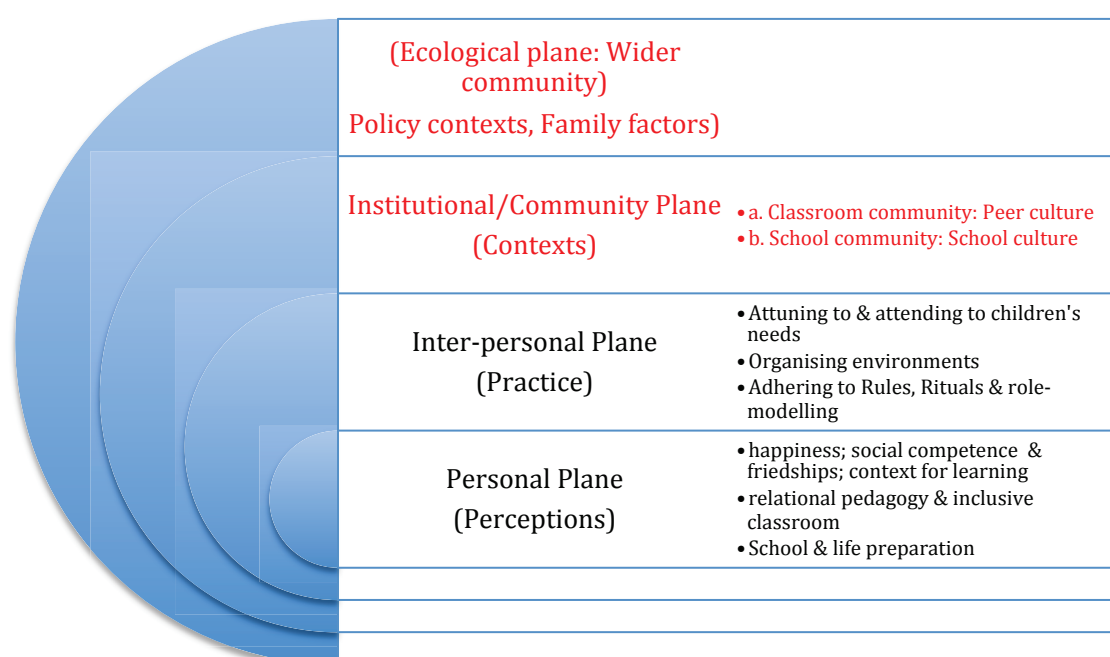
This chapter focuses on the third plane of the analysis i.e. community/institutional plane which foregrounds the cultural *contexts* under which practitioners enact their practice and answers the third part of the research question: What are the contexts under which practitioners' enact their roles across the case study settings? By focusing on the similarities and variations (Rogoff, 2003) it illuminates the specific cultural contexts rather than striving for universal understandings.

Rogoff (1993: 143) uses the metaphor of apprenticeship to explain the third plane i.e. community/institutional, which is a “system of inter-personal involvements and arrangements in which people engage in *culturally* organized activity in which apprentices become more responsible participants”. According to her this metaphor focuses attention on the active roles of newcomers and others in arranging activities and support for developing participation, as well as on the cultural/institutional practices and goals of the activities to which they contribute as well as on its relation to practices and institutions of the community in which it occurs-economic, political, spiritual and material.

Thus institutional plane looks closely at the *cultural context* of the learning community and explores the contributing or constricting factors that impinge on educator's roles in fostering peer relationships in the setting. As Rogoff (1993) contends understanding the processes that become the focus at each plane of analysis: individual, interpersonal and institutional – depends on understanding the processes in the background as well in the foreground of analysis. This is to ensure the mutuality of the planes and to recognize the impossibility of studying one independent of the other planes.

The data analysis carried out under this plane has identified a few contextual factors under which practitioners enact their practice- which has potentially influenced their roles in fostering peer relationships both from Indian and English contexts. They are the contexts of peer culture, the contexts of school culture (either valuing co-operation or competition), family contexts, the curriculum and pedagogic frameworks in place (which value pre-primary or socio-pedagogy approaches) and the underlying assumptions of learning, image of the child and childhood and to the wider purposes of early childhood education that the government sets out prescribe. The following Figure 7.1 situates the findings from the institutional plane among the other planes and also distinguishes and gives specific foci to the wider *ecological* contextual factors affecting educators' roles.

Figure: 7.1. Findings from the Institutional Plane

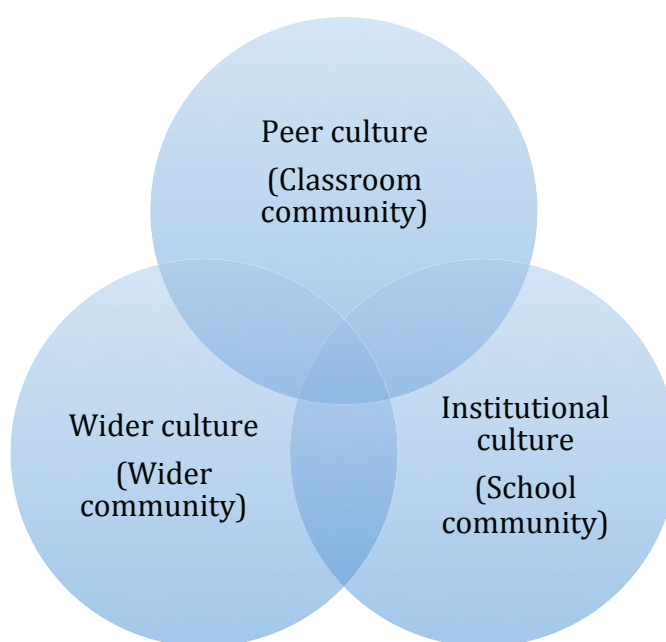


Before I explain the cultural context of the community and elaborate on the various factors that either contribute to or impinge on the roles of educators in fostering per relations; I would like to discuss briefly another important finding relating to the Institutional/community plane i.e. the presence of not just one but multiple communities

in the study as can be inferred from the Figure 7.1 which elucidates the presence of multiple communities in the supposedly monochromatic learning communities.

The practitioners' also eloquently conveyed this as one early childhood practitioner explains: *'when children first start their school there are several bridges to be built. First they have Owls and Ducks Community, and then early childhood community and the school community'* which eloquently bring in the presence of multiple communities in the learning organization as shown in the Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2. Presence of multiple communities, which influence peer relationships directly or indirectly



As is illustrated in the above Figure 7.2, there are influences arising children engaging in peer culture and exercising agency in their classroom contexts; institutional ethos/culture at the school community level and also further influences from the wider community as both children and practitioners belong to wider ecological niche with diverse social, political and economic and policy influences. The discussion now moves

on to first present these findings and later discuss the findings in relation to the extant literature and research.

7.2. Presentation of findings

7.2.1. Classroom community: Issues of peer culture defined by children's agency

In the classroom community, there are aspects of peer culture and children's agency that are impacting the processes of children's peer relationships which are evident from the observations and interviews: the issues of power and control, the notions of independence and inter-dependence, rule-abiding and rule-breaking, sharing and turn-taking, interests and dispositions, likes and dislikes to name a few; all have implications for peer relationships which makes the task of fostering peer relationships not straightforward but one which is a very fluid, dynamic and inherently complex with clear implications for practitioners roles.

Observation: Case study setting, England.

A group of six children were sitting across the table playing with play dough and were engrossed in making different shapes. I was also sitting with them playing with a piece of dough and trying to give a shape. After a few minutes, Rosie joined the table and started taking the piece of dough but for which Lucy intervened and took all the dough with her. I noticed that the rest of five also didn't say any word or give any piece of dough to Rosie. I tried to intervene saying that Rosie also would like to make something out of it but Lucy didn't yield to my requests. But Rosie talked to Mrs. HI and brought her to the table who successfully negotiated with Lucy saying there is plenty of dough for everyone to play and make shapes after which Lucy appeared to give in and let Rosie have a piece of dough.

There are other issues also where I have come across especially when children are playing outside and there will be issues and arguments when it comes to turn taking and sharing which at times leads to arguments and teacher intervention. In many cases, the I have noted that the practitioner tries to put the situation in perspective and argue that it's

only fair to have turn taking which ensures that everyone has equal chance to play and enjoy.

Observation: Case study setting: England.

Outside of the setting during free playtime, David was riding a tricycle with Jack on his back. After a few minutes Tina approached and asked David to ride as well but David was not ready to give her the bike. She has with her the sand timer?? Which she was pointing out to saying that David's time was over. Since David was not relenting and so after a few attempts Tina went and talked to Ms. RS who was at the water area. RS came and explained to David that since he had his fair share of rides, he should let Lucy to ride as well. And she asked both of them to use the sand timer to help them with turn taking.

When the I have asked Ms. RS why David was not giving in even after knowing that the time is up for him she responded by saying that David is a single child who doesn't have to share anything at home. So it is difficult for him to share at the setting as well. Moreover, she felt it is normal for children to have disagreements and peer conflicts which help them with the issues of fairness and justice and also turn taking and inter-dependent. This understanding that children fall out as much as adults and peer conflicts are a very normal occurrence with developmental benefits was well articulated by the practitioners across the settings.

Moreover, the children themselves are not the homogenous group ready to be written off as and when the practitioners want them to act or do either in peer relationships or in academic achievements. As was sufficiently demonstrated in the interviews and the participant observations children themselves have certain innate, personal, family characteristics in terms of temperaments, attitudes, language abilities, social competence, socio economic, ethnic backgrounds all make up for an interesting and complex mix when it comes to their ability to initiate and maintain peer relationships.

As elucidated by Ms. HB children are not the homogenous entity and they have different temperaments and experiences outside the setting, which at times makeup for conflicting scenarios at home and at school.

‘They have different temperaments, different experiences outside of the school. One conflict is expectations at home and expectations at school’. Ms. HB, England.

It particularly happens when children have different experiences regarding what is valued in the setting and what actually transpires at the home environment. This conflict in values is a real challenge for practitioners’ as they cannot control what transpires at the home environment. At the Indian setting too practitioners expressed clash in values for example, obedience and conformity are considered as great values in general whereas this particular setting considers these traits as opposed to freedom of thought. In fact it is to be noted that it explicitly challenges children and in fact everyone at the setting to be free in their thinking and acting rather than blindly conforming.

It is noteworthy that the school organizes regular sessions for both teachers and students where issues concerning the philosophy of the school are regularly debated and discussed in an atmosphere of utmost freedom. It helps in ‘unlearning’ inherent conditioning of values not only for the teachers and children but also for families and community. It is believed that the freedom of thinking is a necessary pre-condition to realize transformatory value of education.

Apart from varied experiences from home front, challenges also arise when there is linguistic diversity at the setting. This is particularly true in the case of children whose first language is not English:

‘Obviously there are challenges from children as well. For children whose first language is not English; Ramaya’s mother tongue is not English, so it’s a challenge’. Ms. FG, England.

Ms. HB further recognizes that developing language skills is an important step in building relationships:

'Because a lot of it is good relationships with your peers is language based, but a right language also it is facial expression, body language its actions all of these things we would work on. And for very young children developing the language for that is the hard thing to do. And often their actions come first It takes a lot of time to help them develop the language'. Ms. HB, England.

'Children engage in mugging the concepts without knowing its full meaning in private schools. It is dangerous, as they will lose interest in learning right from early years. Here we have mother tongue based instruction and we provide English environment too'. Ms. VI, India.

This undue focus on learning in foreign language right from early years through rote memory is a pressing concern in India as voiced by Ms. VI. This is the central concern at the Indian setting which has consciously adopted the mother tongue instruction in early years in the light of the wide spread practice in private provision where children are forced to read, write and speak in English language with negative consequences for their learning and their ability to initiate and engage in effective peer relationships. The practitioners appropriated the importance of mother tongue based instruction for children's development as envisioned by JK and Tagore.

When we look at the community and especially look at the contexts under which practitioners enact their practice, it became evident that along with the issues of peer culture associated with power and domination, there are other issues associated with the temperaments and inherent attitudes of the children. This apart from the fact that they have lives different from the setting in which they will encounter experiences and expectation which at times makes for an conflicting and challenging scenarios for practitioners in their attempts to foster peer relationships.

7.2.2. School community: Issues of school culture/ethos

Apart from the issues inherent to the classroom learning community like children's individual characteristics, their socio economic, ethic and linguistic background and the kind of experiences and expectations they will bring to the mix- there are other factors which will impinge on the actions or inactions of the practitioners in their attempts to foster peer relationships. This study has identified certain factors like school ethos along with practitioner personal variables like age, experience, qualifications etc. that can impact on the roles of early childhood educators in fostering peer relationships.

The school ethos appear to play a prominent role in either contributing or constricting early childhood practitioners' roles in fostering peer relations, which was succinctly narrated by educators' during their interviews. Whether the school values social development or only concerns with academic development makes a huge difference to the tone and ethos of school culture. In this study, the direction set by the Head Teacher (in England) who has actively invited the researcher saying the school is very much open to research possibilities demonstrates how the school culture values research and scholarship. In fact the school has the motto of 'Together everyone achieves more' acts a contributory factor for the early childhood practitioners' who might personally believe in (or not) a child being happy, healthy and social competent. But this kind of explicit message, from the school leadership valuing the social development of children makes a tremendous difference the way they practice peer relationships. One teacher explained how her outlook and attitude changed once she joined this community school which values social relationships and teamwork. In her earlier work place, she shared; the emphasis was always on the literacy and numeracy.

At the Indian setting too, school culture and ethos shape what the practitioners are expected to do and set the tone and context for delivering a fluid curriculum in a creative and collaborative way. For example:

'This school is different and that's what even the outside schools and people know. We don't have exams, we don't have punishments, and we don't give prizes and rewards. This is way different from what the outside schools do. We value learning

and students do it in a way that is creative and enjoyment for them. Learning should be fun. Isn't it? Ms. VI, India.

The ethos, on which the school came into existence, abhors punishments and rewards and also all the external signs of obedience and conformity as is explicitly stated in the school philosophy. All the school community right from the principal (similar to Head teacher role in England) down to the cook or helper is considered educators themselves with a potential to transform the environment. All are well aware of the value system that is embedded into the foundations of school and into its everyday practice of translating the curriculum into a creative and collaborative pedagogy. In fact, Krishnamurti (1953) considers everyone right from head teacher down to the peon or cook who work in the school premises as educators themselves as they have a capacity to influence and be influenced by the whole ethos in place.

The Indian setting doesn't value competition and external markers of punishments and rewards and so the learning experiences are framed in a way that reflects the whole philosophy. Games are set in a way that everybody could win, activities are planned in a way that are collaborative and democratic; since nature is valued most of the learning related activities are organized outdoors with curriculum giving active and explicit importance to the nature. Since early years are not seen as a preparatory stage for primary school or a launching ground for later life-all the activities are concentrated on 'here and now' without explicit or implicit importance to or concentration on school preparation. While in the England context, there is a different scenario, as the practitioners still need to subscribe to a given curriculum and adhere and cater to the children's learning profiles with explicit emphasis on school preparation. They also need to conform to the regular monitoring and evaluation standards by Ofsted, which, as has been thoroughly observed, proves to be a challenge at times.

Clearly, institutional ethos and culture under which the practitioners enact their roles largely shape what practitioners can and cannot do in their roles in fostering peer relationships in their respective settings. As HB points out, institutional rules makeup for clear boundaries under which practitioners enact their roles and makes up a for culture where everyone knows what is expected of them and the consequences if not

adhered to. This is especially important when certain issues arise while fostering peer relationships like issues of power, domination, peer conflicts and disagreements which are part of everyday life in early years settings.

‘Greenland’s is very good from clarity of boundaries point of view. Rules are secure, fair firmly in place and easy to hold really’. Ms. HB, England.

Although there were some clear concerns especially when negotiating the ‘prescriptive’ curriculum, practitioners found that school motto very empowering to give importance to peer relationships:

‘I think it’s very important especially here at Greenland’s; our motto is ‘team together everyone achieves more’. It’s all about everyone working together’.

Ms. LM, England.

‘I guess it is the school. It is the community school that helps us a lot. It’s about caring and working together as a team, all the children in the school. For Year 5 are reading partners, they come down to share books with our children they built relationships with them. When we go on nature walks, they come down they walk with them and taking them. On sports days, at lunchtime, keep an eye on them they play games with them. I think that is important and they are important role models’.

Ms. FG, England.

This clearly depicts how the school culture of peer modeling and utilizing the services of older children to guide their younger children is actually paying off in terms of building up relationships among the children across the age groups. This school ethos instill in children a sense of responsibility and pride when they shoulder the responsibility of younger children and in the small children a kind of moral support and assistance that they need at times.

'I think in the setting all of the staff are committed to fostering peer relations it makes the task so much easier and if we have a concern about child we get-together and a plan. That kind of commitment from the whole team for the importance of peer relations is very helpful'. Ms. HB.

Not only the relationships between the children but the common vision among the staff about the importance of peer relationships is important as it helps them to work in an embedded way. I have noticed how practitioners talk about children even during their breaks how John was a bit quiet these days; or how Lucy is faring with her year 5 partner etc. which gives everyone a sense of what's happening with children and with their social and emotional development.

A similar situation was encountered in Indian setting as well where teachers who work in pairs share a lot of information with the other pair of teachers and discuss things through with respect to situations, which involve children and their social and emotional development. School ethos over which everyone was given proper orientation (it's an ongoing practice) and which everyone is supposed to adhere to in everyday lives helps teachers to share and practice a common vision about children and their everyday lives. The understanding that school is not only to prepare careerists but to prepare citizens who can bring in a good society and that the ideals of co-operation and democracy are not abstract ideals but something to be practiced in everyday lives is something that acts as an under-current in everything that the practitioners do.

'Here everyone knows that we shouldn't punish them, we are not supposed to give rewards. It should come from inside. They should know that it is their learning and we simply we create the environment free from fear. Here questioning is valued unlike outside schools. They can't open their mouths to ask even a doubt'.

Ms. VI, India.

'Here we are not in a rush for anything. You see outside schools and teachers will be busy teaching children abcds from the very early age. They read first class

books in the LKG and UKG. There is immense pressure on the children. We don't have that here. Children do everything happily and that is valued'.

Ms. SU, India.

The fact that the school is an independent one without any restrictions or requirements of outside monitoring or evaluation has further contributed to the relative independence of the practitioners in how they operate and practice an emergent curriculum. Apart from the vision on which the school stands equally important is the school leadership who ensures that those ideals and visions are practiced in everyday lives. This issue of school ethos and visionary leadership proved helpful in negating the effects of a downward curriculum, as is the case with English context.

'First thing I noticed here good culture, emphasis on manners and the way that children hold door here. People complain that this generation has no manners and come to understand the importance of manners. The head teacher sets the tone and the children to get along with others and reciprocate the same'. HI, England.

The school culture of how it accommodates diverse linguistic, ethnic and social mix at the school and the kind of cross-cultural activities it organizes in order to bring in the community feelings and togetherness among the children equally play an important role.

'Every year we celebrate inter-cultural day and we celebrate different cultures of the world so that children will develop appreciation for that. Once Natasha's mum helped some of the children to dress in their own cultural way to celebrate Diwali. It helped children's appreciation of other's cultures paving a way for a sense of belonging in the group'. Ms. HI, England.

'We celebrate everything here. Like you saw last time we had organized the 'utti kottam' festival (local cultural festival) with a lot of balloons and children really liked it. If we have Id we do celebrate that explain children about the festival, we

will prepare semya (id drink) and we will have a Christmas tree when it is time for Christmas. So children will have an understanding and appreciation of different cultures and diversity'. Ms. RE, India.

'We often invite parents and community members to share their knowledge and expertise to the school community. A lot of parents do contribute to school in their own ways. It gives a nice community feeling'. Ms. SU, India.

As the analysis has shown, the *cultural* context of the community largely shapes what the practitioners can and not do and sets the tone for relational pedagogies, which helps in fostering a sense of community and peer relationships. Thus the ethos of the institution can be a contributing or a constricting factor in determining whether the practitioners were able to engage in relational pedagogy facilitating peer relations or instructional pedagogy confirming to the prescriptive curriculum or mediate both. As practitioners from both the contexts explained there are certain activities that schools engage in which helps to bring the feelings of community and togetherness among children which further helps in positive peer relationships.

7.2.3. The Wider-community (*ecological plane*)

As was explained previously the study brings out the presence of multiple communities in the study's context. As one practitioner puts it it's not just the classroom community but they need to build bridges with the school community and with the wider community. Accordingly, this study has focused on the cultural contexts of the learning communities within the institutional context but what was evident was how factors beyond the immediate setting impinge on the practitioners' roles in fostering peer relationships.

From the participant observations and interviews, it became clear that though the activity of fostering peer relations appears to be an activity facilitated by the early childhood practitioners in their institutional contexts, in reality it happens within an entangled web of factors within and beyond the immediate context. This study

particularly gives concrete shape and expression to this aspect, which can be categorized as '*ecological plane*'. Although Rogoff's third plane i.e. institutional plane recognizes the linkages it has with the wider social cultural context, in this study's context, it is considered important to give a concrete shape and focus to this '*ecological*' plane apart from the institutional plane.

The wider context which can be termed as an ecology which consists of government policies, societal practices, family factors and the curriculum models and their underpinning theories, values and aspirations about children, childhood, and education which is prevalent in the cultural plane of the communities. As Hedegaard (2005) pointed out these views of child, childhood and education inevitably results in the ideas of where to bring the child through the education system. Hence fostering peer relations isn't a voluntary process as it may appear but happens in an intricate web of attitudes, environments and aspirations, which will impact the process.

Hence this part of the thesis attempts to put in context the wider ecological niche in which the early childhood practitioners enact their practice. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains how young children's learning does not take place in a vacuum. We must explore the ecological niche in which the child is living which is equally applicable to the early childhood practitioner herself or himself. Hence an attempt is made to make sense of the wider contexts: the view of child, childhood and the aspirations about early child education, and the curriculum models which encompasses these views and the wider policy contexts under which the early childhood practitioner enact their practice.

However, what has come out across strongly is the fact that although practitioners role is impacted by various factors within and beyond the settings, yet they negotiate with them and mediate their role which at times move along the continuum of roles be it carer, nurturer, manager, mediator, facilitator, collaborator and co-learner emphasizing the multiplicity of educators' roles although which role pre-dominates is impacted by the contexts of culture.

Policy contexts: Curriculum: Pre-primary vs. socio-cultural

At the wider cultural context of the community what has come across strongly as the defining factors which impact on practitioner's roles are the nature of the given curriculum and the family factors.

As Ms. HB shares at times it hard to fit everything in together given the fact the practitioners need to move learning goals in a linear fashion with curriculum makers having implicit understandings about the learning and how children learn in an evolutionary way. It shows that if a particular child doesn't progress in a way that is anticipated then it is probable that he or she might come in for extra support. But as Ms. HB explores practitioners find ways to foster peer relationships even under the constrained environments where practitioners are required to conform to the given curriculum. They balance the curriculum demands with their developmental understandings about the child and mediate the curriculum through their caring pedagogy.

'Yeah. Sometimes it is hard to fit it all in. I think it's just done in a different way really. I think we cover everything we need to. For an untrained eye its might not look like we do. I know from the development of the children from the point where they are now they are now that is required of the curriculum and more I think. When we are outside playing and a lot of different issues as far as peer relationships and academic learning so it is hard to fit it all in'. Ms. HB, England.

The limiting and constricting nature of the prescriptive curriculum at times doesn't allow for practitioners to record what they think are wonderful things that children do at times and more often it goes unnoticed as prescriptive learning outcomes doesn't reflect or anticipate everything that children can do or will do.

'Children do wonderful things at times. It's brilliant really. But we can only record what is there in the profile really, which is not always helpful. That's limiting really'. Ms. FG, England.

Teaching assistant RS, who contends that the early years are rather fast paced the way it was designed further reflects the same viewpoint.

'We do find that. It is so fast paced in early years, so much going on. They come first thing. They do self-registration. Straight away they do writing skills. And working out to their names they sit on the carpet. Fantastic and they get told what they are doing for that day. They started going to the big assembly it is hard a lot of time to sit still'. Ms. RS, England.

But a teaching assistant like Ms. LM argues that it is the teachers who are more concerned with the learning outcomes and, being a teaching assistant, she is not involved directly with the attainments. However, she thinks that the new curriculum is an improvement from the previous one as children coming from nursery are able to do self-registration while it was not the case before.

'Learning outcomes it doesn't really affect me may be teachers will be affected more children are we got now are far more advanced than the children we used to have come in here. They know more than they do before the early years curriculum started for example, when children who come from nursery who don't do self-registration but now children we got now who can register themselves. Who have gone through the early years curriculum and I think it is brilliant, it's excellent'. Ms. LM, England.

Furthermore, Ms. FG feels that they have found a way to work around the curriculum and only problem will be when introducing any kind of testing, which will put pressure on the teachers.

'Only thing that limits is imposing any kind of testing. Putting pressure on teachers. It will be pressure when you dictate teachers to come with some kind

of results. To meet certain targets at certain times will put a pressure on the teachers. Some children might be bright but find it difficult to sit and write. Children develop at different paces, and if they are not happy and doesn't have friends, and it is difficult to make them to learn. It would be hard to explain. I think that would be a hindrance'. Ms. FG, England.

The preceding discussion makes it clear that practitioners at times find it difficult to fit everything in together the six areas of the given curriculum (later changed to 3 prime areas and four specific areas while the amount prescription still remains). However, they find the ways to attend to foster peer relationships, as it is the relational pedagogy that makes children happy and ready for learning. It shows how practitioners mediate the contradictory curriculum that is handed down to them and finds ways to foster peer relationships.

However, this contradiction doesn't exist in the Indian setting given the fact that it is an independent school and is not required to follow the national curriculum. It has its own curriculum, which explicitly recognizes the importance of community and relationships based on the values of co-operation. The emergent creative curriculum is designed in a flexible way with explicit understandings and expectations of collaboration and creativity and with broader topics discussed beforehand and made into monthly plans. But the practitioners appear to have greater say in the day translating of the curriculum in which they will set the activities in a co-creative way where children's voice is amply reflected and followed up.

According to Ms. VI (who worked in a government school before moving on to the present setting) it's a very transformative experience and it took some time for her to appreciate the ideals set out by the founders of the school.

'You know how it works in government schools. It's always about learning and learning. Kids will be made to sit whole day doing abcds and numbers. Too much competition, really. My son used to very tired by the evening. Now I have my son to this school and started teaching here. I enjoy it here and so does my son. No

pressure literally and it's fun to come to school for children. If we ask any unruly student not to come to school tomorrow it's like a punishment'. Ms. VI, India

The fact that the curriculum is socio-cultural in nature with a lot of emphasis on social nature of learning and collaborative activities to translate the curriculum it makes things easy and happy for both teachers and children. Teachers seem to have good access to resources to design collaborative way and since it is emergent and creative in nature children's voice and viewpoints are adequately represented.

As Ms. RE says:

'The school curriculum is very different from what other schools do in the area. It recognizes that children can't sit still for too long so every twenty minutes children go and do activities outside, in the playground and in the fields. Children like to be outside so much and it is possible in this school only'.

Moreover, children are not compared and evaluated against each other in this curriculum, which recognizes everyone as competent, capable and unique individuals who develop at different rates. This understanding of children as capable beings and placing emphasis on the process of their learning but not on their final product/outcome has a lot of consequences in the way teaching and learning is shaped in the setting.

As Ms. SH contends:

'We don't give marks and ranks here. That's a huge relief as it doesn't give any pressure to students and to us as well otherwise we will be busy in seeing their ranks and marks. At times it is difficult to explain some parents especially in the beginning but very soon they will recognize and say that their child is happy and excited about going to school and do a lot of activities even at home. I think that's all because we work differently here'.

Based on educators' responses and my participant observations it is sufficiently clear that the kind of curriculum whether it is socio-cultural or pre-primary in focus defines how practitioners can maneuver their teaching and learning, which has further consequences for their ability to foster peer relationships in their settings.

Family factors

Apart from the issues of school ethos and school culture, practitioners have to navigate and negotiate a multitude of family factors which invariably impact on their day to day practice vis. a vis. their ability to foster peer relationships. An in depth examination of these factors illuminates the fact that the task of fostering peer relationships is in fact a very complex and multi-directional process in which practitioners have clearly a significant yet complex role to play.

As was evidenced in the opinions of early childhood practitioners', family circumstances do impact the child's ability to effectively forge and maintain relationships. The parents' or care givers' level of engagement with their children, their arrangements to engage with the child in his or her efforts to socialize; their family structure and circumstances, parents employment patterns, troubled relationships, breakups or bereavements all have an impact on child's mental or physical make up influencing their capacity to effectively engage and sustain social relationships. From this it becomes evident that the family factors play a crucial role either contributing to or hindering their child's social competence, which in turn has implications for practitioners' roles.

When asked about whether or not there are any challenges from home front that they encounter in their task of fostering peer relationships:

'I think it is combination. Sometimes Single families, may not have role models, may be they may not have a normal loving family setting. May be grandparents or other members of family are helping, may be bereavement, perhaps parents, have been

may be unlucky in their own circumstances, they haven't perhaps had a background of loving normal family relations and may themselves doesn't have a background of loving and we have got some children like that here whose parents need help with how to play with children etc. and how to help with friendships and relationships with children'. Ms. FG, England.

Ms. HI who thinks that it is harder for some children especially when they lack role models at home voices similar view. They may find certain things like swearing acceptable at home but at the school they see things differently. This scenario proves to be contradictory for children who are forced to reconcile the two different scenarios at home and at school. This will be particularly difficult when practitioners try to build relationships among children.

'Yes, a lot of children have problems at home. They are not socializing; not having friends and families so they haven't got skills. We need to step in to help and more help high levels of help'. Ms. FG, England.

'He thinks that it's acceptable to swear and come to school and find that it is not acceptable at all. He must feel very insecure and children need security and what expected of us and then yes one set of rules at home and one set of rules here. And child finds it hard what do I do'. Ms. HI, England.

For the Indian case study too, family factors weighed in but for different reasons. Here educators haven't particularly noted any issues with single parent households but about single children who don't have siblings. According to them, single children, who are not accustomed to sharing at the home front, find it challenging especially in the beginning, to share toys with others, (as they are not used to sharing). In this scenario, practitioners initially explain to them the need for fair sharing and turn taking among the children. This initial support helps children in following the rules of fair sharing and turn taking.

As VI explains: *'we have some children here who are single child at home and so are too pampered. They don't know how to share, as they don't need to at their home. But here they have share everything and play co-operatively. It's a problem in the beginning. But later on they will get used to'.*

This is a big issue with the England setting as well where children especially who don't have siblings at home may lack the concept of sharing. In that case parents have a lot of role to play as well in creating the situations where children can get to meet other children and learn to share and play together. Ms. HI who has a single daughter knows how to address this problem as a single parent as well. As she shares, she used to take her daughter to a playgroup where she learns to play with others, which help, in building relationships.

'If they have siblings they will learn a great deal know a great deal. But if you are only a single child you can't really create that. My daughter has problems with sharing because at home she doesn't have to share it at all. I took her to play school so that she can put into situations where she would have to learn that. So that she will be able to get-together and develop relations. At home it is difficult to create that situation'. Ms. HI, England.

Sometimes there are conflicts regarding parental expectations. Some parents press for academic attainment and might not value social development at all. At these times practitioners have a huge role to play in explaining to the parents the importance of peer relationships for the children. Practitioners like Ms. HB find their way around in situations like this and explain to the parents the value of peer relationships and the importance of that to the child. She likes to keep child's interests at heart and works very hard to foster peer relationships.

'Sometime you have to be creative how you fit everything together. Sometimes parent's pressure was an issue. If it's becoming a difficulty I will have conversation with the parents. And explain the reason behind the madness of methods, I suppose and the importance of that to the child. But sometime

parents might not value at all. And the child is in conflict. But we have to understand everyone has his or her opinion. But as far as child is concerned I will work very hard (to foster peer relations)'. Ms. HB, England.

Parent pressure was a huge challenge at the Indian setting in comparison to England setting. As was explained at the outset of the thesis India in the globalization era has started giving a lot of importance to education and especially to English language – which is considered as a means to upward mobility. This competitive trend reflects in the pedagogic practices of both the public and private early years settings whose only emphasis on academic achievement and school readiness. This often results children sitting for hours together working on their literacy and numeracy without any place for play and relationships in the settings.

Parents mostly contribute to this scenario by putting immense pressure on the schools and teachers in terms of tangible learning outcomes even at early ages. This case study setting has come as a critique to the extreme scenario that is prevalent across the provision. Although most of the parents accept and understand the uniqueness of the school and its curriculum and pedagogic practices at times practitioners have to encounter anxious parents who constantly compare their children's performance with other children in the neighborhood who go to public or private settings and appear to be perform better (especially in the initial stages).

As Ms. VI (India) contends:

It's not easy sometimes. Some parents are often worried about their children not yet starting reading and writing while other children of the same age doing good with abcds. We will explain them clearly with a lot of patience that early years are not for literacy and numeracy alone and that they are doing the same stuff in a different way happily. It is difficult especially in the beginning but later they will only see for themselves that their children are very happy to come to school and are engaged in a lot of activities at home and here. It's not the case with children from public and private schools who will have to carry huge

bags to the school and read and write all the time. By evening, they will be so tired’.

When asked about what could help them better to foster peer relationships, Ms. FG feels that knowing as much information as possible about the children in the beginning itself.

‘I think the biggest thing is finding out as much information about children as possible. So home visits. New children come in September. We are going to home visits to meet parents and all the information coming from parents is very important for us. When they come into school in September, we already know their interests, so we can make sure we have dinosaurs, trains, and also trying to make them comfortable and also if they are talking at home and if they are not talking to us and understand they are a bit over-whelmed and needs some time to settle in’. Ms. FG, England.

This is also the case with the Indian setting where practitioners make regular visits to the children homes to find more about their inner lives, their likes and dislikes etc. Moreover, parents often take active part with the day-to-day activities of the school and work as a community. There will be talks, shows or presentations by the parents if and when they have something to contribute to the school community especially in the morning assembly. It gives a sense of partnership among the school and the parents and the wider community.

As Ms VI (India) explains:

‘Yes we try to know as much as we can about the children beforehand and before they start. We have parents who work here often and give talks on different issues etc. Last month we have Soumya’s parent who talked on symbiotic relationships in animals to which all children attended and enjoyed asking a lot of questions’ which showcased the way school builds relationships with outside community where parents become partners with the school community.

As the preceding discussion demonstrated, *the Community/Institutional plane* looked closely at the *cultural context* of the community. Drawing from and corroborating evidence from both the participant observations and semi-structured interviews, it emerged that there is the presence of not one but multiple communities. At the classroom community level, there are several factors ranging from peer culture to personal profiles of the children -which impact practitioners roles in fostering peer relationships. At school community level, there are issues of school ethos or culture, which can play a contributing role or constricting role in practitioner's ability to foster peer relationships. Apart from this the study also taken note of the factors from the wider community (which is categorized as an *ecological plane*) which further impact on the practitioners' ability to foster peer relationships.

The wider ecological context sets the tone for curriculum context and the purpose of the education shapes what practitioners can and cannot do in their settings. The focus of the curriculum whether it is pre-primary or socio cultural in emphasis defines how practitioners enact their own practice and transforms the given curriculum. However, what is evident from the study is that practitioners mediate the curriculum to ensure that children's needs are taken care of. Family factors form another theme from the ecological plane with implications for the practitioners' roles. The family circumstances, structures, parents working patterns, their socio economic circumstances, parental aspirations all indirectly impinge on children's socio, emotional and physical makeup which further implications for their peer relationships. Evidently all these factors add much more complexity to the mix and highlight the mutuality of the planes and the embedded ness of peer relationships as opposed to child centered assumptions of peer relationships. Practitioners evidently have to consider, balance, and reconcile all these factors within and beyond the setting and play a meditative role in fostering peer relationships.

7.3. Discussion of findings

Having analyzed and presented the findings from the institutional foci, which has foregrounded the cultural *contexts* under which practitioners enact their practice: the discussion now moves on to situating these findings in the light of extant studies and relevant literature.

Carroll (1872: 189 cited in Fler, 2006) contends that '*we usually do not operate by choice. Instead, we inherently appropriate the terministic screens, affordances, constraints, and so forth associated with the cultural tools we employ. Unlike Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, then speakers are not in a position to assert that 'When I use a word, it means whatever I want it to mean'*'. It is the same case with the early childhood practitioners who participated in this study who work in the defining contexts of the culture. They, as any other human beings are part of the wider context and are conditioned by the prevailing social and cultural context and inherently and (often inadvertently) appropriate the cultural tools. Hence it is important to appreciate whatever they have to say or do in relation to the context.

Rogoff (2003) equates her third plane i.e. Institutional Plane to the metaphor of apprenticeship which provides a model in the plane of community activity, which involves active individuals participating with others in a culturally organized activity that has as part of its purpose the development of mature participation by the less experienced people. The idea of apprenticeship necessarily focuses attention on the specific activity as well on its relation to practices and institutions of the community, be it economic, political, spiritual and material. Lave and Wenger (1992) were also interested in contexts in which learning takes place; speaking of *situated learning* and *communities of practice*. Woodhead et al. (1998) argue that although all children develop emotional attachments, develop reasoning and learn language etc., they all take place within culturally regulated social relationships and are mediated by cultural practices which are further shaped by knowledge and beliefs about what is normal and desirable. Hence it is important to understand the cultural contexts to understand how they impinge on the activity of fostering peer relationships.

Rogoff (2003: 3) explicitly contends that 'development can be understood only in the light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities-which also change'. Howes (2011) extends this understanding by devising a Theory of developmental cultural interface to understand children's peer relationships in the contexts of culture. This understanding of child development in the contexts of cultural communities is further exemplified through the works of Hedegaard (2004, 2005) who considered child development beyond the realm of personal plane onto the institutional

plane contesting the biological maturation and highlighting the socio-cultural nature of human development. Without foregrounding the cultural contexts it is difficult to understand educator's roles in fostering peer relationships. The following Table 7.3 summarizes the findings and conclusions drawn from the Institutional plane from the preceding discussion by focusing on similarities and variations across the cross-cultural case study settings as advocated by Rogoff (2003).

Table 7.3. Findings and conclusions from Institutional/Community plane

England	India
Findings:	Findings:
<i>Presence of multiple communities.</i>	
<i>Classroom community: Issues of peer culture</i>	
<i>School Community: School ethos</i>	
<i>Wider community/ Ecological Plane:</i>	
<i>Influence of Family factors</i>	--Same themes yet cultural contexts vary
<i>Policy Contexts of curriculum:</i>	
<i>Pre-primary vs. Social pedagogue</i>	
Conclusions:	
<i>Embedded nature of Peer relationships as opposed to child centered nature of peer relationships.</i>	
<i>Practitioners move along the continuum of roles.</i>	Conclusions: --Same as in England context
<i>Need to give specific focus to the ecological plane by extending the institutional plane.</i>	

7.3.1. Presence of multiple communities

Rogoff (2003) defines a cultural community as a grouping of people who share goals, beliefs and everyday practices, and often a racial or ethnic identity and maintains that children and adults who participate in the same cultural community develop through common activities and practices, social interaction forms and styles and argues that individuals do participate in more than one community.

In the present study, it was evident that there is no homogenous community and that there can be multiple communities co-exist. As was observed from participant observations and interviews with practitioners; there is presence of multiple communities in the setting contesting the developmental/universalist notions, which consider children as a homogenized entity that evolve/develop at similar phases.

As one practitioner noted, children have to navigate through different communities especially when they first join like they need to belong to their particular group, and to the early years community and then to the school community and other than that they have lives outside the setting as participants of diverse social, political and economic and religious communities. This makes the task of fostering peer relationships a multi-faceted and complex one as the needs, abilities, capabilities, experiences and expectations of each and every student differs making each one a ‘unique’ being.

7.3.1.1 Classroom community: Presence of peer culture defined by children’s agency

When we look at the immediate community that the children belong to, the setting is their classroom community. Here, as evidenced from participant observations (and narrated in the first part of this chapter); there are aspects of peer culture and children’s agency which make the task of fostering peer relationships not a straight forward but one which is a very active, dynamic and inherently complex.

This image of children as active beings with rich and complex experiences, abilities and as active co-constructors of ‘peer culture’ is demonstrated in the work of Corsaro (1987; 1985, 2003, 2005) who showed how children are active in their own social worlds enmeshed with issues of peer culture and agency. This presence of peer culture with its inherent power issues and active agency of children in impacting the dynamics makes the task of fostering peer relationships an inherently complex task. The issues of power embedded in learning communities evidenced in this study cohere with Singer and de Haan (2007) who consider early childhood spaces as sites of power and politics, as evidenced from their research on Dutch and Moroccan children. They succinctly

explain how children co-construct their own social and political world, which is very different from the adult worlds.

Peer culture as exemplified by children's own characteristics of temperament, age, gender etc. and how it influences their behaviours is consistent with the works of Edwards, Guzman et al., (2006) who explore how children's own characteristics based on their gender, age, and unique characteristics such as their temperaments, personalities, and interests become important in determining their behaviours, response patterns, and choices of preferred play mates and activities. According to them, the very environments in which children participate are both influenced by and reflective of their genetic predispositions: indeed children become actively involved in their contexts and manage their experiences not as passive recipients from the adult interventions as was evidenced from the study. Dunn (2004) and Justice et al., (2008) also note that individual differences in temperament and communication skills are influencing peer relationships.

This agentic role children play as active beings in their own socialization independent of adult interference coheres with Tudge and Hogan (2005); Tudge et al, (2000); Tudge et al., (1999) Corsaro (2004); Howes and Spieker (2008) who examined how children become engaged in their own activities and play an agentic role in their own socialization experiences. They provided empirical data suggesting that children are active agents in their participation in various contexts and activities and in no way passively experiencing activities structured by practitioners as was clear from the participant observations.

Children bring dispositions and skills, sociability and wariness, emotional regulation and communicative skills that influence their friendships and relationships with peers (Howes, 2008, 2011). Theoretically, children as active beings and co-constructors of their own socialization are increasingly accepted (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978; Gardner, 1993 and Nutbrown, 2006). Traditional notions of childhood were contested and the childhood was defined as the social construction based on the beliefs, values and philosophies of adults (James and Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002). The United Nations

Charter on Rights of the Child (1989), too, advocates for the active roles of children being the agents in their own development.

7.3.1.2. School community: School ethos/culture

School ethos plays a prominent role in either contributing or constricting early childhood practitioner's role in fostering peer relations, which was succinctly narrated by early childhood practitioners during their interviews. Whether the school values social development and relational pedagogy underpinned by social and cognitive development (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009) or only concerns with academic development makes a difference to the tone and ethos of school culture.

This coheres with both Donnelly (2000) and Bredekamp and Copple (1997) who contend that ethos is distinctive range of values and beliefs, which contribute to the philosophy of the environment. Apart from the issue of school culture, this study has further taken cognizance of the issues relating to practitioners age, experience and qualifications along with the structural variables, which has impact on their roles. However, these structural and functional variables don't form the focus for the study. For example, Ms. HI considers that her qualifications and experiences and her being a mother contributes to her role in fostering peer relationships:

'It is a big part of my study, career so far and also my experiences. Also I am a parent again you see it from both sides. Harder being a parent than a teacher (laughs) to foster peer relations. It's a major issue through my parenting and teaching'.

Ms. HI's viewpoint coheres with EPPE study, which found positive co-relationship between practitioner's qualifications and the social, emotional and intellectual outcomes of children.

7.3.1.3. *The wider community (Ecological Plane)*

Having discussed the issues of peer culture and school culture embedded in the learning community and its implications for practitioners' roles vis. a vis. peer relationships the discussion now shifts to the issues of wider culture embedded in the *ecological plane*. I have consciously used the term '*ecological plane*' as an extension of '*institutional/community*' planes as it is essential to give it a specific foci and clearer definition to this plane in this study's context as the cultural factors which influenced practitioners roles ranged beyond the immediate *institutional* plane of the given setting.

This wider ecology takes cognizance of the factors that impinge on the practitioner's roles beyond the immediate context of the learning community as evident from the interviews with the practitioners (and explained in the first part of this chapter). These include the family factors, the policy context of the curricula along with the underlying assumptions of children, childhood and the purpose of education.

The influence of family and community factors

The study has noted how the circumstances of children's families be it- single parent, joint families, parents working patterns, child rearing practices, parents' motivations, aspirations along with their social, economic and community makeup – all have implications for the kind of children's experiences which impact on their socio, emotional makeup and the expectations that they bring to the setting which has not only implications for practitioners roles but also makes their job an inherently complex one which was succinctly explained by White (1996: 28):

'A child lives in a complex ecology of homes, schools, farms, stores, roads, and factories. Part of the growing child's task is to learn how to act in these behaviour settings; part of the child's task is to learn how to move among them, selecting some and rejecting others; part of a child's task is to learn how to build them and redesign them'.

The complexity of children's lives was further explored by Edwards and Guzman (2006) who contend that forces such as technology, family support, family patterns, division of labour, work patterns, exposure to crime and violence all influence, directly or indirectly, the quality of child's peer relationships which resonates with this study's findings. The US National Institute of Child Health and Development Study (NICHD) found that family characteristics have a greater impact on outcomes for children than pre-school factors. This influence of family on child's social and emotional development is well recognized. The EPPE study emphasized the parental involvement and partnership regarding their child's intellectual and social gains (Sylva et al., 2004). Patterson et al (1989) report on linkages between family stress, transitions, divorce or single parent households and its implications for children's peer relationships. There are many studies that have emphasized the family influences, their discipline and child rearing styles on children (e.g. Daal, 2004; Singer et al. 2006; Howes, 2011).

Edwards, Guzman et., al (2006) define these characteristics as 'cultural scripts for socialization as shared child-rearing routines that guide a community's behavior toward children which was considered (e.g. by Levine et al., 1994:18-19) as part of the 'cultural software'. As evidence from the study the 'cultural software' differs across the cultures. For example the high prevalence of single parent families in English context is not a norm with the Indian case study context. English practitioners felt that since children are lacking socialization experiences at home due to single parent households, in their work patterns they have to actively step in to fill that role. It coheres with Pinkster's (2009) study, which found that monitoring and facilitating peer relationships is particularly challenging for single parents.

In the Indian context, this is not expressed as a problem since children tend to grow up in relatively bigger households and in tightly knit communities with a lot of scope for socialization at home and in the community environment along with more opportunities to roam around in a relatively carefree environment without restrictions. This seems to be not the case with the English context, which is accustomed to increasing child monitoring resulting from security concerns at home and in a community context.

This resonates with Rogoff's (2003) theory that children in post-industrialized communities are excluded from many activities of their communities and instead spends strict age-graded institutions such as schools and in specialized child-focused activities to prepare them for later involvement in the full range of their community activities. She contrasts this to childhoods in diverse cultures where children to learn through observation and collaboration in ongoing community activities which she terms as 'intent community participation'. As evidenced from the study, this '*embedded*' nature of children's social lives and the availability of and access to opportunities to engage in socialization processes has implications for their peer relationships along with implications for practitioners' roles.

Rogoff (2003) reasons that the growth of emphasis in many societies on age-graded institutions has created conditions in which associations with similar age have taken precedence over intergenerational family and community relations which resulted in *dis-embedded* nature of peer relationships (and as the study has noted from the English context) and in *child centered* nature of peer relationships. Edwards, Guman et al., (2006) discuss how cultural communities vary significantly along one dimension of early peer relationships: age of access. According to the authors, three societal level factors influence children's opportunities for interaction with peers viz. Settlement pattern (the density and clustering of families in space; Reproductive strategies (number and spacing of children). Though this aspect is not the particular focus of the study *access* to peer relationships from the family and community viewpoint definitely has implications for the practitioners' roles as evidenced from the interviews with practitioners.

Apart from the issues of familial configurations and community embedded-ness there are issues relating to cultural beliefs on how important it is for children to have access to and opportunities for socialization. As noted with the Indian setting parents most often prioritize their children's academic achievement. It coheres with Aukrust et al, (2003) and Harkness and Super (1996) that often parents have different cultural beliefs and values (ethno- theories) about their young children's peer relationships. However their focus on academic rather than relational might also stem from the fact that children in the Indian study context have comparatively more opportunities to socialize and

spend time with their peer group in their communities outside of school context.

This resonates with Whiting and Edwards (1988) finding that children in different cultural communities have varied amounts of freedom to leave their homes and play around the neighborhood whether in East Asia or in Western post-industrial societies. Their access to unstructured leisure time varies significantly depending on whether they live in East Asia or in post-industrialized communities (Larson and Verma, 1999).

As evident from the study fostering peer relations is a multi-directional process with influences ranging from peer culture, school culture and wider culture which makes up for an interesting and a complex mix in terms of practitioners' ability to foster peer relationships. This coheres with Oden et al (1993) contention that peer relationships development as multi-contextual yet family focused. As evidenced from the study, whatever is the cultural context, family seems to hold an important say/sway in this -as key finding from EPPE project point out to the importance of the quality home learning environment as more important for social and intellectual development of children than parental occupation, education or income. The key is what parents do is more important than who parents are (Sylva et al., 2004). Dunn (2005) argue that family influence on children's social and moral development.

Given the central role that family can play OECD (2006) calls for family and community involvement in early childhood services: "families play a central nurturing and educational role in their children's lives...[and] should be assisted by early childhood centers and staff to support their children's development and learning" (Moss, 2007: 17) which is also echoed and reaffirmed in the works of New (1992: 1999) who argue that teachers need to know not only about children's lives but should also engage in discussion about the purposes of education.

This understanding is evident at the Indian setting where practitioners not only required to know more about children but also engage in discussions with their parents and families regarding the transformatory purpose of education. This happens on a regular

basis (which I knew from my previous teaching experience there) and also gleaned from participants responses when they shared how they talk to parents about the importance not competing or not in a hurry about reading and writing. EYFS too actively endorses active parental involvement of parents in children's learning (DfES, 2008; National Strategies, 2009c, 2009d; DfES, 2014). And this emphasis on maintaining links with the family for working relationships in order to foster children's well-being, learning and development is evident in the works of Manning and Morton (2006), Edgington (2004), Drake (2001).

Policy contexts of the curriculum: Pre-primary vs. Social pedagogue

As evident from the participant observations and interviews with the practitioners (explained in the first part of this chapter) it is clear that the kind of given curriculum whether it is in Pre-Primary or Socio-Cultural in focus impacts practitioners and their everyday practice in relation to peer relationships.

As Ms. HB contends: *'and a lot of different issues as far as peer relationships and academic learning so it is hard to fit it all in'*. This difficulty has been linked to the school readiness discourse that pervades the English early childhood education. It is to be noted that reception classes are considered as a launching ground for primary school with children's profiles listing out the sequential learning outcomes to be achieved by the time they join the primary school. As explained at the outset, though government has responded to the essential school focus and the prescriptive learning goals following the Tickell Review (DfES, 2011) and had reduced the learning goals; the evolutionary and the prescriptive and the school readiness focus still remains.

This focus on school readiness has been linked to the increasing schoolification trend in early years, which sees *ECEC* as simply a training ground for compulsory schooling Moss (2007) and "an instrumental and narrow discourse about readiness for school is increasingly heard" (OECD, 2006: 219). This is in strong contrast to the socio-pedagogy traditions in Nordic context. According to Moss (2007: 19) 'the early education tradition results in a more centralizing and academic approach to curriculum content and methodology' as is the case with EYFS, 'while pedagogical frameworks in

the social pedagogy tradition remain more local, child-centered and holistic' which is the case with the Nordic countries and the Indian case study setting which adopts a philosophically different approach from the mainstream school readiness curriculum. These pre-primary or social pedagogy traditions cohere with Hedegaard (2005) assertion that often the educational systems are constructed on the basis of theories and values about children and childhood. Upbringing and education is directed towards ideals of where to bring the children through the educational system.

In England, early years is now the first part of a national system of testing designed to achieve outcomes but also meant to hold teachers and schools to account. Adams et al. (2004: 84) contend that this climate of accountability prioritizes curriculum planning to ensure coverage of the six areas of learning (later changed to four) and the observation and the assessment of five-year olds in school reception classes sometimes reduced to "making the greatest number of ticks in the shortest possible time".

While this prescriptive nature of curriculum has been linked to the high stakes accountability system, there are concerns that it might pressurize teachers into practices they believe are not in the best interests of the child Dowling (2007) and Mindes (2003). Hatch and Greishaber (2008) conclude that an emphasis upon standards and accountability has influenced a move away from the use of child. Moreover practitioners might not be able to record all the wonderful things children do due to the pre-set nature of the learning goals as confided by the practitioners in the study. This resonates with Nutbrown (1998) and Broadhead (2006) concern that if educators focus upon the targets judged by the Foundation Stage Profiles, then some significant aspects of children's learning might go unexamined and over-looked.

There are concerns that non-compulsory years are becoming more formal with a focus on academic learning of content areas (Miller and Almon, 2009), which is the case with the mainstream schools in India and EYFS in England. Raver (2002) contends that it is important that social competencies and inter-personal skills are seen as equally important when children begin their school. This prioritizing social and emotional development has been recognized as a prime area following the Tickell review;

however it is the evolutionary and prescriptive nature that still remains. This academic approach to early years and the prescriptive nature of external learning goals got a number of critiques (Dewey, 1916; Drummond, 2003; Nutbrown, 1998; Broadhead, 2006; Wood, 2008). This is in contrast to the Indian case study setting (which came as a reaction against mainstream school readiness focus) and is explicitly based on the socio-pedagogue tradition recognizing the social cultural aspects of learning where learning doesn't take the linear, evolutionary path but a revolutionary one (Vygotsky, 1978).

Shepard (2000) contends that prescriptive learning outcomes based on outdated model of how children learn i.e. Developmental Sequentialism which considers development in an evolutionary and linear fashion can be unsuitable for or biased against culturally or linguistically different children. (Barblett and Meloney, 2010) argue that this will have implications for inclusive classrooms and children's social and emotional development vis a vis peer relationships. It goes against saying that children develop at different rates and in different ways which might not manifest in the same way that has been pre-arranged in the children's profiles which was further corroborated from practitioners interview responses. Robbins (2002) contend that these evolutionary assumptions as supposing universal notions of developmental achievements might position children who fall out of these experiences or not in conforming with the ages and stages as deficient and overlook, dismiss, criticize certain aspects of development and as the practitioners in the study contend they might not even be able to register certain changes as the children profiles organized around the developmental sequentialism (Kwon, 2002) doesn't allow for unforeseen changes or deviations from the pre-set outcomes.

Rogoff (2003) critiques these taken for granted notions inherent in the universal nature of development especially with regard to the chronological age and developmental milestones, which are again based on cultural perspectives. Though all the children develop yet they do so in the contexts of their culture, which defines how and when they do it as has been noted from the study arguing for contextual, cultural understanding of development as opposed to universal notions. Howes (2011) development-cultural interface model to understand peer relationships is a perfect answer to understand development nested in cultural contexts.

According to Miller (2003, 2006), the EYFS the national curriculum guidance for early years is heavily influenced by a resurgence of instrumental values of curriculum as it endeavors to provide guidance to early childhood practitioners and teachers so as to enable them to effectively prepare children for the next stage of schooling. This instrumental focus is in sharp contrast to transformatory philosophy envisioned by philosopher pedagogues like Montessori, Froebel, Steiner and McMillan including the Indian philosophers JK and Tagore. As explained earlier, JK's approach (followed by the Indian setting) does not adhere to national curriculum or standardization but is a localized child-centered approach. This approach explicitly espouses progressive and socio-cultural views of the child without any external pressures from the national curriculum and assessment. This approach views child as active constructor of knowledge, social being, and the teacher is viewed as a collaborator and co-learner along with the child whose role is to guide, facilitate and encourage research. This has consequences for children's peer relationships and the kind of space, scope that is made available to them. Definitely the kind of curriculum in place and the underpinning theories and views be it pre-primary or social pedagogy has enormous consequences for children's peer relationships and the kind of roles available to educators as evident from the study.

7.4. Chapter summary

This chapter addressed the third part of the question: *What are the contexts under which practitioners' enact their roles?* by presenting the findings inferred from the third plane, Institutional or Community plane and discussing with the extant literature and research. The conclusions are drawn from the two cross cultural settings by focusing on the similarities and variations to further illuminate the impact of the cross cultural contexts as envisioned by Rogoff (2003). What is clearly evident from the study is the presence of multiple communities in the supposedly homogenous learning community viz. classroom community with the issues of peer culture, school community with its own ethos which will impact practitioners' roles, and the wider community where the issues of family circumstances, and the kind of policy contexts regarding curriculum be it pre-primary in focus or social pedagogy, all have consequences for practitioners roles.

As the findings suggest all these cultural contexts within and beyond the settings have consequences for children peer relationships and thereby practitioners' roles. Hence it's been concluded that a clearer definition and a specific focus on the wider *ecological* contexts, as an extension of institutional contexts will give recognition and appreciation of the wider contexts that extend well beyond the immediate institutional contexts. It further emphasizes the *embedded* nature of peer relationships across the planes as opposed to the evolutionary *child-centered* understandings of peer relationships, which was the basis of EYFS curriculum.

Chapter Eight– Contributions to knowing: Answers to the research question

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, I endeavor to summarize answers to the research question posed at the outset of the thesis. The guiding question of the thesis ‘How do Early Childhood Educators *Perceive* and *Practice* Fostering of Peer Relationships in their Socio-Cultural *Contexts*?’ is divided into three parts representing three planes: Personal (*Perceptions*); Inter-Personal (*Practice*) and Institutional (*Contexts*) planes as proposed by Rogoff (1995) and are considered separately yet retaining their inherent mutuality throughout the empirical investigations, data analysis and the presentation of the findings.

This chapter brings together the three planes of analysis and answers the proposed research question. The theoretical, practical and policy implications are briefly explored followed by critical reflection and evaluation of the study. This critical reflection and critique of the study is essential given that the epistemological, theoretical, methodological, ethical and cultural reflexivity forms integral basis for the study throughout the process, which also helps in ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. The possibilities for further research are then briefly explored.

8.1. Answers to the research question

As has been explained at the outset the study ‘A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Early Childhood Educators Roles in Fostering Peer Relationships: Cross-Cultural Perspectives from India and England’ has been guided by the main research question ‘How do early childhood educators *perceive* and *practice* fostering of peer relationships in their socio-cultural *contexts*?’ As was enumerated in chapter 4, socio-cultural theoretical framework (Vygotsky, 1978/1998; Bruner, 1960, 1986; Rogoff, 1995, 1998, 2003) provided useful lenses to bring the individual and the contexts together and explore their roles in the context of culture. This cultural context is important as Rogoff (2003: 3) argues, “development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities-which also change”. While doing so, it has become clear, as the findings suggest, how the task of fostering peer relationships and their overall roles shape and are being shaped by the social, cultural and historical contexts within and beyond the settings.

Here I present the summary of the findings emerged from the Personal, Inter-Personal and Institutional planes which explored the *perceptions*, *practice* and institutional *contexts* of the early childhood practitioners from across the case study settings of India and England.

Findings emerged from the *Personal plane* which looked at the *perceptions* of the practitioners from both the contexts on the significance of peer relationships suggest a lot of *similarities*: Practitioners from across the contexts perceived peer relationships to be very significant for children's happiness and wellbeing, as a pre-condition for all learning, important for social competence and friendships, as a basis for inclusive classrooms and as an aspect of relational pedagogy. The only *variation* between the contexts is the absence in the India case study setting of overly explicit emphasis on peer relationships as a preparation for the school, which was evidenced explicitly and implicitly at the English setting. This vital difference has been linked to the prevalence of socio cultural context of the Indian setting with emphasis on Social Pedagogy and the English setting on Pre-Primary Pedagogy (as argued in the chapter 7-*contexts*).

English educators are constantly required to adhere to the Pedagogy of Predictive Outcomes (DCSF, 2008) while planning their activities in tune with the children's interests. However, these restrictions associated with the prescriptive curriculum with explicit emphasis on school readiness didn't arise with the Indian participants who are operating under different socio cultural realities. As their *perceptions* and *practice* attune to the Pedagogy of Care and Sensitivity - they consider similar to their English counterparts- peer relations as very important for children's happiness and wellbeing, important to form friendships and improve social competence, a pre-condition for all learning and to be facilitating inclusive learning and relational pedagogy.

The only *variation* in their *perceptions* relates to the socio cultural historical context of the setting itself and especially to its genesis. The founding fathers (of the Indian case study setting) have envisioned transformative purpose of education based on the philosophy of JK and Tagore. They ensured the aim of the school (and early years) as life itself where the principles of co-operation and democracy (Krishnamurti, 1953;

Moss, 2004) are practiced not something to be professed. In an extreme scenario where both public and private providers of early years in India are engaged in explicit and implicit pedagogy of school preparation in an atmosphere of utmost competition –it's been a conscious choice not to consider education as a way to get into a career but engage in an integrated curriculum which ultimately creates good society based on relationships.

Findings from the *Inter-Personal Plane* which focused on the actual practices of early childhood practitioners in fostering peer relations suggest that practitioners engage in fostering peer relations in several ways: *by attending and attuning to children's needs, by organizing physical, social and emotional and play environments of the settings* and also *by adhering to rules, routines, rituals and role-modeling*. Whereas these patterns of fostering peer relationships is similar across the settings in India and England, however, the distinctive aspect is *how* they do it which in turn has linkages to the immediate and wider social and cultural context.

What is important to consider is how the inherent mutuality of each plane influences and gets influenced by the other. As Rogoff (1998) rightly contends, understanding the processes that become the focus at each plane of analysis-individual, interpersonal and institutional relies on understanding the processes in the background as well those in the foreground of analysis. It brings out the inherent mutuality of the individual and the social and the cultural worlds that he/she is part of and so shape and are shaped in turn.

The *perceptions* of practitioners especially on how peer relations are significant: first and foremost, to keep children happy and emotionally secure has found a concrete expression in their *practice*. Practitioners from across the contexts conscientiously *attune* themselves to the needs of the children whenever children are unhappy, hungry or emotionally or physically insecure. They find it is important that children are happy and emotionally secure and felt otherwise children will not be ready to learn anything. It is interesting how some practitioners actually attribute this 'caring pedagogy' to being mothers themselves.

What is evident, despite of the cross-cultural variations of the contexts is that early childhood practitioners are ‘conscientious carers’ before anything else which is underpinned by maternal thinking (Ruddick, 1989). One practitioner particularly made explicit links to the Hierarchy of Needs theory proposed by Maslow (1954). Almost all the practitioners from the study felt it is important that children are happy, healthy and feel secure. They also considered that physiological needs should take precedence over the higher order needs like cognitive needs. This priority in focus also coincides with their actual practice where practitioners try to reconcile competing demands (Luff, 2009; Soler and Miller, 2006) of a given curriculum.

However, what is being valued in terms of fostering social and emotional needs is again a cultural and curriculum question. Where independence is valued focusing on ‘unique child’ in EYFS; at the Indian case study setting, the emphasis is on the ‘interdependence’ and ‘community aspect’ of children’s needs. Here the integrated curriculum influenced by JK’s philosophy prioritizes cultivating integrated individuals with relations to the community, wider society and to the universe and thus explicitly focuses on the relational pedagogy. This mutuality of the individual, community and the social and cultural contexts is compatible with the Social and Cultural approach informing the study. Hence the environment, activities are shaped in such a way that children will need to think and act in terms of sharing and negotiating in a co-operative manner.

Secondly, practitioners foster peer relationships by organizing various aspects of environments: *physical, social & emotional, learning and play environments*. Once again the patterns in WHAT they are organizing is similar but HOW they do it vastly different again emphasizing the crucial ‘culture’ at play. From the observations it became evident that practitioners organize environments based on the school philosophy or curriculum-in English setting evident in space for circle time and physical arrangement to facilitate group work where children sit four or five in groups and work individually most of the time except for the circle time and playtime. This obviously links to the curriculum goals where ‘unique child’ is valued and the curriculum and assessment goals are geared for the individual child needs and abilities although there are aspects of group work. Where as in the Indian setting, the physical setting is a huge

open space with facility for children to sit wherever they want while they participate in the activities and with opportunities to spend a lot of time outdoors –doing various activities collaboratively engaged in an activity or a project. The curriculum and school philosophy actively endorses the significance of Nature, its importance in developing sensitivity and provision is made for a lot of learning to happen outdoors along with regular play and gardening work.

Like in Reggio Emilia and Montessori, it is recognized that the environment is a ‘third teacher’ and JK postulates ‘you are the environment’ bringing the human element into the dynamics of environment. It invokes different roles for the educators: in being not only reflective about their practice but being ‘reflexive’ – in what they are bringing to the environment in terms of assumptions, biases, attitudes. JK considers –educators too as the products of the social and cultural conditioning and hence they too are part of the problem, hence the solution. According to him, educating the educator is a real problem and the education process should involve *hyper-reflexivity* on the part of the educator - constant questioning, deconstructing and changing as the result and is termed as a post-modern stance (Ryan, 2005: 81).

In terms of ensuring *social and emotional environment*, again the patterns are the same: practitioners attend to social and emotional needs of children and see that they are happy, secure and are well fed. They also intervene to resolve peer conflicts whenever necessary and accept peer-conflict as a very common occurrence, which is very important for children’s emotional regulation and independence and inter-dependence. Again the underlying values differ; for the English participants and curriculum, the guiding principle is: *independence*, while at the Indian setting *the* organizing principle is *inter-dependence and co-operation*, which again relates to the wider social and cultural context of both the settings.

In the Indian setting early years is a distinct phase of life in itself (not in preparation for school or a distant reality) and the curriculum endorses democratic and simple co-operative living -consciously practiced with emphasis on freedom and self-awareness-not linking to rewards and punishments or evaluation. This links to JK’s insistence that

children can only learn in an environment free from fear and censure involving self-regulation and responsibility while exercising freedom. What is to be noted is that this is possible only in an emergent curricula where practitioners have freedom to meander learning but limited in a context (as noticed in English context) where there is huge emphasis on accountability and mandatory practice.

Practitioners from both the contexts, further foster peer relationships by organizing the *learning environments*, again what makes the difference is *how* they do it. In English setting, it's been observed that there is a lot of group work where groups of four or five children around the table work individually on the tasks of their choice viz. working with clay to make different shapes and sizes of animals, food items, prepare greeting cards etc. At other times will be seated with the teacher or teaching assistants who help them with the tasks of literacy and numeracy etc. Though occasionally there are opportunities for group work in terms of role-play and outdoor play; it's been noted that collaborative learning is not an integral part of the curriculum where the needs and abilities of the individual child are valued and are assessed in terms of individual profiles.

However, findings corroborated through interviews and participant observations gathered from the Indian setting suggest that the curriculum is organized around the principle of 'experiential learning' prioritizing hands on activities of the children in a collaborative way. All the different components and learning goals of the curriculum will be meticulously planned into different activities and projects covering over a period of time giving a lot of leeway for teachers and students to meander through the curriculum and changing, modifying in an evolving manner without having to recourse to some pre-fixed learning goals.

Findings indicate that *embedded* collaborative learning communities (as opposed to child centered) are the key to positive peer relationships as children engage in collaborative activities and are working for a common goal involving lot of interaction and negotiation. This also provides scope for practitioners to engage more in 'sustained shared interaction' and has an ability to transform practitioner's roles –to that of

‘facilitator’ and ‘co-learner’. Practitioners have more space and freedom to sustain the interest of the children and work in partnership with the children in expanding or developing on the activity at hand without worrying about –where she *needs* to take them in a *linear* way confirming to the top-down curricula.

Organizing the *play environments* is another way, where practitioners facilitate peer relationships, by balancing teacher directed and child-initiated play. English practitioners especially appreciated the significance of play in fostering relationships among children, where children can freely get to choose what they can play, with whom they can play; thus changing, and modifying the dynamics of play. Thus often raising the issues of power and gender dynamics in the peer culture, which is interesting for further study (Corsaro, 2005). However, as evident from the interviews with the practitioners and the researcher’s observations, the cultural context shapes educators’ assumptions about the significance of play.

It is noted that the significance of play in an industrialized society like England with institutionalized childhoods is quite different from the cultural context of India, a semi-agrarian and largely collective society where children still have lots of avenues to play at home environment. Moreover, the Indian setting adheres to collaborative curriculum coupled with a lot of outdoor activities and gardening tasks. In this backdrop of diverse cultural and social realities, the concept and the significance of play, varies from agrarian to industrial societies and entails different meanings. However, this aspect is not the focus of the present study but will be an interesting research area to further explore.

Lastly from the *practice* perspective, educators adhere to rules, routines, rituals and role modeling to foster peer relationships. Again HOW they do it is a cultural question with Indian setting actively emphasizing the intrinsic value of education rather than rewards prioritizing learner self-regulation and critical questioning rather than blind adhering and modeling. This has been linked to the founding father’s aspiration for education playing a transformative role of bringing in good society by critiquing the status-quoist society and questioning the taken for granted notions.

Findings from the *Institutional plane* which looked at the cultural *contexts* - indicate that ascertaining educators' roles in fostering peer relationships is a complex process with various factors within and beyond the setting influencing and impacting practitioners' roles. Also the factors range from issues of peer culture (along with children's temperaments, abilities, attitudes and their socio, economic and domestic backgrounds) to institutional culture (along with practitioners personal variables like education, experience, personal belief system along with institutional variables like resources) and the wider culture of families and their circumstances and the wider ecological contexts including the enabling/prescriptive policy contexts setting the tone for what the aims and purpose of early childhood education should be. This extends the notion of *child centered* nature of peer relationships where practitioners operate at the individual level to the *embedded* nature of peer relationships where the recognition is that peer relationships are *embedded* in a collaborative learning community and in the wider community calling for the synthesis and the mutuality of the planes.

Having summed up the findings from Personal, Inter-Personal and Institutional planes which explored the *perceptions, practice* of practitioners in their cultural *contexts*, it has been evident that their *perceptions* and the *practice* was defined and refined by the overarching cultural *contexts* in which they are part of. For example, although English educators perceived the significance of peer relationships and the importance of personal, social, emotional development as a crucial preparation for school among other reasons, at times they struggled to bring the interests of the child and the demands of the prescriptive curriculum together. This is due to the contradictory nature of the (given) curriculum itself; one hand emphasizing the play based curriculum balancing the child initiated play with practitioner directed learning-on the other hand providing a prescriptive curriculum with strict adherence to the sequential learning is at odds with the actual nature of learning itself.

Here the age and stage model of evolutionary learning vis a vis peer relationships is at odds with the socio-cultural and revolutionary nature of learning vis a vis peer relationships. As one practitioner puts it: at times there are moments when children display exciting moments of learning yet it doesn't really reflect in the actual list of the outcomes in the children's profiles. Even under the limitations of the highly prescriptive

curriculum, the *intuition* of the practitioner prevails as they mediate through the pedagogy of caring and pedagogy of predictable outcomes as has been corroborated through interviews and observations of the caring pedagogy (Noddings, 2003; Goodfellow, 2008). What has emerged strongly, which adheres with Papatheodorou (2010), is that practitioners act as active *mediators* of a given curriculum.

As was evident from the English context, practitioners albeit working in a rather ‘restrictive’ environments engaging in a pedagogy of predictable outcomes resulting from a highly instrumental competency based curriculum- reconciled the needs of the child with the demands of the curriculum and prioritized children’s social and emotional development. In this the school culture-with its motto ‘together we work more’ helped in balancing the limitations of the competency based curriculum.

The criticism by Moss (2004) and Dahlberg (2009) resonates with the way practitioners are looked upon as ‘technicians’ administering a centrally handed down curricula fulfilling the demands and needs of accountability at the same time compromising the freedom of practitioners and children in engaging in learning that is meaningful to them in a given context. As one practitioner shared eloquently, albeit the rhetoric of the play based curriculum, in reality, they always need to come back to the student profiles and tick the boxes whether or not they are following the same pattern all the. This results in ignoring all the other wonderful things that didn’t find place in the pre-fixed outcomes. Conformity to government’s agenda of accountability and efficiency and the overall aim of preparing children for future workforce has consequences for practitioners’ roles and children’s peer relationships.

Arthur et al (1996) contends that early childhood education in western countries has always been geared to focusing on the individual child. This coincides with the image of the ‘unique child’ in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum as opposed to the image of ‘community child’ envisioned in the philosophy of Tagore and JK and followed by the Indian case study setting. This exemplifies the spirit of co-operation based on JK’s notion who maintains that *to be is to be related*.

Davies (2007: 113) argues that in industrialized societies, ‘we long ago liberated the individual, a decisive shift in orientation that David Marybury-Lewis has described as the sociological equivalent of splitting the atom, for in doing so, we severed the obligations of kind and community that, for better or worse, constrain the individual in traditional societies. In glorifying the self, we did away with community’. This is the kind of orientation that is embedded in the wider context that gets into the ‘unique child’ principle where the individual skills, abilities are prioritized in a narrow competency based-curriculum resulting in a pedagogy of predictable outcomes, individual learning and assessment criteria often to the point of exclusion of community aspect with an image of children as future workers.

This contrasts with the progressive and transformative curriculum followed by the Indian setting with huge implications for the educator’s roles and how they foster peer relationships. Here too, practitioner’s roles are influenced by the factors within and beyond the setting. The reconceptualization of aims and purposes of education as envisioned by JK and Tagore and explicitly followed by the setting –whose origins resonate with the aims and aspirations of Malaguzzi (1998) and the philosopher pedagogues (Froebel, Steiner, Montessori and McMillan). The striving for good society based on relationships and striving for integrated individuals who can question but not merely conform, making co-operation, not competition as a guiding principle and asking different questions about how children learn and how everyone can win-has influenced the curriculum, pedagogy and the whole learning environment -free from evaluation, rewards and punishments. Here the focus is on the joy of learning itself, the intrinsic value of it, quite a contrast to the wide spread outside competitive environment whose instrumental aim of education only focuses on the extrinsic value of education with competition as the only guiding spirit.

This wider social and cultural context itself proves challenging at times to the practitioners from the Indian setting as some parents initially might not see how their child will benefit from a competition free environment of the setting with no exams and no punishments-in direct contrast to the wider environment they one day enter. Educators have to constantly negotiate with the parents of the children and alleviate

their fears of their children not being competitive as with other children in the mainstream schools whose main focus is on school preparation (Woodhead et al., 2009).

As explained at the outset of the thesis, it is to be noted that the overall social and cultural context, where education and especially knowing English is seen as a passport to future career in the overall context of Globalization, resulted in the commodification of education. With the mushrooming of private schools, offering English medium education at a price-the transformative value of education, as a level playing field bringing equality and equity -has lost its significance. This instrumental focus with severe competition has negative consequences for children, their learning, and social and emotional development (Woodhead et al., 2009). It is in this backdrop of colonial residues and globalization- extreme competition and instrumental aims of education-that the founding fathers of the Indian case study setting have envisioned (based on the philosophy of JK and Tagore among others), for a school which can assist in flowering of the goodness of the individual with co-operation and simple democratic living as the primary purposes of education. In order to bring in a good society based on right relationships- the early years become a phase of life in itself practicing the principles of co-operation and democratic living.

Here what the founding fathers visualize is not an image of children who master some skills and contribute to the future economy-but integrated individuals who practice the principles of co-operation and democracy- strong contrast almost revolutionary -to the rest of the society in India and in fact quite contrary to what is enumerated in the Every Child Matters- where one of the aims is '*to learn the skills so as to contribute to the future economy*'. It is this fragmentation that JK is completely against and instead visualizes an integrated individual with relationships to people around, society and the wider cosmos as the curriculum sensitizes the relationship to the Nature through pedagogy of relationships.

The principle of competition, the basis for modern education which is the byproduct of industrial revolution (Rogoff, 2003), where everything needs to be categorized to be branded into high quality, low quality, average and above average, simply does not find

a place in the Indian setting based on JK's philosophy. Consequently, there is no place for comparison. However, it is to be noted that competition, the basis for most of the industrial societies, is not even a basis for most of the agrarian and aboriginal societies- where relationships are prioritized over acquisitions (Davies, 2011).

Here as Malaguzzi (1998) is open to and acknowledges '*hundred languages of children*' it is being open to '*hundred ways of being*' to save the world from monochromatic world of monotony versus polychromatic way of diversity' (Davies, 2011). By recognizing hundred ways of being and relating, educators do not have to take children through a fixed path of predictable outcomes vis a vis their social and emotional development. Not following a linear path, regarding learning goals, means that educators do not need to disadvantage/label children who don't evolve in the same way and at same rate.

This opens up new possibilities and a thousand ways of knowing, being and relating either in a learning community or in a wider community. This '*embedded*' and *organic* way of peer relationships has consequences for educators roles – co-learner, facilitator, guide in contrast to what EYFS envisions-a *technician* (Moss, 2006, 2009) who can implement a centrally handed down curriculum and ensure accountability and efficiency- the two main tenets of industrial society.

8.2. Conceptual conclusions

Here I present a few conclusions, which I draw from my research. The research project was guided by socio-cultural theoretical framework (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981, 1997; Bruner, 1986, 1990; Rogoff, 1998, 2003,2005), which enabled me to understand and explicate the inherent mutuality between the individuals, both educators and pupils and their cultural contexts. It also enabled me to explain how everything, right from the *perceptions* to the actual *practice* of fostering of peer relations and the institutional *contexts*, the children and practitioners themselves are embedded in the socio cultural contexts, influencing and influenced by culture. The analytical lens of Rogoff's three planes: Individual, Inter-personal and Institutional provided specific focus to each plane, in turn, while keeping the other planes in the background. It has helped me in

ensuring the totality of the action and the mutuality of the planes in successive timeframes and has addressed the problem inherent in the traditional developmental and ecological research - where the focus will be either on the individual or on the context as if both exist independently of each other (Fleer, 2003).

8.2.1 Extending Rogoff's Three Plane Analysis

As evident from the study, what can be modified or extended in this study's context is that apart from (and in addition to) the individual, inter-personal and institutional foci there is wider ecological influence beyond the immediate institutional contexts –which has influenced the educators' roles in fostering peer relationships (as has been argued in Chapter Seven). Although Rogoff's (2005) Institutional plane encompasses wider social and cultural contexts, however, in this study's context, it needs a clearer definition, scope and focus from the Institutional Plane. Hence I propose, on the basis of this study, an extension or modification of third plane into a fourth plane: *Ecological* (Figure, 8.1).

Theoretically, although a socio cultural approach helps in foregrounding the cultural contexts and ensures the mutuality of the unit of analysis, and thereby addresses some of the shortcomings inherent in traditional research, it does not readily explicate power relationships inherent in the community or in wider society as has been recognized from the study. Recognizing power issues is imperative as JK's call for practitioners and children not only to be *reflective* but also be *reflexive* about their own attitudes, behaviors, power and authority issues which in turn will have implications the way peer relationships are practiced and fostering in a learning community. This emphasis on both reflection and reflex ion opens up diverse pedagogical possibilities, not just one 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1991). This in turn, challenges the status quo and assumptions about educators' roles inherent in mainstream curricula.

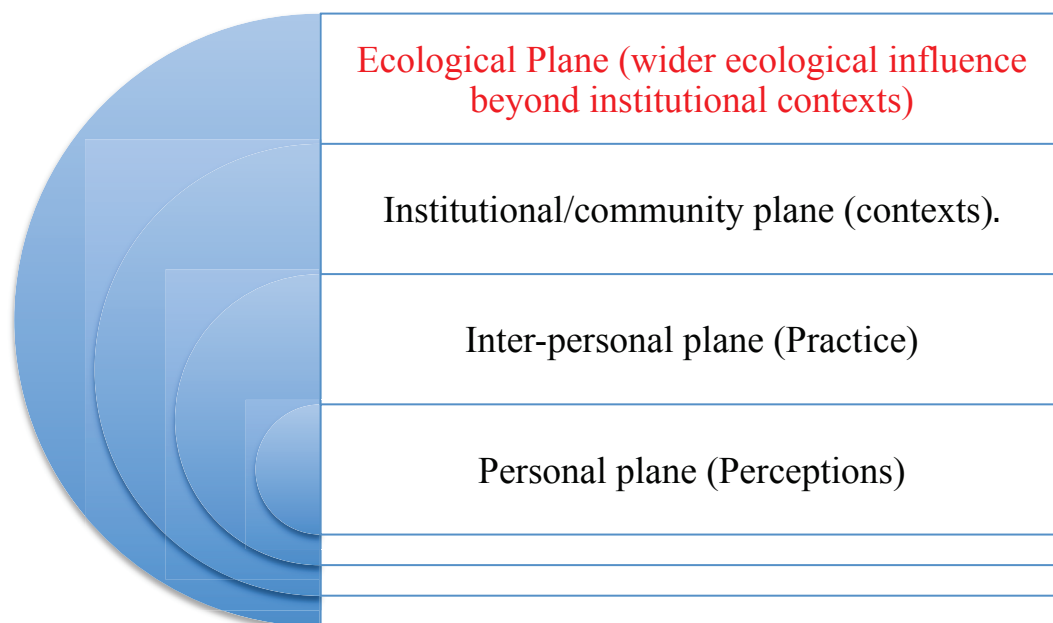


Figure 8.1: Extending Rogoff’s three planes of analysis by giving specific focus to the Ecological Plane

8.2.2 Synthesizing theoretical possibilities to foster peer relationships

Another concept, which finds a concrete expression in this study, is the ‘*embedded*’ nature of peer relationships. The thesis presented is that in a child-centered pedagogy where everything is centered on ‘individual’ children there is an obvious need to make a provision for fostering peer relationships. Whereas in a collaborative classroom community the emphasis is on the community and collaboration and so it inherently contains relationships ‘*embedded*’ within the approach, thus transforming the educators’ roles and that of peer relationships. As is evident from the participant observations and the interviews (above) peer relationships are seen as a process and product of collaborative learning communities.

Katz (1996, 1997) particularly calls for the synthesis of theoretical approaches and argues for a balanced view in which developmental criteria inherent in evolutionary approaches and psycho dynamic theories are considered in relation to the wider contexts of culture. While Howes’s (2011) Culture-Development interface brings together child development theories and the contexts of culture to explore peer relationships, the

following model (Figure 8.2) further synthesizes and extends the theoretical base to include post-modern perspectives.

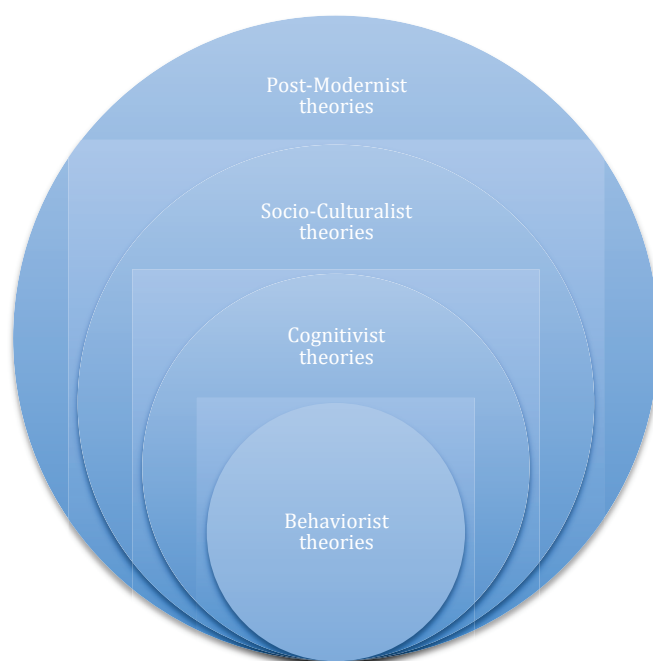


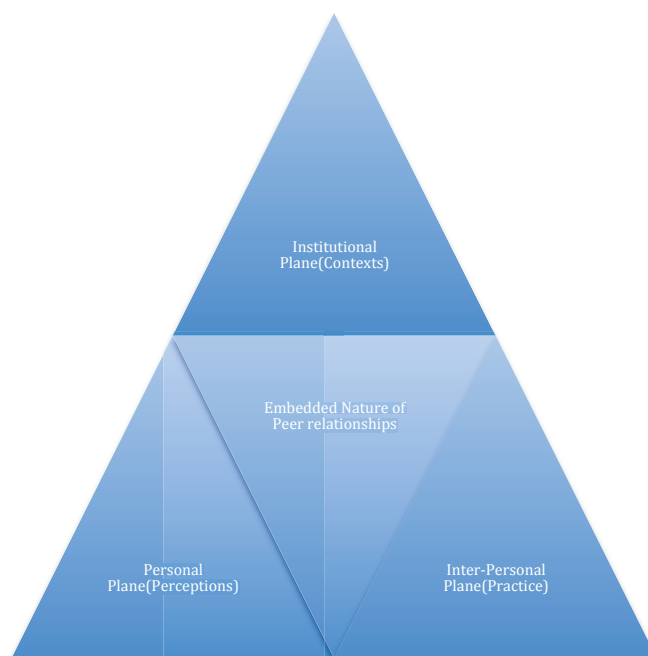
Figure 8.2 Synthesizing diverse theoretical possibilities for educators to foster peer relationships

8.2.3 Embedded and collaborative nature of peer relationships as opposed to child centered understandings

What is evident from the study is that peer relationships are not only children centric but are embedded across the planes being impacted by multitude of factors ranging from personal, inter-personal to institutional to wider ecological contexts (Fig. 8.3). Fler (2006) argues that relationships are embedded across the communities. This particularly is the case in Indian context, where the setting adheres to a collaborative curriculum based on relational pedagogy and is located in a semi-agrarian locality with traditional joint families still in existence and where children often form part of community based activities. What has emerged from the interviews, and my own understanding and appreciation of the cultures, is that comparatively children inhabit and are embedded in

different realities in both the contexts. This has implications for their social lives and to the degree and variance of significance of peer relations per se, as felt by the practitioners.

In English case study setting too, it is clear that evolutionary understandings of peer relationships are inadequate as children's peer relationships and educators' roles are impacted by factors within and beyond the settings. In Rogoff's (2005) terms, it is embedded across the planes. This needs further analysis and is something suggested for future research.



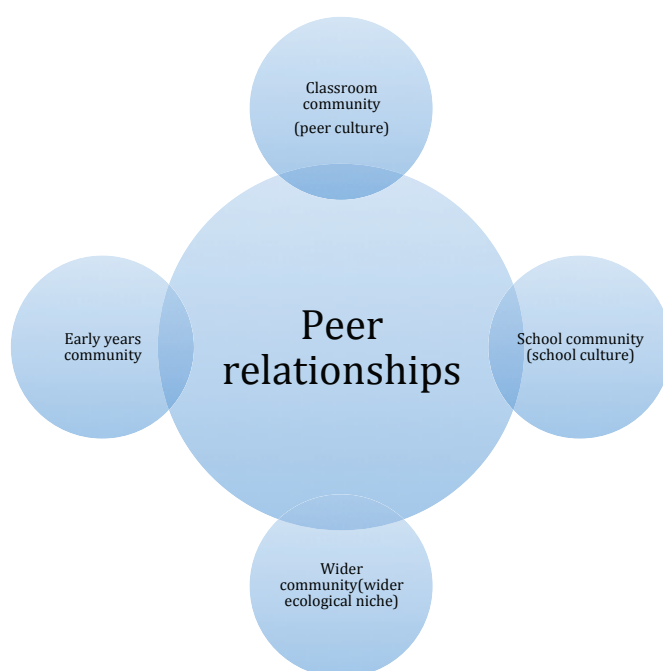
8.3. Figure showing the *embedded* nature of peer relationships

8.2.4 Presence of multiple communities

Another concept that emerged from the study is the presence of '*multiple communities*'. As one practitioner puts it, children are automatically embedded in their classroom community, early years community, school community and wider social and cultural communities (Fig. 8.4).

A child's participation in these multiple communities entails multiple identities for the child and consequently different realities, opportunities and challenges. This makes the task of fostering peer relationships all the more complex, multi-directional and multi-contextual process with the onus shifting to the child and his family and wider community. This is also one significant area, which is worthy of further research and analysis.

Figure: 8.4. Multiple communities



8.3. Practical implications

As stated at the outset of the thesis, the study was conducted in the broader context of concerns regarding the increasing schoolification or the pre-primary focus of early years having negative consequences for children's peer relationships both in India and in England. The specific stimulus was Kutnick and Brighella's (2007) study that showed English early childhood practitioners appreciating the social and emotional aspects of pedagogy yet shifting the responsibility for development to the individual child rather than taking a shared responsibility, while adopting individual level strategies rather than

whole class approaches (see Chapter 1). Hence in the broader contexts of schoolification and the specific contexts of early childhood practitioners' individual attitudes and perceptions motivated me to research their roles in fostering peer relations. This was achieved through bringing together the practitioners and the socio cultural contexts in the same frame; by exploring and appreciating their *perceptions* (Chapter 5), their *practice* (Chapter 6) and the influencing and influence of the cultural *contexts* (Chapter 7) within and beyond the settings.

Studying two diverse cultures enabled me to better understand and appreciate their roles and recognize the significance of the immediate and wider contexts by focusing on the similarities and variations (Rogoff, 2003). As was explained previously (in Chapter 6), participants in this study adopted caring pedagogy and prioritized children's physical, social and emotional needs reconciling the demands of the centralized top-down curriculum (Luff, 2010). Though at odds with the dominant discourse of school readiness curriculum in England, educators still have recognized early years as a distinct phase in itself, quite different from the other phases of life and appreciated care as one huge aspect, which is not readily explicated in EYFS (DCSF, 2008a, DCSF, 2008b; DfE, 2014).

Hence it is suggested that it would be in the best interests of the child, if the mandatory EYFS learning goals become just advisory and outcomes are just for guidance purpose rather than a compulsory prescription. It will then have positive implications for change from the pedagogy of predictable outcomes to the pedagogy of immense possibilities (Moss, 2007). This shift from the mandatory to advisory will entail freedom needed for the practitioners (and children) to engage in a creative pedagogy that is meaningful to them. This will pave a way for socio-cultural and revolutionary understanding of peer relationships with a focus on community and peer relationships, as was evident from the Indian setting adhering to social pedagogy.

This understanding also resonates with Reggio Emilia approach where a carefully crafted project approach is built on children's interests and teachers sustaining and facilitating those interests in an environment where there is no statutory accountability

and evaluation. As Krishnamurti (1953) argues, it is freedom, but not accountability that shapes learning and the end of compulsion is compulsion itself. Again, this calls for different roles for teachers and different dispositions where s/he is prepared to learn along with the students constantly engaging in self-reflexion. This constant reflection and reflexion is a core basis for JK's practitioner – as teaching is seen not as a cut and dried method with the practitioner taking children along a fixed path of predictable outcomes but a reflexive practice, where s/he is a co-learner himself/herself in a creative and collaborative learning community (Krishnamurti, 1953).

Envisioning different and almost radical roles for practitioners calls for changes in overall aims and purposes of education down to shifts in theoretical basis (from developmental sequentialism to socio-cultural to postmodern) to classroom size and teachers pay. This reconceptualization (as has been noted from the Indian case study setting) opens up possibilities for new ways of thinking, doing and relating; so transforming the very nature, purpose and the scope of fostering peer relationships in an embedded way.

Adopting socio-cultural perspectives while designing and executing curriculum with its emphasis on relational pedagogy and community is receiving much needed attention as evidenced from the curricula frameworks in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Italy. With the UN Charter on Children's Rights (UNCRC, 1989) emphasizing children's agency and belongingness, it is high time that the policy makers in India and England re-conceptualize early childhood education, its aims, purposes, curriculum and pedagogy, on socio-cultural lines which entail different roles for practitioners in fostering peer relationships and transformation of their everyday practice.

In conclusion, the thesis argues for philosophical, conceptual, theoretical, policy and practice shifts based on transformatory curricula and relational pedagogy so as to allow for the collaborative and embedded nature of peer relationships. This in turn, allows for transformations in the nature of educators' roles in fostering peer relationships from technicians to researchers and co-learners. For this to happen, there is an urgent need to consider early years as a distinct phase in itself allowing children to enjoy the play

based pedagogy and maintain and sustain peer relationships useful for their learning as well as their social and emotional wellbeing - with a focus on the Here and Now.

8.4. An Evaluation of the study

In a qualitative research project, where the researcher is considered an integral part of the study, it is important to engage in some reflection and reflexion to ensure trustworthiness of the study and to make an honest evaluation. Hence reflection and reflexion formed an integral basis of the study. In chapter 4, I explored and explained how different decisions were made: right from conceptualizing the study, it's theoretical underpinnings to methodological choices - bringing out the epistemological, theoretical and methodological reflexivity.

I understand and appreciate and make it clear from the outset of the study that being a reflexive researcher, researching two distinct cultures, has its own share of possibilities and challenges. Yet again, the same stance of one ethnographic researcher researching two cross-cultural settings proved immensely beneficial. As Rogoff (2003) asserts, when one learns more about another culture, one also learns more about one's own. This proved to be true in the context of this study. I have endeavored to overcome the challenges by adopting and attuning myself to the culture of the setting in England, habituating myself until I got a clearer understanding of the culture and context of the learning, to better appreciate the practitioners' roles. My previous experience of working in a philosophically different school (which is the Indian case study setting for the study) has given me insights necessary to problematize the outcome based curriculum and appreciate the theoretical underpinnings necessary to theorize a new relational pedagogy to appreciate educators' roles in fostering peer relationships.

Aligning my thinking with the post-modern stance of Krishnamurti (1953) and thereby questioning and critiquing the narrow and fragmented nature of aims and purpose of (early childhood) education has consequences for the study. Envisioning a good society based on relationships, recognizing co-operation not competition as the operating principle of education, problematizing educator's roles and envisioning transformatory roles for them proved helpful to conceptualize from a philosophical and theoretical

standpoint. Recognizing an active image of children as citizens with rights and responsibilities and agency and reconceptualising schools as democratic spaces - have consequences for the research project yet was necessitated as was evident from the literature (Moss, 2006a, 2006b; Dahlberg et al, 1999; Fler, 2006).

Having clearly spelt out 'ME' as a researcher, and as an educator, improved the trustworthiness of the research project and enabled me to relate my findings to the wider context. However, I acknowledge that this is not the only way to approach the research question and another researcher with a different philosophical disposition about the purpose of education and about teachers' roles would have attempted it from a different angle. This is essentially my 'take' on the issues, especially when it comes to relating and discussing the research findings and contesting fragmented versus transformative value of education for supporting, promoting and nurturing peer relationships.

I appreciate that this is my personal project for which early childhood educators from both the contexts, generously gave up their time, made efforts to facilitate my presence, over-came 'stranger anxiety', and patiently answered my very polite but at times intrusive questions. I feel that whatever comfort or discomfort (which I always tried to minimize) felt by the educators because of my presence in the hectic life of the settings proved useful and helpful to better understand and appreciate their roles in fostering peer relationships across the cross-cultural contexts. I further contributed in an academic way through disseminating the findings by publishing and by sharing at academic gatherings.

However, I feel that a shared partnership with the participants of the study right from formulating the research questions, finalizing the research project to theoretical stances to methodological decisions could have ensured a more authentic research project, better reflecting the 'actual' realities of their lives to the 'perceived' realities. However, appreciating that early years settings have hectic day lives and practitioners do not have generous amounts of time at their disposal to spend with a researcher, the study comes close to depicting their lives through participant observations and semi-structured interviews. An ethnographic approach to the study enabled spending sustained amounts

of time in the setting over the course of a Spring and Summer term in England and intensive amount of time in Indian setting (coupled with previous teaching experience in the same setting as a teacher). This facilitated good understanding of the practitioners' lives as they were 'lived' and enabled me to present their realities filtered through my own policy, philosophical and theoretical understandings. Thus the study fulfilled its aims of understanding practitioners' roles in facilitating peer relationships by understanding *perceptions*, exploring their *practice* embedded in their social cultural *contexts* through sustained periods of participant observations and semi-structured interviews guided by socio-cultural theoretical perspectives.

8.5. Possibilities for further research

The cross-cultural nature of the research has raised many questions and opened up avenues for further study. Incorporating the views of children and their parents about the roles of educators' in fostering relationships could have further strengthened the research. As it was clear from the study, children are not 'tabula rasa' or blank slates' to be written on as, how and whenever and whatever is required or deemed necessary by the practitioners or demanded by the curriculum. Children are active agents and complex beings themselves and bring their own share of attitudes, dispositions, experiences, and family dynamics into the mix. This makes practitioners' roles all the more complex and multi-directional. It is not that practitioners can foster peer relations as and when and how they wish. As amply acknowledged and appreciated by the practitioners from the study, children are complex beings who bring their own power and gender dynamics to the mix and engage in peer culture. Hence, a further research project which incorporates the views of the children and also their parents and carers could contribute to further understanding of practitioners' roles by adding diverse perspectives.

Another relevant project could be to explore further the significance of collaborative learning environments and communities in shaping of peer relationships. As was observed from the study, embedded collaborative communities automatically entail a lot of interactions and hence pave way for positive peer relationships without practitioners having to deliberately foster peer relationships. It also entails a more dynamic and

active image of children as makers of meaning and initiators of relationships, as opposed to a static view of children as needing to be supported with peer relationships.

As one of the findings of the research related to the wider social, economic, historical and cultural context and its influence on practitioners' roles, it would be worthwhile to pursue a project which can explore the direct or indirect influence of these factors on the nature and significance of peer relationships per se. What is the status and significance of play in a semi-agrarian communities and settings with collaborative learning practices? Are there any variations to that of industrialized communities? What are assumptions and biases behind the play based curriculum? Is the universal childhood privileged over the reality of multiple childhoods and complex cross-cultural contexts? All these are important questions, which I will be exploring in my future projects to refine my theoretical model.

A further potential research project could be exploring the possibilities of collaborative learning environments in ensuring relational and inclusive settings that prioritize peer relationships. This is especially significant in the context of dominant developmental perspectives on child development focusing on a linear path where a slight deviation from the 'normal/prefixed path' can be considered as 'deficit', 'special needs' or 'out of norms'. This closely links to the 'revolutionary nature of learning' as envisioned by Krishnamurti (1953) and proposed as recently as 2010 by Fler and Hedegaard who consider development as a revolutionary transition as opposed to a 'naturally evolving process' embedded in the institutionalized thinking of early childhood education in most European heritage countries.

This shifting of the focus from the evolutionary/developmental sequentialism (inherent in the EYFS) to the revolutionary/socio-cultural (embedded in JK curricula) could have significant consequences for children's learning and peer relationships. As recognized from the study, inclusive and collaborative socio-cultural environments ensure children's 'hundred languages' to be heard and respected than striving for 'monochromatic world of monotony' in terms of predictable and fixed path of learning outcomes with regard to children's social and emotional development. This in turn calls

for transformation in educators' roles in facilitating collaborative and creative curricula that recognize cognition as collaboration.

8.6. Contribution to Knowing

In summary, the thesis that I have presented here, after socio-cultural analysis of data using Rogoff's (2005) Three Plane Analysis, is that peer relations are '*embedded*' across the planes (and are revolutionary) as opposed to the '*child centered*' (and evolutionary) nature of peer relationships and that the practitioners' roles in fostering peer relations are defined and are often dictated by the cultural contexts within and beyond the settings cutting across social, economic, political, historical and ecological contexts. This cultural context has been the basis for the study and served as theoretical framework; however what is new and innovative is my proffered contribution in terms of situating peer relationships as '*embedded*' in collaborative learning communities and further '*embedded*' in wider communities cutting across the personal, inter-personal, institutional and ecological planes. This in turn has consequences for educators' roles in fostering peer relationships as has been noted from the study.

This *embedded-ness* as opposed to *child centered-ness* has implications for practitioners' roles and children's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and transforms practitioners' roles as co-learners and facilitators in the process. It is based on Fleer (2003) notion of '*embeddedness*' aligning with Tagore's notion of '*mutuality*', which coheres with the interconnectedness of the planes and the impossibility of understanding one plane independently of other planes. Likewise it is impossible to understand practitioners' *perceptions* and their *practice* dis-embedded from the socio cultural *contexts* that they and children are part of and hence have the capacity to influence and be influenced in the process. The following framework Figure 8.5 devised from the study depicts this complex nature of practitioners' roles (in the contexts of embedded nature of children's peer relationships) and the mutuality of their roles framed through personal, inter-personal and institutional contexts and is offered as a contribution from the study.

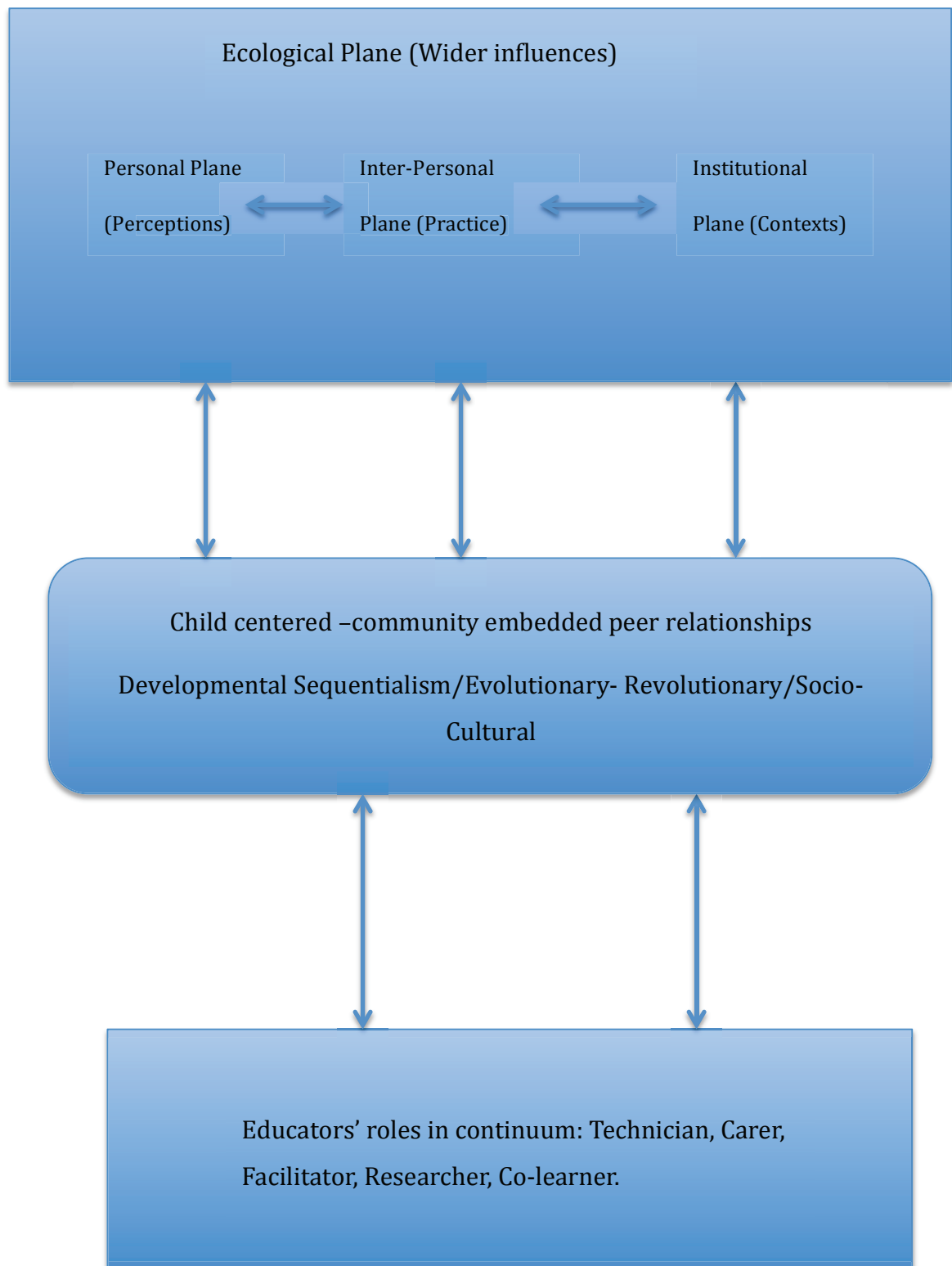
This socio-cultural theoretical framework to understand educators' roles in fostering peer relationships takes into account the educators' *perceptions* regarding the importance of peer relationships (personal plane), situates their *practice* in terms of inter-personal realities (inter-personal plane), while appreciating the institutional factors within and beyond the contexts of early years settings while doing so (institutional plane). The study's cognizance of wider ecological factors in terms of influencing their roles in fostering peer relationships has necessitated a clearer definition for ecological foci. The argument is that the overall contexts, within and beyond the settings, define whether peer relationships are to be child-centered or community embedded which again has implications for educators' roles from carer, technician or enabler to co-learner.

This framework brings together all the sub questions posed and answered in Chapter 5 (educators' perceptions) Chapter 6 (educators' practice) and Chapter 7 (cultural contexts) which helped in understanding the roles of educators' in fostering peer relationships holistically while maintaining the mutuality of planes. This mutuality of planes is essential as Rogoff argues: 'the distinctions between what is in the foreground and what is in the background lie in our analysis and are not assumed to be separate entities in reality' (Rogoff, 2003: 58).

While Howes (2011) *Theory of developmental and cultural interface for understanding peer relationships* highlights children's development of peer relationships in the contexts of culture, my study further illuminates *educators' roles in facilitating peer relationships* across the cultural contexts. This extends the theoretical insights and contributes to the field by presenting a *socio-cultural theoretical framework for conceptualizing educators' roles in fostering peer relationships* derived from socio-cultural theoretical perspectives, framed and presented through the analytical lens of Rogoff's (2005) planes of analysis.

(The Framework to be followed in the next page).

Figure 8.5: A SOCIO-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND EDUCATORS' ROLES IN FOSTERING PEER RELATIONSHIPS



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Appendix A



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of project:

Role of Early Childhood Professionals in Fostering peer Relations

1. Purpose and value of study:

There is strong evidence that children's peer relations greatly benefit children's social and intellectual development and the case for children's peer relations has been made conclusively in developmental theory and research. The present study aims to explore the role of the early childhood practitioners in facilitating / fostering the peer relations in early year's settings of UK and India. And It will investigate how Early Childhood Professionals perceive/view their role in fostering peer relations.

2. Invitation to participate:

After receiving your consent, you will invited to be involved in the above mentioned research project.

3. Who is organizing the research:

Janbee Shaik a full time PhD researcher at the Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford.

4. What will happen to the results of the study:

PhD dissertation will be written up and may be published and discussed with other University students, educational researchers and teachers. However no picture of yours or children will be published without your consent. Your name or the school name will not be recorded in the final write up of the project in order to maintain confidentiality. A copy of result will be provided to the Head Teacher of school, but as stated earlier, absolute anonymity in terms of identity will be maintained and the final report will only show fictitious names.

5. Whether you can refuse to take part:

You have every right to refuse to take part in the study. But should you wish to ask any questions or gain further information, you can contact me at the above-mentioned address.

6. Whether you can withdraw at any time, and how:

You are able to withdraw at any time, should you wish to, for any reason and without prejudice. If anytime you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form as attached in the consent sheet and return to the researcher, Janbee Shaik.

7. What will happen if you agree to take part (brief description of procedures/tests):

Small digital camera will be fixed in your classroom so as not to disrupt the normal flow of the classroom setting after consulting with Head teacher and you. Basing on the observation and behavioral mapping, you will be interviewed outside the classroom hours to elicit views about your beliefs, opinions, perceptions and practice. You will also be shown video clippings of your own practice and will be enquired about your perceptions, beliefs behind their responses to a particular behaviours or a situation (of course you will have a say in what's going to be filmed in the first place and that will be negotiated).

8. Whether there are any risks involved (e.g. side effects from taking part) and if so what will be done to ensure your wellbeing/safety:

As such there are no potential risks associated with your wellbeing and safety. The data collected from you will be dealt with absolute anonymity and in no way your comments will be identifiable while discussing result with the Head Teacher of the school.

9. Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong:

Your participation does not affect your legal rights in any way. Also you can withdraw yourself any time, should you wish, for any reason and without prejudice.

10. Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study:

No

11. What will happen to any information/data/samples that are collected from you:

Research data will be collected by the researcher who will aim to thoroughly ensure the anonymity of participants by using fictitious names in any written work. All the data collected including the video tapes will be safely stored in secure place with access only to the researcher. While communicating the research findings to the school head teacher and the Principal only a summary of the results with no indication of teachers and children's names will be given.

12. Whether there are any benefits from taking part:

The research is intended to provide positive insights into professional practice and not to be negative about practitioners' skills. Discussions about the project findings should prove supportive and other sources of information about this aspect of practice will be identified (if you want them).

13. Contact for further information: Janbee.Shaik@student.anglia.ac.uk Room SAW 304, Faculty of Education, River mead Campus, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SQ.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP, TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix B

Children consent form:

Hello

My name is Janbee Shaik. I would like to work with you for the next few days. I have especially come here to see what interesting things you do in your school.

And I would like to know if that is ok with you.



Yes.



**Not sure, need more
time to think**



No.

If there is anything that you/your parent(s) would like to be contacted at this phone number:
07536360883 (M).

Appendix C



PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

The Research Project: The Role of Early Childhood Professionals in Fostering Peer Relations.

The study attempts to understand the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations by investigating how and in what ways early childhood professionals foster peer relations in their classroom settings. This study is valuable given the significance of positive peer relations and the associated risks if they are not fostered adequately.

Your child is invited to participate in this research project and as part of the research; I will be spending time as an observer in the classroom. And we would like to seek your permission to let your child to be filmed and also to use the photographs for the research purposes.

We very much hope that you would let your child to be filmed. But to help you decide it is important that you understand what this research is all about.

This research project is organized by Janbee Shaik, a full time PhD research student at Anglia Ruskin University and is being supervised by Professor Theodora Papatheodorou and Dr. Chrissie Rogers, also from the Anglia Ruskin University.

You can contact Janbee Shaik by e-mail on janbee.shaik@student.anglia.ac.uk, by mobile 07536360883. and at room SAW304, Faculty of Education, River mead Campus, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1SQ.

If you have any questions you can also contact Professor Theodora Papatheodorou by e-mail on Theodora.Papatheodorou@anglia.ac.uk

The results of the study will contribute to a PhD thesis to be written by Janbee Shaik and might get published in a journal and/or presented at a conference. In any case, the researcher will maintain complete anonymity and will not identify any names in any of the activities listed.

, Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why your child has been invited to take part?
As part of the research design, we will video film a classroom with due and prior consent from the Head teacher and the class teacher.
2. Whether you can refuse for your child to take part?
It is up to you whether or not you wish your child to take part. You will be given a consent form to sign if you wish to give consent for your child to take part. Not participating in the project will not impact your child in anyway.
3. Whether your child can withdraw at any time, and how?
Anyone who signs a form is still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason at any time.
4. What will happen if your child takes part

This is just filming of the classroom in its normal setting and hence doesn't involve any special participation on behalf of a child.

5. Whether there are any risks involved and what will be done to ensure your wellbeing/safety.
There are no potential risks involved.
6. Whether or not agreement for your child to participate in this research compromise your legal rights should something go wrong?
Agreement for your child to participate in this research will not compromise your legal rights should something go wrong.
7. Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study
No special precautions are required.
8. What will happen to any information/data/samples that are collected from your child
All information and results are kept in a secured and password protected computer at Anglia Ruskin University. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to the data.
9. Whether there are any benefits from taking part
There are no financial benefits from taking part in this research but the overall benefits will be an added positive understanding into the role of early childhood professionals in fostering peer relations and group learning.
10. How your participation in the project will be kept confidential
The information we collect is kept strictly confidential and participants are identified by a code number only.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP, TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM



Participant Consent Form

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: The Role of Early Childhood Professionals in Fostering Peer Relations.

Main investigator and contact details: Janbee Shaik, PhD, Faculty of Education, SAW 304, Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford.

Members of the research team: Prof. Theodora Papatheodorou, Dr. Chrissie Rogers

1. I agree to take part in the above research, which includes video filming of the classroom setting with children and class teacher.
2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
4. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
5. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
6. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹ processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print).....Signed.....Date.....

Name of witness (print).....Signed.....Date.....

¹ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: The Role of Early Childhood Professionals in Fostering Peer Relations and Group Learning.

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____ Date: _____



Interview Questionnaire

(semi-structured)

(Start the conversation with bio-questions and with a vignette from classroom observations).

1. What do you understand by the term peer relations?
2. Do you think fostering peer relations is important? If yes, for what reasons? (Learning/social/emotional/cognitive/intellectual dept./sense of wellbeing).
3. To what extent do you think it is the role/responsibility of the teacher/school to foster peer relations/develop friendships/social skills?
4. Have you covered peer relations/children's friendships/social development in any course that you have done?
5. How and in what ways you cultivate peer relations in your settings?
6. What are the preconditions/factors that you think will allow you playing active part in fostering peer relations?
7. Are there any issues/demands that limit you from fostering peer relations in your settings eg. School ethos, curriculum, learning outcomes etc.
8. Do you perceive any issues/limitations from children themselves, which can contribute to or limit them from having/developing active peer relations?
9. Do you have anything in particular to say about peer relations in your setting/school/community/country in general?