

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION

DEVELOPING A SHARED PEDAGOGICAL SPACE FOR AND WITH EARLY
CHILDHOOD STUDIES DEGREE STUDENTS: A PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH PROJECT

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degree of Doctorate in Education

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My interest in students' participation originated from an undergraduate module on Children's Rights that I used to co-teach with my colleague Dr Christine (Chris) Such. My interest sparked from numerous conversations that Chris and I used to have about young children's rights and the experiences and challenges that we faced while teaching that module to ECS degree students. I would, therefore, like to first thank Chris, in inspiring that curiosity in me to look into the pedagogy of teaching participatory rights to HE students.

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ABSTRACT

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PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

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The study aimed to analyse the use of participatory approaches of working in partnership with students in a Higher Education Institution (HEI). The study builds upon students' participation work by looking specifically at the benefits and challenges associated with the application of democratic and participatory principles of working together with students, in a contemporary HEI. The study also records my professional development as a participatory researcher by reflecting critically on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project, whilst playing the dual role of an academic and a researcher, in the same institution.

The methodology and methods are drawn from participatory research where both students and staff worked together in developing an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room), as a curriculum enhancement space for the Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degree students. Six participatory group meetings, in the form of working and research group, with twenty ECS students, three members of staff, an administrator, and a lead researcher, formed the main method of enquiry. The working group met to develop the aims and objectives of the research and discuss the nature and scope of the ECRR Room; the research group met to analyse the participants' views on the ECRR Room, discuss dissemination opportunities, and record students' feedback on their participation in the project.

The findings from the project suggest that participatory research can have multi-layered benefits in HE. It enabled the student participants in getting their views built in the development of a pedagogical space; helped individual students with their learning and personal development; as well as built capacity for knowledge co-construction through engagement in various processes of research.

With these findings in mind, the study makes two major contributions. The first is pedagogical, where I integrate my academic and professional knowledge in conceptualising students' participation in HE; and second, is methodological, in the form of a distinctive participatory approach of working in partnership with students.

Key words: Higher Education, Early Childhood Studies, students' participation, participatory research, student voice

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Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

The study presented in this thesis exemplifies the use of participatory approaches for working in partnership with students in a Higher Education Institution (HEI). Participatory research, despite gaining momentum in early years education and schools, lacks a similar impetus and influence in Higher Education (HE), contributing to its underdeveloped conceptualisation (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). Recognising this gap, the study builds upon students' participation work by looking specifically at the benefits and challenges associated with the application of democratic and participatory principles of working in partnership with students, in a contemporary HEI; as well as analysing benefits of participatory work on students' learning and personal development. The study also records my professional development as a participatory researcher via critical reflection on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project, whilst playing the dual role of an academic and a researcher, in the same institution.

Inspirations are drawn from my own teaching experiences from undergraduate and postgraduate early childhood studies programmes in a university, where I work as an academic. Early Childhood Studies (ECS), as an academic and professional discipline, is underpinned by the principles of inclusivity, democracy and participation (QAA Subject Benchmark Statement, 2014). Promoting children's participation in education and care and listening to their views has always been a vital aspect of early childhood theories and practice (Luff and Kanyal, 2015). These principles have influenced and informed the core curriculum of ECS programmes in my university. Instilling these values and attitudes amongst our students, whilst they are still undergoing their education, hence becomes an important aspect of tutors' responsibility.

Democracy and participation, in addition to being theoretical concepts, also embrace practical significance, thereby influencing practice in various ways. Their true potential, arguably, can only be realised in practice. These concepts, therefore, need to be fully explored, critically analysed and challenges identified whenever opportunities arise. This holds true especially for the ECS students who are likely to become educational practitioners in the near future, for them to be able to demonstrate inclusive and

democratic practice with young children for the development of a sustainable, civic society. The implications of participatory pedagogy, therefore, have profound meaning for ECS students as the benefits can transcend beyond the university classroom into their wider professional and social lives.

To be able to fully realise the meaning of these concepts, the students first need to be given opportunities to explore and experience these ideals in practice. The present study, therefore, builds upon notions of democracy and participation and analyses the influence of participatory approaches in knowledge construction, where students and staff worked together in developing a pedagogical space that would supplement the practical needs of an ECS degree curriculum. The methodology and methods are drawn from participatory research and their usefulness analysed in relation to the development of more sustainable learning environments where knowledge may not only be shared but also co-constructed through the involvement of various participants.

1.1 Background to the study

The beginning and the development of ideas for this thesis can be traced to my previous research work on children's rights, particularly children's participatory rights that I had been working on, out of my academic interest (for example, Kanyal 2012, 2014a). I draw inspirations from a 'Children's Rights' module that I lead for the undergraduate ECS degree program at the university. After teaching the module for a number of years and exploring the nuances of children's participation from a sociological perspective, especially children's disempowered and vulnerable position in society, the fundamental question that I had been grappling with was whether 'participation' could also be used as a pedagogical construct? If yes, then how could we practice it in educational environments? What could be the benefits and challenges? In my quest to find answers to these questions, I carried out some cross-cultural research in primary schools and early years settings. The investigation led to some interesting findings, especially, in relation to the multiplicity of the meaning of the term 'participation' and the socio-political impact that can govern the participatory processes in any institution (for example, see Kanyal 2012, 2014a).

Whilst analysing and publishing findings from small scale research projects, I proposed some ‘dos and don’ts’ of participation (see Kanyal, 2014a). Despite the achievement of writing and getting findings published, I realised that there was a gap in my knowledge and that I was wanting to explore these ideals further in practice, but this time in my own academic practice, which was situated in HE. My professional role as an academic in HE sits outside direct contact with young children but my teaching is mainly situated in the discipline of Early Childhood. I am in constant contact with practitioners and prospective practitioners who work with children in educational and care environments. Some of the students who enrol onto the programmes may themselves be going through a transitional period from being a child to becoming a young adult and, therefore, in transition, from being the bearer of children’s rights to the future protectors and upholders of children’s rights.

I therefore wanted to explore the challenges inherent in practising what one preaches, which was teaching theory and practice of participation to students who may see the potential benefit of similar knowledge and skills in their future role as children’s educators. My interest in participatory research in HE, therefore, originated from the position of an ‘outsider’ researcher, surfacing from the work that I did with primary schools and early years settings. In order to get a critical insight about the concept and explore its usage within a higher education pedagogical environment, I wanted to engage with it myself, but this time as an ‘insider’.

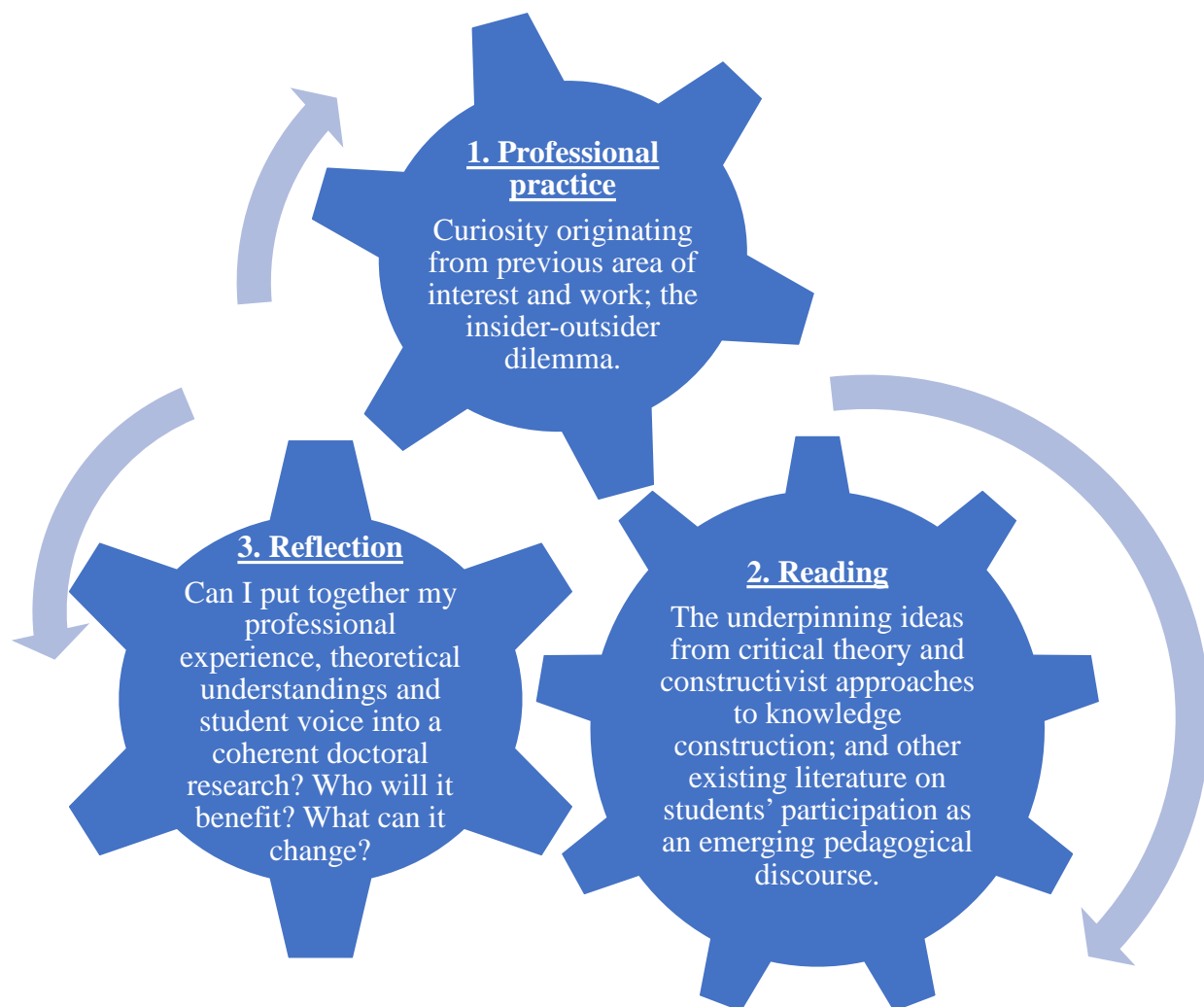


Figure 1.1: The developing ideas for doctoral research

Figure 1.1 shows the interconnectedness of the developing ideas at a time when I was beginning to embark my Doctorate in Education. As stated in the previous paragraph and shown in the first gear of figure 1.1, my interest in the field originated from the curiosity generated by the insider- outsider dilemma in children's participation work. My thinking, as shown in the second gear of figure 1.1, was heavily influenced by the readings that conceptualised 'participation' in a sociological context. This stemmed from the universal yet the individual notion of children's rights, grounded especially within a social constructivist lens of meaning making. On a wider scale of human rights and humanistic values, the theoretical and methodological inspirations for participatory work were drawn from the ideals of democracy, empowerment and transformation.

These humane notions, as I found, were conceptualised under critical theory, focusing particularly on the empowerment of the disempowered as a means to challenge the power differentials in societies (e.g. Fook, 2002; Bowen, 2010); and the broader family of social constructivism that showed the social and cultural nuances of participation (e.g. Rogoff, 1995, 2003; Stetsenko and Arievidt, 1997). Critical theory, therefore, gave me a theoretical insight into comprehending the complexities of participation and power imbalances, thereby helping me to discriminate between genuine and tokenistic approaches to participation. Social constructivism, on the other hand, helped me to realise the potential of participation in practice, especially within pedagogical environments. It was social constructivism that helped me to understand the mediating and situated nature of participation which, I believed, had the prospects to be applied into educational environments. Reviewing literature from these two distinct sociological and pedagogical lenses, as shown in the gear 2 of figure 1.1, made me realise that in order to conceptualise as well as apply ‘participation’ in educational practice, especially in HE, it would require a combination of theoretical perspectives. These theoretical perspectives may be drawn from different ideological positions, for example, critical theory and social constructivism, one making me aware of the implicit and explicit power differentials which could influence the level and quality of participation, and the other uncovering the social and pedagogical application of participation. It was, therefore, a combination of dual theoretical lenses that came to frame my study, which I have discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The theoretical combination that I envisaged and reflected upon, as shown in gear 3 of figure 1.1, I believed would enable me to co-construct, de-construct and then re-construct participation with the student co-researchers. I paused to consider whether I would be able to put together my professional experience, theoretical understandings and student voice into a coherent doctoral research study? Would I be able to embed critical reflection into the process to help make students’ participation work thrive and sustain within an educational environment? With these questions and reflections in my mind, I started to look at the nature, scope, issues and challenges facing HE, both in its traditional and contemporary forms and whether a study, based on the principles of democracy and participation, can be co-constructed with a group of ECS students. Some of these issues are discussed later in the chapter and also in Chapter Two of the thesis.

1.2 Issues facing higher education

Whilst constructing all these ideas, as discussed above, in section 1.1, there was an immediate issue that I faced in HE. It was the realisation of a paradox of participation in education. As my inspirations were drawn from children's rights literature and practice, I was aware of a wealth of information and examples from research, practice and policy that promoted children's participation, even at an age and stage when children are not yet capable of forming a firm view or able to express their views in a comprehensible manner. I have always regarded the work being done in this field as commendable and inspirational (for example, see Kellett, 2005; Clark and Moss, 2006; Manefield, et al., 2007; Clark, 2010; Kellett, 2010; Murray, 2015), but when I researched for examples in HE, I could see the irony in how we tend to take away the processes and experiences of participatory learning from our students, and replace them with rigid institutional processes and structures, despite the HE students being at an age and stage when they are capable of forming and expressing their views confidently.

There is extensive literature that suggest the benefits of students' participation in their learning and personal development activities in HE (for example, Pant, 2008; Bartley, et al., 2010; Jiaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Baryana, 2013; Seale, et al., 2014; Seale, 2016), but despite the research evidence, these vital experiential aspects of learning are gradually being eroded, especially in the name of consumer culture, which seemingly promotes an implicit adherence to formal structures and processes, including formalisation of students' participation (University of Lincoln, n.d.). The current culture within HE, arguably, seems to be encouraging the development of a conforming group of graduates, who do not necessarily get any real opportunity to participate in their education (Carey, 2013a). I soon realised that we were missing potential opportunities where students could not only study theory but also experience participation and strengthen their own democratic decision making capabilities, which we, as HE providers, would want our graduates to take to their prospective professions and wider social and political lives.

The issue of non- participation or market- driven participation could be positioned within a wider debate of the changing culture of HE, which the thesis will elaborate further in the following chapters, especially in Chapter Two. At an early point in my doctorate journey, I

recognised that there was a gap in knowledge and practice in HE, and that we could make better use of participatory approaches in education. This, in my case, was with the ECS students who, being a specific group of vocational practitioner students, would be able to apply its principles within their own professional practices.

1.3 Benefits of participatory pedagogy in higher education

The benefits of participatory pedagogy have been acknowledged widely, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) believes that pedagogic uses of participatory approaches have the power to make knowledge accessible to *all students*, regardless of their backgrounds, and can also help students to learn to exercise responsible political influence at different levels (UNESCO, 2008). The inclusion of participatory approaches in HE, therefore, one might argue, could only be a good thing.

The present study, therefore, aims to analyse the use of participatory approaches in HE where students would be able to work collegially with each other as well as with staff, in developing their own learning spaces. As stated earlier, I wanted to go beyond the role of an ‘outsider’ researcher where I was theorising participation in education for young children, and wanted to implement some of these ideas into my own practice, in HE, as an ‘insider’ researcher. This, I anticipated, would not only assist my professional development as an academic but also contribute to the development of a culture of participation within the institution where I work. The knowledge and skills that the participants, for example, the ECS students would bring, acquire and construct during their participation in the project, would be applicable throughout their professional and personal lives (Weimer, 2002).

One way of doing this was either by making participatory research (PR) explicit in our curriculum and by exploring its use within wider curricular activities, in which students could play an active part. It was the latter aspect that I was particularly interested in. In order to explore the use of participatory approaches, it therefore became essential to first engage with the literature on participatory research. Participatory research, at a methodological level, appeared to be an appropriate choice as it is grounded in an ethical

methodology which builds upon the principles of democracy and equity (see for example, Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014) and has been used in students' participation research (ibid). The philosophical and epistemological position of PR is discussed in detail later in the thesis, especially in Chapter Five, but through my literature search I found a general consensus amongst the researchers and academics that the inclusion of PR in HE can facilitate its actual practice, which would benefit any institution (Jaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). Taylor and Fransman (2004) encapsulate that a consistent use and practice of PR, with student participants, can help HEIs to become agents of social, institutional and individual change, thereby enabling capacity building and also contributing in key development initiatives in any given community.

The adoption of more collaborative and participatory learning approaches in teaching and research, generally speaking, have helped to integrate HEIs with local communities, practitioners as well as students who would then become an integral part of the academic processes. Community integration has the potential to developing more pragmatic and relevant research, benefitting both theory and practice (Taylor and Fransman, 2004). The inclusion of participatory approaches in HEIs, therefore, could produce new forms of knowledge and social change, and, at the same time, challenge the hegemonic discourses of knowledge construction that often dominate in education (Jaitli, 2010). The HEIs, on the contrary, if they continue to operate within their perceived traditional elitism and disassociated research from local realities, then Taylor and Fransman (2004) argue, that a paradigm shift in learning, teaching and research approaches in HE may be needed. To help with this cultural shift, students' participation work, in its profound form, can be a contributor, as it calls for an attitudinal change that opens up our minds not only to student voice but also power; power especially in relation to who constructs knowledge and for whom? (Robertson, 2015). It is within these notions of students' participation that the present study explores and argues for a place for participatory approaches in HE teaching, learning and research.

1.4 Inspirations for the study

When looking broadly, the use and implications of PR are being realised in a range of educational contexts, for example, in early years, primary and secondary education. This work is generally presented under the umbrella of citizenship education and children's rights discourse. As a result, children are being actively consulted to plan and design their learning environment with adults (see, for example, Clark and Moss, 2006; Clark, 2010) and also participate effectively in planning, designing and executing research projects which are meaningful to them (The Open University, n.d.). The growing interest in this area is widening the contemporary research focus to include research 'by' children, on various issues identified by 'them' (Kellett, 2005; Clark and Moss, 2006; Clark, 2010; Murray, 2014). The field is also embracing research to look beyond the rights and empowerment discourse to include student voice on school reform and improved student outcomes (Manefield, et al., 2007).

A similar momentum of participatory work, however, has not been realised in HE, contributing to its underdeveloped conceptualisation and application (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). There is a need for the students to be given opportunities to participate in different ways in learning- teaching processes (Barceló et al., 2013). In order to make it an effective process, Barceló et al., (2013) argue that it is first the tutors themselves who need to set examples by actively participating with students in collaborative forums and activities. Similarly, academics like Campbell, et al., (2007); Tandon (2007); Jaitli (2010); Tang and Wu (2010); Seale (2010); Seale, et al., (2014; Seale, (2016); Bovill, et al., (2011); and Cook-Sather (2011), have also been arguing for a place of participatory approaches in HE, not only in relation to listening to student voice but also from a pedagogical, transformative and empowering perspective. I see this transformation not only at student and policy level but also at practice level, as the adoption of participatory processes often demands a redefinition of the roles of tutors and academics (Robertson, 2015).

Within my workplace, an opportunity to develop a participatory project arose in the form of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room), in the Department of Education. The room was being developed as part of an on-going curriculum development

for Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degree students, giving me an opportunity to work with students and colleagues in developing the learning space. I, therefore, took this opportunity to explore the use of participatory approaches in understanding students' perceptions of an ECRR Room and also in seeking their views in planning and designing the room as a shared pedagogical space. The sharing was amongst different ECS student groups in the department, as well as between students and staff.

1.5 Research aims

With this background and opportunity, my study aimed:

1. To analyse the use of participatory approaches in developing a co-constructed and critical understanding of a pedagogical space in the form of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room).
2. To analyse the benefits of students' participation in a pedagogic activity that supports their learning and personal development.
3. To critically reflect on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project as an academic and a participatory researcher.

The primary aim was to analyse whether participatory approaches would assist in forming and sharing a co-constructed, yet critical view of an ECRR Room, especially for the benefit of ECS students, in the Department of Education. The study, therefore, took the shape of a participatory project, where students and staff worked together in developing a shared pedagogical space, as an extended curricular room, for the ECS degree students. Due to the research being part of my doctoral study, it was an accepted fact that the project will help me to collect data for my research, but for any participatory work to become integrated and sustainable in pedagogical environments, it has to be of benefit to students, the main stakeholders in any educational institution. The usefulness of the project to individual and groups of participating students, therefore, also became an essential part of my study. Last but not least, I wanted to take this opportunity to critically reflect on my own learning as an academic and a researcher, especially by engaging with PR as an insider. I wanted to be able to understand the position of PR in a contemporary HEI; as well as contribute in its

conceptualisation by analysing the theoretical ideas that are congruent with PR, but within an HE context.

1.6 Significance of the study

The study, therefore, explored the use of participatory approaches in listening to students' views and enabling their participation in designing and planning a pedagogical space for their educational use. It makes two major contributions. The first is pedagogical, in keeping with the expectations for the Professional Doctorate in Education, where I take this opportunity to integrate academic and professional knowledge in conceptualising students' participation in HE; and second, is methodological, where I develop a participatory approach for working in partnership with students. The methodology itself is designed to assist in producing inclusive forms of knowledge, which can assist in bringing a social change in HE pedagogical frameworks (Jaitli, 2010), traditionally associated with power imbalances (Taylor and Fransman, 2004).

I, therefore, argue for a place for participatory approaches in pedagogical discourses in HE, which at the moment lack a clear conceptualisation (Jaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). Students are recognised as researchers in my study who seek to explore and answer questions that are pedagogically relevant for their learning, by participating in the development of an ECRR Room as a pedagogical space.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

The context for this thesis is explored in the next two chapters. After this introduction and background to my study, Chapter Two discusses a specific perspective on students' participation which I examine with regards to wider pedagogical practices in HEIs. The immediate context of the study, the HEI in which my research was conducted, is also described. The chapter provides a discussion of the HE policy environment in which students' participation commonly occurs; along with a critique of the dominant consumerist perspective on participation, influenced by the wider neo-liberal economy policy, often used and applied in different ways within institutional systems. Chapter Two, therefore,

offers the reader a sense of the institutional structure and culture where my research was conducted. Both, sector-wide and institutional drivers, are discussed, giving a broad perspective and fine detail on students' participation work. After discussing the context of the research, it becomes imperative to understand current practices within the chosen area. This is the focus of Chapter Three in which current practices in HE are critically reviewed via various themes and examples under students' participation work. Central to the argument is the contested nature of students' participation in educational environments. To demonstrate this, various issues and challenges associated with students' participation work are discussed, bringing the attention of the reader to the caveats under which I framed my study.

This sets the scene for underpinning theoretical ideas that frame students' participation work, especially within my study. A case is made, in Chapter Four, for the consideration of multiple theoretical perspectives, originating from different ideological positions, though with mutually situated ideas. The theoretical framework goes beyond consideration of the common perception of knowledge as a linear phenomenon to focusing upon the 'how' and 'why' of knowledge construction and the different ways in which it can be actively co-constructed amongst various participants. Specific links are made with critical theory and social constructivism, in particular: Freire; and Dewey and Wegerif's ideas on the social construction of knowledge.

Adoption of these two theoretical frameworks, critical theory and social-constructivism, which were developed in different socio-cultural contexts and times, are applied cautiously in the chapter, to offer lenses for meaning making in contemporary HE. This conceptualisation leads to research methodology, in Chapter Five, where I draw heavily upon critical theory and social constructivist frameworks, to apply participatory approaches of working in partnership with students. The methodology required the creation of a democratic environment where barriers to participation could be diminished, for students to be able to share their views and perceptions of an ECRR Room, within a pedagogical context. A case for the inclusion of participatory approaches, in HE pedagogy, is therefore argued in Chapter Five.

The methodology itself led to the selection of research methods which, as discussed in Chapter Six, enabled me to do research ‘with’ and ‘for’ students. The selection of research methods is based on an argument that participatory research, being located within the interpretive paradigm, allows the research participants to have a say, through dialogues and various other forms of participation, to themselves decide the mode of their participation in research. This is especially true in this case as the pedagogical space, in the end, was to be utilised by students and, therefore, establishing students as powerful agents became an important aspect of the research (Baum, et al., 2006), right from the beginning of the project. Chapter Six, therefore, discusses how the control of the research agenda, process and analysis was shared with student participants, by encouraging their participation in fluid and open environment of participatory group meetings. The chapter also discusses the voluntary participation of students and staff in working and research group meetings, giving participants an opportunity to discuss the nature and scope of the ECRR Room and also participate in collective data analysis.

A central feature of this research was for me to be able to reflect upon my professional development as a participatory researcher, and hence a discussion on the nuances of insider researcher was essential. This is discussed with reference to ethics and power differentials between the researcher and the researched, in Chapter Seven. Implicit dilemmas that I faced as an insider (and outsider) researcher while collecting and analysing data are discussed, with emphasis placed on the ‘in-between’ space (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016). In addition to my in-between space, this research was dependent on students’ participation. Consideration, therefore, was given on how students’ participation was encouraged. One of the main risks in educational research is that students may feel compelled to participate (Wagner, 1997). Hence, Chapter Seven, addresses the power dynamics of student: staff relationships in university and how these were ethically managed in my project.

The whole idea of developing a pedagogical space in partnership with students was an ethical choice, but these issues turned sharper due to the participatory nature of the project. Ideologically, the whole research was grounded within the principles of democracy and participation, making it vital to consider ethics right from the beginning of the thesis, but the chapter itself is placed in the seventh position as various terms and

concepts that I have used in this chapter should become contextually relevant and more clear to the reader by this point in my thesis.

Given the emphasis of the project on students' collective views, it was important that data analyses processes be developed that were group oriented, engaging, understandable and inclusive of the student community (Jackson, 2008). Data analysis, for this research, is therefore divided into two distinct chapters, which is also in accordance with the broad objectives of the research. Stage one of analysis, as shown in Chapter Eight, represents the collective analysis procedure, stemming from working group and research group meetings, where students and staff analysed participants' views on the ECRR Room. Findings are presented in the same order as they emerged, firstly, based on the co-constructed understanding and development of ideas about the resource and research needs of the ECRR Room; and secondly, critical evaluation of the data produced by the working group, further critiqued and analysed by the research group. Last, but not least, the chapter also shows findings from students' questionnaires which they used to evaluate their participation in the project.

Following this, the second part of analysis, which is my critical reflection on the research process, is discussed further in Chapter Nine. Although the project was carried out exclusively with a small group of ECS students in a single university, the similarity between the general contexts of UK universities, makes the application and conceptualisation of students' participation work of wider relevance. Chapter Nine, therefore, presents my reflexive analysis as a critical researcher and an HE professional. The analysis and discussion is drawn by me, without any input from student participants. The chapter revisits data and data analyses using two separate but related lenses, a) that of critical researcher and, b) that of a reflective practitioner. The first part of chapter, where I discuss my views as a critical researcher, shows the intricacies of using a participatory research paradigm within an HE context; the issues of dominant and silent voices; and the place of participatory work within the economic model of HE. The discussion centres on the extent to which students' participation is influenced by neoliberalism in HE and the associated subjectivities in the context of assumptions regarding students as consumers. The chapter, specifically, discusses how the aspirations for students' participation may be constrained within a neoliberal university. The second

part of the chapter, which is discussed as a reflective practitioner, illustrates the potential contribution of research to the pedagogical discourses in HE by referring back to key theoretical concepts and underpinning ideas of critical theory and social constructivism. The second part of the chapter also considers how the combined theoretical ideas can assist in co-constructing critical knowledge amongst various participants, thereby benefitting everyone's learning, in long run.

Last but not least, is Chapter Ten, where I end my thesis by reflecting on the successes, limitations and recommendations for future work on students' participation. I also take the opportunity to emphasise the contribution of my study and conceptualise students' participation work in HE by referring to various stages and key decisions made during my research.

Conclusion

The introductory chapter presented a rationale and the conception of a research idea to the reader. To enable the reader to readily follow the thread of the research, the thesis is divided into separate chapters, and each chapter into further sections and sub sections. All chapters close with a conclusion, emphasising the key arguments and decisions made during various processes of research. To position my research within a pedagogical context, I first start by examining the context in which my research was situated. Chapter Two, therefore, describes and discusses the current environment of HE and various possibilities and contentions associated with students' participation work within it. The chapter sets the scene for the research by analysing the institution where the research was conducted.

Chapter 2: The research context

Students' participation is a broad and diverse concept. It is used in varying ways in different contexts but in this thesis I refer to a specific perspective on participation that focuses mainly on how students can be encouraged to get involved in co-constructing knowledge about pedagogical environments, whilst working in partnership with each other and with staff; as well as how this involvement can have a direct impact on their learning and course experiences. This perspective is examined with reference to how participation can be enacted in wider pedagogical practices, within an HEI, which usually operates within policy driven structures. I discuss these aspects through my doctoral research in a single university. The chapter, therefore, offers a context for my research by describing the HEI in which my research was conducted. The chapter situates the HEI within a network of British universities, particularly the post 1992 universities that adopted the UK higher education diversification through a change from an elitist culture to a massified system, where students from diverse backgrounds and places started to join the institutions to pursue higher studies (Nagy, 2011). The chapter provides a discussion of the HE environment, in particular the broader political influences, within which students' participation is situated, thus limiting the scope of literature in this chapter to mainly policy and policy implementation context. The chapter extends the policy discussion by providing a critique on the dominant consumerist perspective of participation, commonly used and applied in different ways within the institutional systems.

2.1 Higher education and its significance and position in wider society

Since their inception, a millennium ago, western universities have played a vital role within the societies and cultures in which they operate (University of Bologna, n.d.). Their distinctiveness from other societal institutions can be seen in their primary purpose which is mainly devoted to extending and deepening human understanding (Collini, 2011). Universities, therefore, have always served the needs of society and should continue to do so (Thomas, 2010). Bergan (2003) classifies universities as societies in themselves but also a part of the larger society. If universities or HEIs choose to remain detached from the wider society, they head towards uncertainty; but if they become too involved, without maintaining a distance from the wider society, HEIs run a risk of losing their reasoning

capacity (Bergan, 2003). They also run a risk of getting entangled into everyday socio-political issues which may make them lose sight of long term concerns, thus affecting their capacity to identify and offer more sustainable solutions to any long term challenges facing society (Bergan, 2003). Forging a middle ground can be difficult. In order to maintain that middle position, HEIs need to acknowledge and continue building their potential through the contributions they make in theory, practice and research. It is these contributions that, in turn, can support social change processes within societies, thereby enabling the HEIs to fulfil their role as agents for development (Taylor and Fransman, 2004).

The HE sector, overall, is influenced by the government's broader policy agenda. Since the beginning of the 21st century, different governments have been building upon and applying the principles of neo-liberal policy into various guidelines and initiatives (Carey, 2013a, 2013c). Neo-liberal policy, generally speaking, represents a political ideology which promotes self-interest and economic growth through implementing policies such as privatisation and globalisation, including in areas such as education (Blackner, 2013). Within this ideological framework, education can be seen to be playing the vital role of socially reproducing the labour force and therefore ideologically legitimising the social order (Lipman, 2011). This ideological mind-set reduces everything to economic needs (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) which then becomes the prime driver for institutional decision making and policies and procedures, including the ones that are used to showcase students' participation. The shift towards neo-liberal policies has mainly been due to the pressure of global knowledge and economic priorities, which the HEIs strive to achieve through various institutional systems and procedures (Cochrane and Williams, 2013). In a globalised world, a general perception of universities has changed from that of a place that deepens human understanding (Collini, 2011) to the one that provides new knowledge, innovative thinking and skilled personnel, to its members, along with the potential to attract international talent and business investment into a region (Boulton, and Lucas, 2008). There is, therefore, a "*growing tendency to see universities as sources of highly specific, marketable commodities*" (Boulton and Lucas, 2008: 5).

Governments, arguably, are not wrong in devoting and prioritising resources to ensure their people's economic priority, but as Nussbaum (2010) argues, these goods are not ends in themselves. A nation's desire for economic profit is making the universities

relegate the knowledge and skills that are needed to keep democracy alive (Nussbaum, 2010). HEIs, unsurprisingly, have therefore moved from the periphery of national policy to governments' central agendas, with the governments making demands upon them to set economically driven objectives and even domineering the methodologies that can be used to attain and assess these objectives (Boulton, and Lucas, 2008). With this continuing trend, Nussbaum (2010) argues, that universities will mainly be producing *"technically trained machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves"* (pg: 13).

The economic policies of neo-liberalism, therefore, have become the dominant discourse of meaning making, including the way universities describe their role within societies (Jaitli, 2010; Carey, 2013a; Cochrane and Williams, 2013). The development role of HEIs, however, is not restricted to producing highly skilled labour and research outputs to meet the economic demands of a society, but also to continue developing as places that lay the building blocks for the new institutions of a civic society (Brennan, et al., 2004). It therefore becomes paramount to challenge the dominant discourse of knowledge construction, influenced by the economic model of education; and suggest alternative conceptualisations, which are more inclined towards the pedagogical and social reconstruction aims of HE.

An alternative way of seeing knowledge construction in university education can be through the concept of student partnership and dialogue. A rationale for this approach is that students' active participation enhances learning. There are examples in HE, such as Seale (2010); Bovill, Cook-Sather and Felton (2011), Bovill, et al., (2011b), University of Lincoln, n.d.; Seale, et al., (2014), where students have worked as co-creators of teaching and curricula. The partnership approach benefits both students and tutors by *"developing deeper understanding of learning, increased engagement and enthusiasm, development of different ways of relating to each other and developing a better understanding of the perspectives of each group"* (Freeman, 2014: 47). Further examples include national enhancement initiatives, for example, Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLS) and joint Higher Education Academy (HEA) and National Union of Students (NUS) student engagement projects (for example, NUS, 2012; HEA, 2013) . Government funded centres (such as CETLS) provide students with opportunities for involvement in development of HE in various ways, including, students as mentors, researchers, teachers

and educational developers (Freeman and Wilding, 2009; Freeman, 2014). With changing governments, the funding for some of the initiatives has been discontinued but it has certainly helped to embed unique approaches to student involvement and participation in the HE sector (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011, Freeman et al., 2013, Freeman, 2014), parallel to the consumer model of education. The evolving partnership perception of students' roles has helped to create a 'student as partners' discourse in HE which acknowledges and assigns students more active roles, such as producers, researchers, partners or change agents (Bovill, et al., 2014; Freeman, 2014; Cook-Sather, 2014) in explorations of teaching and learning (Cook-Sather, 2014). An increasing recognition of student participation discourse in the sector has led to growing number of sessions on students as co-producers or partners in professional conferences, web- based forums, peer reviewed journals (Cook-Sather, 2014), affirming the acceptance of the partnership approach of working with students in HE, by the academic community.

The construction of any new knowledge and understanding in a pedagogic environment and its inclusion in learning, teaching and research does not come easily. This also applies to knowledge and understanding of the concept and practice of 'students' participation'. Challenging a dominant discourse and constructing alternative conceptualisations requires a concerted social effort. The movement has to come "*from the margins to the centre of institutions and the policy environment within which they operate*" (Taylor and Fransman, 2004: 33). It is not sufficient to run ad-hoc and random projects and lessons on participation but the thrust and necessity needs to be realised from the centre to provide consistency. There is, however, a risk of becoming compliant and passive to the dominant central agendas and understandings in an institution and thus becoming linear in our approaches to practising new ideas. It therefore becomes essential to develop a culture of continuous questioning, in addition to generating new knowledge, to keep the reasoning capacity of HEIs alive (Taylor and Fransman, 2004). This reasoning may include questioning dominant understandings of the concepts of power, students' participation or student voice¹, and in broader terms, the dominant belief of knowledge construction itself.

¹ In this chapter, I have used the terms student voice and participation interchangeably. The similarities and subtle differences between the terms are discussed in next chapter, Chapter Three.

Being part of society, HEIs are always influenced by the national political climate in which they operate. I shall be discussing this by taking the example of England, although within this chapter I have included occasional references, where relevant, to educational policy and provision in other parts of the UK. Taking the example of the HE political environment in England, particularly during the first sixteen years of the 21st century, policies have been framed and influenced by the broader political and social agendas of successive governments.

To begin with, HE, under the new Labour, in early 2000s, was influenced by its broader political agenda that placed emphasis upon global knowledge and economic priorities, alongside a social agenda of widening participation to reduce social exclusion (Pollard, et al., 2010; Cochrane and Williams, 2013). After the defeat of the new Labour, the Conservative-led Coalition government came into power, in 2010. The emphasis shifted from Labour's widening participation to the Coalition's new policies on university funding and substantially increased student fees. This initiative was largely justified in terms of the English elite universities and their global competitive position, as well as a recognition of the need for the university funding to be shifted from state to the student or graduate (Cochrane and Williams, 2013). The changes eventually altered the HE fees structure making England a nation with the highest tuition fees at publicly funded universities, in the developed world (Sutton Trust, 2010).

After the Coalition period, an all majority Conservative government came into power, in 2015, with new policies on immigration, extremism, the European Union devolution and the spending review, all having substantial impact on HE (Dandridge, 2015), especially on its demography, budget, pedagogy and democratic practices. The government's White Paper on 'higher education participation and access to higher education' (BIS, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015) claimed to put students at the heart of HE. The paper broadly covered four main areas, including, a boost for the quality of teaching; a support mechanism to support social mobility in education, especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds; better value for money and employment prospects for students; and a removal of barriers for new HE providers (BIS, 2011; Cable and Willetts, 2011; BIS, 2015). The boost for teaching quality, specifically, recommended the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), putting stronger incentives

for excellent teaching, entitling students to having more information about the type of teaching they can expect and their likely career paths after graduation (BIS, 2015).

In order to provide prospective students this extended piece of information, the TEF will use various measures, for example, student satisfaction surveys, student retention rates and graduate job prospects; a combination of which portrays a certain image of an institution to the applicants. The higher the place of HEIs in these measures, for example, in league tables generated as a result of students' participation in large scale surveys; the higher the quality of teaching they are seen to reflect, which the institutions can, in turn, use to increase tuition fees, in line with the inflation. On the contrary, the HEIs that fail to meet these expectations, will risk losing additional income through students' fees (BIS, 2015).

A combination of raised fees and acknowledgement of students' choice as a prime factor in determining HE provision, shifts the HE funding policy thrust from taxpayer towards students, directly (Thomas, 2012). Students, therefore, can be said to be appropriately entitled to be demanding greater information about universities, including data on student satisfaction. This shift has had a direct impact on the priority settings of universities, putting more pressure on them to getting their position in the sector league tables' right, open for public scrutiny (Currens, 2011). HEIs, therefore, are investing more resources and time in encapsulating data that can showcase a high level of student satisfaction (or in other words, student voice) in these league tables, across different aspects of university life. This has led to the utilisation of more positivist methodologies for data crunching, marginalising the dialogic and qualitative measures of understanding students' experiences, hence generating a 'quantifiable' view of student voice.

The shift and creation of a certain type of understanding of HE, primarily driven by market driven initiatives, as discussed above, frames students' experiences within a political and economic context, accentuating consumerist view as a dominant conceptual view of students' participation and knowledge construction. The view of student voice, mainly reduced to participation in performance measuring surveys (discussed further in Chapter Three), is arguably distant from its academic merit and pedagogical relevance as it only

reiterates an economic model of education (Shore, 2008; Carey, 2013b). This fast developing yet skewed view of participation and involvement needs to be challenged and problematised for it to be able to be conceptualised in alternative forms, for example, the ones that are more congruent with the academic and philosophical value of HE, as stated earlier in this section.

2.2 Students' changing roles and identity

The last sixteen political years in England, as discussed in section 2.1 (above), when analysed from a students' role and identity perspective, have been transitional years in HE. The main shift can be realised in HE culture from its knowledge production and development of a civic society role to a more consumerist business model of education, raising voices of concern for maintaining either 'quality' or 'standards', or both, in HE (Dearden, et al., 2011). This shift in culture has created new and multiple identities for students. Labour's widening participation policy agenda, for example, contributed to the construction of 'new' HE students, perceived to be 'non-traditional' students, often characterized by a struggle (Reay et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2010). Their struggle is illustrated by the irony between the rhetoric of equity and easy access of HE to *all*, as perceived by the widening participation initiative, but with the implications that continue to reflect and re-construct class and other inequalities, mounted up with the discourse of "*dumbing down*" (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003: 4) and lowering of university standards (ibid).

The Coalition government's introduction of new HE funding and increased fees has added to the wider global economic debate on education (Thomas, 2012), creating yet another hybrid identity for students, who are characterised as coming to university for enhancing their knowledge but, at the same time, demanding a consumer service. There are, therefore, worries over the impact of this new level of student expectation on academic professionals; the 'value for money' that students get for the fees they now pay and; above all, over the effect on the nature of the study itself (Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011). These changes, in turn, have affected the overall management and pedagogic environment of institutions (Bragg, 2007; Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Cochrane and Williams, 2013), as discussed later in this chapter.

The Conservative's introduction and proposal for a TEF and the notion of putting students' experiences, through national surveys and statistics, at the heart of HE, has further fuelled a debate on commercialisation of education, with HEIs expected to produce trained, readymade, quickly adaptable manpower for the economic market (Tandon, 2007; Buchanan, 2014). Needham (2003) refers to this commercialisation of education as 'marketplace democracy', where government treats citizens as consumers, maximising customer satisfaction and expanding individual choice and competition, a pattern similar to the choice and power that can be found in the private economy. This shift in citizens' behaviour invites students to navigate HE as a market, making demands upon the institutions to work towards student satisfaction (Taylor and Wilding, 2009).

The impact of these policy initiatives, during the last decade and a half; and the emergence of a parallel approach of regarding 'students as partners', in university education (as discussed above, in section 2.1), have therefore created two dominant conflicting discourses in HE, namely, consumerism; and students' participation. The discourse on students' participation is based on a more collegiate model of education where students are regarded as co-producer in their learning. Consumerism, conversely, presupposes a more conventional customer-provider relationship between the student and university (Carey, 2013b).

Both roles of students can influence their behaviour and response to any unsatisfactory provision or service. The former role of being a 'member' drives the student to strive to improve the institution and the education that it provides rather than go elsewhere; and the latter role directs a consumer attitude where the student, as a client, may complain and look for desired services, either within or elsewhere (Bergan, 2003). The reality however falls between the two categories, where students do have specific expectations for their education but at the same time also see themselves as members of a community, as participants (Bergan, 2003; Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Carey 2013a). Students, therefore, do not necessarily see themselves positioned explicitly in either the participation or the consumerist model of education but somewhere in between.

A recent formal work on students' participation within the HE sector in the UK can be traced to the year 2007 when the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS, now the BIS, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) started its student listening programme as part of a commitment to citizen engagement and the amplification of 'student voice'. The work developed further with the establishment of the National Student Forum (NSF), originally set up by the DIUS in early 2008. The forum was created to give a greater voice to students taking HE courses across the UK and to extend the delivery of a message that *"policies were the better for being informed by the student voice"* (NSF, 2010: 10). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) also supported the partnership of various stakeholders, such as the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA), to develop and promote student engagement policies and practices (Seale, et al., 2014). The HEA also identified 'students as partners' as one of its central work and research streams, with a belief that student partnership can lead to effective student engagement as well as improve learning and teaching (HEA, 2013). The ideals of the HEA are reinforced by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which states that all students should have the opportunity to be involved in quality enhancement and assurance processes in a manner and at a level appropriate to them *"it is important that higher education providers create a culture and environment where students are encouraged to take up the opportunities on offer"* (QAA, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2012: 3).

All these initiatives and developments have certainly helped to embed students' participation more strongly into the sector's way of working at a national level but the NSF asserted that much of the improvement for the student experience now needs to take place at the local level (NSF, 2010). The 'Next Steps', according to them (on their closure in 2010), were for the sector organisations and universities to themselves extend the work (from what they initiated) and continue to devise appropriate, effective and inclusive ways of hearing from the student body in all its diversity (NSF, 2010).

Despite the development of students' participation policies and quality codes, evidence from research suggests that students in HE, in general, experience a lack of opportunity for participation (Persson, 2003; Bartley, et al., 2010). The proportion of students participating in student union elections, for example, is often less than 10 per cent (Quality Convergence

Report: Sweden, n.d). This contention makes ‘students’ participation’ a worthwhile area to investigate as there is some contradictory evidence between theory and practice.

The differences in rhetoric and reality of students’ roles in HE problematises the notion of students’ participation and urges us to explore how HEIs can become social and educational spaces where the essence of democracy and participation can be cultivated and developed (Molander, 2002). It raises the question how HEIs can effectively encourage students to participate in various matters affecting their experiences? What can we do alongside them to feel that their participation has an impact? These are some of the questions that I explore through my work.

2.3 The institutional and sector context

My research is conducted in a single university that operates within a fairly conventional structure of faculties, subdivided into departments or schools according to various subject or academic disciplines. The faculties are supported by a range of centralised and faculty level support services. The university executive (for example, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors and Faculty Deans), had remained largely unchanged, especially at the time of data collection for this thesis, offering the institution a period of general organisational stability.

In past years, the university where I work used to be a cluster of HE colleges within local community, and later became a polytechnic centre in 1991, which was further awarded a university status in 1992. The awarding of the university status was a part of British university expansion system, following the Education Reform Act of 1988 (Dearlove, 2002). Due to the institution being a regional college and later a polytechnic, the institution operated under local authority control, primarily responding to local community needs, and enrolling a high percentage of local students (Shattock, 2002; Archer, 2007). The institution’s polytechnic legacy is still evident in the demography of students as well as in the range of subjects offered in different faculties, a majority of which are applied subjects, with a vocational focus, for example, Early Childhood Studies (ECS) courses.

Moving out of its polytechnic past, the university is currently a global university, with 39,400 students from 177 countries, gaining qualifications in four continents (University website, 2016). The university also “*helps some 2,000 businesses to grow quicker and partner with organisations to deliver a spectrum of educational and commercial projects*” (University website, 2016). A very high percentage of its graduates secure professional jobs (3 out of 4). The university values itself as “*exceptional and imaginative in the advancement of knowledge and education of students*” (University website, 2016). The values statement also projects its passion about “*collaboration, innovation and transformation to enhance social, cultural and economic well-being*” (University website, 2016).

Student engagement holds a prime position in university’s strategic plan. Goal three of The Corporate Plan (2015-17: 6) clearly states that the university “*will increase student engagement within and outside the curriculum, so as to enrich students’ time at the university, support their academic success, give them a distinctive ‘edge’ in the job market and enrich their lives after university*”. There are, however, various factors that affect the level of student engagement and active participation in various institutional activities, despite its holding a prime position in the university’s strategic plan. The university offers residential opportunities to its students but a majority of its students come from local communities, who, due to increased HE fees, either continue to live in family homes or are in part-time employment. Students’ participation, with this demography of students, have to be considered with a caveat as they may struggle to fully integrate and participate in university life (Thomas, 2012).

Another factor affecting students’ participation is student numbers. The number of students in my institution has been rising steadily, currently enrolling 39,400 students (University website, 2016). The larger the university, the less likelihood of its students to engage and put themselves forward to participate in various university activities (Carey, 2013a, 2013c). According to HESA (2015); the statistics for HE students by HE provider, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2014/15; my university is 45th largest, out of a total of 170 HE institutions within the UK (HESA, 2015) . The number, as stated in these statistics, has since gone up quite steadily (from 19,830 students to 39,400, including the overseas students studying in affiliated institutions in four continents) (University website, 2016). The level of participation and engagement is not only dependent on the number of students

but, as pointed out by Porter (2006), is also influenced by the density of students. To identify the density of students, an easy indicator is to look at the student: staff ratio. With a ratio of over 19:1, my university sits in the lower quartile of British universities (Complete University Guide, 2015), influencing the quality of interaction and relationship that staff can develop with big groups of students at one time.

The distinctive characteristics of my university, as discussed above, are not unique. Most post 1992 universities share similar characteristics. There is some commonality in how British universities involve their students in institutional decision making, or, in other words, encourage students' participation. Consequently, this research may have wider reach than initially implied. The most common students' participation is through representation mechanisms used across the HE sector, such as module evaluations, course and institutional surveys and students' representation in various meetings and institutional governance; mechanisms providing new forms of power to students (Carey, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Freeman, 2014). The training of student representatives is organised by the Student Union (Little et al., 2009). This is in keeping with common practice across the sector (Carey, 2013a, 2013c; Freeman, 2014). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), sets out quality expectations for all UK HEIs, and makes special reference to meeting expectations on student engagement. Student engagement is an explicit chapter in the Quality Code (QAA, 2012) setting out clear expectations or the different ways in which student voice can be framed within a university, especially through student charters and student representation.

These structural procedures that support students' participation in HE, such as the formalisation of student representation in quality assurance procedures, formal mechanisms of student voice through module evaluations and national surveys, all have implications for institutions and pedagogy. These mechanisms influence the ways in which teaching is constructed and managed, as well as how students and staff interact with each other (Currens, 2011). Also, the influence that these policies can have on recruitment, success, staffing and delivery of the courses is being realised across the HE sector. There is growing evidence that the procedures also affect institutional decision making and actions (HEFCE, 2008; Currens, 2011). These sectorial and institutional aspects, collectively, influence the conceptualisation of students' participation in HE, in England. The dominant influences on its conceptualisation, currently, are market driven initiatives rather than pedagogical

inspirations. Pedagogically, too, institutions have been applying the notions of transferable skills, embedding them within the curricula and learning and teaching (Carey, 2013a). The overall inclination of the sector and institution, therefore, is towards the standardisation and marketisation of learning (Shore, 2008), fitting in with a broader national and international neo-liberal economic policy agenda (Jaitli, 2010; Carey, 2013b).

2.4 Students' preferences for participation and the context of student participants in my study

Besides the policy driven, marketised and standardised approaches to students' participation, it is necessary to analyse whether students themselves prefer to participate more in policy driven, representative participatory activities or activities that are more pedagogical and dialogic in nature. Bartley, et al., (2010) describes three elements of students' participation work. The first element is students' participation for institutions' quality enhancement; second, individual student's learning and personal development; and third, education and implementation of democratic values. It is the third element that enables educational institutions to be regarded as "*players in a democratic society*" (Bartley, et al., 2010: 151) and this became a main influence in the design of my study.

To understand the institutional role in educating and implementing democratic values amongst students, it is first important to understand different constructs of democracy. The concept is driven primarily from politics where it is associated with the practice of public democratic decision making methods (Bartley, et al., 2010), for example, through voting. When applied in pedagogical institutions, the construct becomes more academic, signifying open knowledge-construction methods that facilitate the phenomenon of learning together (Bartley, et al., 2010). The learning and experiences of academic democracy, when applied at a broader level, equips people to make decisions about political democracy. The learning together is not limited to student-tutor relationships, but extends beyond that and includes students-students groups, as well as other stakeholders within educational institutions. Academic democracy, therefore, can be seen as one of the prerequisites for political democracy (Molander, 2002), which builds upon informal participation methods, thereby preparing people for more formal methods of political democracy (Bartley, et al., 2010).

HEIs, therefore, can be seen as pedagogical spaces where the essence of participation can be cultivated using the notions of academic democracy.

There are examples from national and local contexts that show how students implicitly prefer participating in institutional or course matters using more open approaches of academic democracy. Bartley, et al., (2010), for example, refers to students' participation work done by the Council of Europe, covering most of the European countries. The findings show that students' participation in educational issues is generally weak at national level but becomes stronger at institutional level. The findings are similar for both formal and informal students' participation. The main reason attributed to the lack of students' participation is the less regulated nature of student representation, affecting students' willingness to act as student representatives, a trend evident in my university as well. The strong areas identified for students' participation at institutional level are the areas affecting social, pedagogical, environmental and curriculum related issues, and the weakest being budget and employment related issues (NSF, 2010).

The findings from a NSF annual report (2010) also showed that students are willing and interested to participate in matters affecting their education, especially when the issues are related to curriculum and pedagogy. Capitalising on students' general willingness to get involved in academic democratic practices, the current study explored the use of different dialogic ways of engaging students in hearing their views about the use of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room). A study of this nature takes the baton of participatory work from national policy to local practice level, a gap, as proposed by the NSF at its closure in 2010 (NSF, 2010).

When situating my study within the sector and institutional context (as outlined in section 2.3, above) the students, who were participants in my study, were enrolled onto ECS programmes. They were not necessarily all immediate graduates from secondary schools. A majority came from local communities who continued to live in family homes or were in part-time employment. Partly due to Labour's widening participation initiative, the group constituted of a mixture of young and mature students, some of whom had been in practice or other forms of employment for some time. There was, therefore, a mixture of experienced

and non-experienced practitioners who had joined the university with a certain skills and knowledge, which could be further honed, extended and shared to construct knowledge within the academic discipline and practice.

The ECS courses we offer in university are both professional and semi-professional in nature, meeting the QAA benchmarks (QAA, 2014). The content focuses upon professionally relevant study of play, development and learning of children from birth to eight years. The implications for learning and teaching are therefore high for developing students' understandings of practice in early childhood settings. Due to the emphasis being placed on practice and pedagogy, a majority of the courses offer a blend of theory and practice where students engage not only with the academic debates but also choose to spend time in placements, which are mainly early childhood settings and primary schools in the local communities. Some of them, as stated earlier, might already be employed in the sector and therefore come equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge needed in the profession.

Involving students' views and participation in the development of an ECRR Room, therefore, seemed appropriate as they would work from an already established knowledge base. Their involvement in this wider and extended pedagogical process, through participation in my study, would also help in the achievement of Goal 3 of The Corporate Plan (2015-17: 6) that clearly states university's priority to *"increase student engagement within and outside the curriculum to enrich students' time at the university, support their academic success, give them a distinctive 'edge' in the job market and enrich their lives after university"*.

The students, however, due to being educated in a certain political environment of education (in HEIs and schools) were used to a distinct way of being consulted and invited to participate in institutional decision making. These more familiar measures and design of student consultation and participation, as discussed earlier, are mostly driven by the institutional economic and market driven consumerist agenda, for example, in the form of large surveys and evaluation forms; shared as league tables, both internally and externally, to showcase institutional quality of teaching (and research). With the Coalition's raised fee

policy, all participating students were registered within the newly raised fees structure, expecting to get a good value for their money through the university course. The group of students I worked with, therefore, had been experiencing education within this changing wider political environment which must have influenced their participation in the project. The nuances of these influences are discussed later in Chapter Nine.

Even after moving from their school or college based education to university, the students were still used to being consulted in similar institutionally structured ways, for example, through formal representational methods. There is, however, a general reluctance from students in such participation where they often hesitate to put their names forward as student representatives and lack enthusiasm to complete surveys unless constantly encouraged. This resonates with what Bartley, et al., (2010) and the NSF (2010) suggest, that students lack willingness to participate in representational democracy measures but show more eagerness to work in matters concerning democracy, curriculum and pedagogy that offer more prospects for collaboration and joint knowledge construction.

My project, therefore, offered an opportunity to students where the institution performed the role of a democratic player (Molander, 2002) by encouraging its members to work together in discussing the creation of a pedagogical space, relevant for the development of skills and knowledge needed for early childhood research and practice. The participatory approaches used in the project were also anticipated to model good practice for prospective and current practitioners, to help them experience ‘academic democracy’, which they often study in theory through the formal ECS curriculum. The study helped to bridge the gap that the NSF (2010) identified, in terms of implementing students’ participation policy at local practice level, through HEIs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed policy within English HE, especially changes within a network of post 1992 universities, in England. The influence of policy changes on the HE environment, in particular, the use and application of students’ participation and engagement in institutional processes, was highlighted and critiqued. There is growing

evidence that suggests a perception of education as a consumer driven phenomenon, with an increasing use of structured and more formal processes of students' participation, mainly representational in nature. The chapter argued for consideration of an alternative conceptual understanding of students' participation by looking more deeply into its pedagogical and democratic understanding that may have potential for developing more egalitarian and collegial ways of working with each other. The knowledge thus produced would, arguably, enable the building of capacity amongst graduates who would then be able to offer more sustainable solutions to long term challenges faced by society. The chapter also emphasised a need to continue with a culture of continuous questioning and reasoning through students' participation, despite a growing consumerist culture, and a recognition of the importance of students' involvement in institutional matters due to their previous knowledge and professional experiences.

Chapter 3

Students' participation in education has been a contested area due to competing discourses of learning and knowledge construction, which impact upon the role that students can take in any educational institution (Manefield, et al., 2007). Their role may range from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants, who co-construct knowledge with other stakeholders in education. Different forms of contributions that students make in HEIs, through their participation, are discussed in this chapter. Embedded with students' participation work remains the issue of power, especially the power differential between tutors and students. The chapter, therefore, considers issues with regards to uncontested compliance towards power differential structures in a pedagogic environment, and offers alternative views on the relationship between power and responsibility. The chapter, overall, reviews various benefits of adopting a student voice approach, but also brings to the foreground some of the challenges that come implicitly with the application of such principles into practice.

3.1 Students' participation: a contested area

When understanding the role of 'student' in students' participation, especially in the context of Early Childhood Studies (ECS) courses, it is first vital to understand the context in which participatory processes take place. As discussed earlier, in Chapter One, the discipline of early childhood itself favours a participatory approach to education and care (see, for example, Clark et al, 2003; Clark and Moss, 2006; Kellett, 2010; Clark, 2010). Extending from the early years, students' participation in schools and colleges (for pupils under the age of 18 years) is also reasonably well defined under the discourse of citizenship and children's rights (Fielding, 2004, 2011). Pupil participation is being widely researched and published and its value realised in the creation of policies and sustainable pedagogical environments (Pascal and Bertram, 2009; Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011). It is seen as a way to democratise education for the benefits of students, teachers and the wider community (Fielding, 2004, 2011). These ideas on citizenship and participation underpin early childhood practice, which students studying on ECS courses are expected to recognise and apply in their practice. Early childhood professionals, again as discussed earlier in Chapter One, are expected to listen to the voices of children to plan their learning environments and curricula and it is controversial to not allow these

students, who are current or prospective practitioners, not to experience these ideas first hand. Kay and Bath (2008) assert that teaching and learning approaches used within the ECS curriculum can inform its students' sense of social responsibility and also influence their learning about democratic concepts.

Participatory research in education, however, raises a common argument on the development of new methodological approaches and issues of power. The application of participation sits comfortably with democratic processes, where there are least or no power differentials amongst participants. It is ironic to apply participatory approaches in an authoritarian environment, as the principles conflict. This stresses the importance of paying attention towards the methodological approaches that researchers use, which may range from traditional methods of research (for example, interviews) to the use of more innovative and participatory methods, such as art- based approaches.

The new methodological approaches, in participatory research, are termed the “*dialogic alternative*” by Fielding (2004: 305), especially in the field of education. As the name suggests, the approach shifts the methodological focus from speaking *for* students to speaking *with* them and can take various pedagogic and research forms, such as students being treated as data sources to students as active respondents, co-researchers and researchers (Fielding, 2001, 2004). In a similar vein, Wegerif (2013a) argues that a dialogic approach is essential in pedagogical environments as it helps to move beyond the monologic concept of learning, portrayed in most traditional learning theories. Learning, which is often described in monologic terms, can be reconceptualised from isolated moments of experience into more dialogic ways, making learning a mutual and two-way process, creating opportunities for both parties to learn simultaneously, and not just the student (Wegerif, 2013b).

Researchers and professionals who work with students need to clearly indicate the roles they assign to students whilst undertaking any participatory research. This role may range, as suggested above, from treating students as data sources to co- researchers (Fielding, 2004). Though all forms of participation are regarded as good (Kellett, 2010), but with participatory research picking up momentum in education, there is a gradual shift and

push towards assigning more co-researcher and researcher roles to students (Fielding, 2001). This is particularly true in HE as the students, due to their developed understanding, experiences and competences, are able to make contribution to knowledge creation (Bovill, et al., 2011) in their respective disciplines, by establishing a dialogic relationship with their tutors.

3.2 Students' participation in higher education

When we look into students' participation in HE, its conceptualisation and definitions appear not to be fully formed (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). There are institutional and individual constraints that restrict the facilitation of students' participation. Jaitli (2010) argues that, due to the neo-liberal thrust in education, most HEIs prefer to focus on market driven subjects, and refrain from including new research methodologies, curriculum and pedagogy into their courses. This eventually results in the commercialisation of education, where emphasis is placed upon training quickly adaptable manpower for labour markets, decontextualizing the pedagogy in education (Tandon, 2007; Buchanan, 2014). The issues are not just restricted at institutional level but include personal challenges as well. It is hard for the individual tutors to step outside the culture of 'experts' holding knowledge and be inclusive in research and curriculum development to include students as co-researchers and partners (Nhamo, 2012). Issues of ethics also add to the complexity, as there are uncertainties in relation to power; for example, who sets the research schedule, who controls the research process and who determines the labour pool (Stocker, 2008).

Looking at students' participation research in HE, this work can commonly be cited under three broad themes. First is quality enhancement and assurance (for example, Nair, et al., 2015; Beatrice, 2015); second is staff professional development (for example, Duffy and O'Neil, 2003; Campbell, et al., 2007), and both themes are used to promote reflective practice. The third theme is student engagement (for example, QAA 2005; Campbell, et al., 2007; Bovill, et al., 2011). The first two themes tend to be positioned in relation to the student feedback and evaluation policy agenda in HE (Freeman, et al., 2013; Freeman, 2014; Garwe, 2015). Both quality enhancement and staff professional development themes make an implicit assumption that research and policy in these areas will have

transformative impact on teaching practices and curriculum development (Seale, 2010). The assumption is that change is inevitable, based on students' feedback, because the feedback can give new teaching and learning insights to the tutor, which may challenge tutor's previous practice and assumptions. This implicit rule of students' feedback changing tutors' practice is challenged by some researchers who argue that a lack of challenging attitude and acceptance of students feedback as a fair critique, can give rise to a culture of compliance where students feedback is accepted unquestioningly without any further discussion (Bovill, et al., 2011; Nair, et al., 2015). The common belief that student feedback will lead to action and change, without challenging, discussing or questioning their feedback, can potentially develop tension between the institutions and students, especially if the changes or expectations of transformations are not articulated or applied in the ways they were asked for by the students. These feedback mechanisms often lack the rich descriptors which are needed, both at the time of giving and receiving feedback, on expectations and changes. This is where a dialogic alternative (Fielding, 2004; Wegerif, 2013b), as discussed above in section 3.1, can help to reduce the issue of discrepancy and tension.

The third theme, which concerns student engagement, again makes an implicit assumption that students will become more engaged and therefore learn more effectively if they participate in the content and context of their learning (Bergan, 2003). There is, however, a lack of explanation of this conceptualisation of participation in the literature, and as a result, several opportunities may be missed. Due to the implicit assumptions in relation to students' participation, their views are used more to inform policy agendas (Seale, 2010), overlooking the potential impact that they can have on pedagogy. An example to show the tension regarding student engagement agenda is in citizenship education in secondary schools, in England. The citizenship curriculum, instead of encouraging the participation of children in democratic governance and challenging power mechanisms, implicitly encourages compliance, which negates the whole idea of citizenship (Osler, 2009).

Seale (2010), extending this thread of uncertainty and lack of clarity, brings our attention to the relatively silent issue of power, equality and empowerment in HE, which, she suggests, needs further exploration and conceptualisation. Researchers, such as Hampton

and Blythman (2006) have used Paulo Freire's ideas to explain student voice, drawing from notions of power and oppression. They relate notions of oppression to the groups of students who may be at risk of being excluded from educational events because of their experiences of academic failures. The differences in academic knowledge and skills, for example, can permeate an academic culture where social inequalities are reflected and reproduced (Read, et al., 2001). Examples like this bring to the fore issues of equality and empowerment and the need for HE to invest in methodologies that can reflect existing power cultures and offer alternatives and solutions.

It could therefore be argued that, there is a place for participatory research to be introduced and included within various pedagogical processes, for example, in the form of short term courses and training and also more formally within the curricula. This, Jaitli (2010) suggests, will help in building future practitioners, researchers and educators who are capable of contributing and producing new forms of knowledge and social change that can counter the hegemonic nature of knowledge construction and power imbalances in education, and beyond. Research evidence also supports the need for the students to have a greater involvement in shaping course design, content and curricula (NUS, 2012). Kay, et al., (2010), for example, assert that a framework where students are enabled to take the role of a participant, evaluator, co-creator, expert and change agent in education; in general, benefits everyone, and not just the students. Learners become more engaged with their chosen subject and institution (Kay, et al., 2010), thereby benefitting not only themselves but the institution as a whole.

3.3 Student voice and students' participation

Researchers generally quote student 'participation' under the construct of student 'voice'. The two terms (participation and voice) have been (and can be) used interchangeably (for example, see Seale, 2010; Maunders, et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2014; Seale, et al., 2014) but there are subtle differences between the two terms which need to be explored and discussed. When considering 'voice' as a metaphor, its meaning can be associated with disempowerment. It is usually applied within a context of giving participatory rights to a disempowered section of population, either from a rights, welfare, and moral or social justice perspective. Whether this group of people are children, people with disabilities,

minority groups, socially disadvantaged people or students, the main concern is regarding the empowerment of their social and, or, legal position within a given system (Kanyal, 2014a). This makes us believe that 'voice' is associated with critical theory and that any work done under this banner has a primary aim of empowering the oppressed, marginalised and neglected groups.

The term 'voice', in education, is also used in relation to the concept of representation (Freeman, et al., 2013; Freeman, 2014), which is likely to make us think about the structures and the tools that we commonly use in our institutions, for example, the feedback instruments used for gauging student and staff satisfaction. The tools, though vital for the running of any institution, predominantly display the functioning of policy makers. These functions, although inspired from the traditions of democracy, may take the shape of documentation, for example, from formal meetings to representation from students and staff groups. The representative tradition of democracy, which Fielding (2011) refers to as the 'elitist' approach, provides limited possibilities. He favours the classical tradition of democracy, participatory democracy, which he believes suggests ways of living and learning together and offers a more inspirational aspiration (Fielding, 2011). Without the traditional understanding of democracy, the concept of 'voice' may get conceptualised in an oversimplified structural form, making it rather bland and simplistic. For example, student voice may be viewed only as a tool for students to communicate their ideas and opinions to 'represent' their views. Student voice is much more complex than that and its implications need to be considered critically. Its application cannot be restricted to institutions' operational work, for example, policies and formal feedback mechanisms, as the structures themselves do not have voice - but people do (Porter, 2008). That is why it is important to consider voice from a people's perspective, which stresses the importance of implementing it from policy to a practice level.

This is where the term participation has implications. Participation, as a collective term, helps to research and understand student voice. Participation, as a term, evokes the use of various research approaches that help to facilitate an in depth understanding of students' views and their voices, rather than the structural 'snap shot' from students' feedback and other representative measures. The use of participatory approaches, in collective or

individual form, can give students the freedom to express their experiences and views in their own words (Mauders, et al., 2013).

Students' participation can give a critical insight into student voice work, which is often labelled as 'individualised' and 'authentic' (Spyrou, 2011). Students' participation, unlike 'voice', suggests that student voice is a social (re)construction of their attitudes and beliefs which are shaped by various external and internal factors (Spyrou, 2011), such as educational experiences; social groups; family, cultural and ethnic background; and many more. The study of students' participation, therefore, is not restricted to critical theory but crosses boundaries with other theoretical perspectives, such as social constructivism (McIntyre, 2008). Hence, participation, within a research context, implies the use of various participatory approaches that can help to study student voice, but within a dialogic environment. It is the multiplicity in the exchange of ideas that gives 'participation' a more dialogic attribute than 'voice'.

Both terms- student voice and participation- however, have been used interchangeably in educational literature, mainly in research involving students in decision making to build opportunities for meaningful learning experiences, for example, in the operational running of a learning environment and also in the delivery of the curriculum (Mitra, 2003). From now onwards, I aim to use the term 'participation' more in my thesis, as the focus is on the use of various approaches and techniques that help to understand students' collective views within a given context.

Several researchers argue democracy to be the underpinning value driving any participatory research in education (for example, Fielding, 2004; Bovill, et al., 2011; Cook- Sather, 2014; Bovill, et al., 2016), in the form of different representational and participatory democratic processes (Fielding, 2004, 2011; Little, 2009; Carey, 2013; Freeman, 2014). I argued in Chapter Two how the English HE system is wavering between the political (representational democracy) and pedagogic (participatory democracy) use of student voice, with the current political drive supportive of the representational notions of students' participation (Fielding, 2011; Carey, 2013), complementing a marketised view of HE (Carey, 2013). Students' participation, therefore, has become a multi-dimensional concept encompassing various aspects of

students' experiences. Its definition ranges from that of a broad sectorial approach, for example, the HEA's view of student voice as the "*values, opinions, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of students within a HE community*" (HEA, n.d., n.p.); to a more theoretical and practice based definition of students' participation as "*a theory and set of practices that position students as active agents in analyses and revisions of education*" (Bovill, et al., 2011: 2); as well as an action oriented and collaborative view which regards students' participation as "*a genuinely shared, fully collaborative partnership between students and staff. Leadership, planning and conduct of research and the subsequent commitment to responsive action are embraced as both a mutual responsibility and energising adventure*" (Fielding, 2012: 53). All three definitions, above, show social construction, agency and collaboration as the main features of students' participation, all applicable within the context of my study.

I acknowledge that these are only some of the ways that students' participation and their voice have been defined within educational contexts. I, therefore, do not intend to narrow the concept of participation solely to the notions of theory and action but, to contextualise students' participation within my study, I have drawn upon the above three definitions, as they correspond with the pedagogical and research aspect of collaboration. My study, therefore, recognises the multiplicity in students' participation, for example, it acknowledges that student voice can be a (re)construction of their attitudes and beliefs, shaped primarily by their personal, social and professional experiences (Dewey, 1938; Spyrou, 2011); I recognise the importance of underpinning theoretical ideas on knowledge construction where I believe that knowledge can be co-created between students and staff (McIntyre, 2008; Bovill, et al., 2011; Cook- Sather, 2014) which, when applied in practice, can challenge the rigid ways of thinking and decision making (Pant, 2008; Richards, 2011). I also believe in a collaborative approach to promoting participation, with a commitment to the democratisation of both the content and methods of educational research (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Baum, et al., 2006). My definition of participation, therefore, coheres with the views of the above authors and sees it as a way to democratise education, focusing primarily upon the approaches that we can use to co-construct knowledge about pedagogical environments. I see co-construction as a collaborative process whereby the students work with each other and with staff; as well as their involvement having a direct impact on their learning and course experiences.

In addition to students' participation and student voice, I have also used the terms participatory research and participatory work, at different places, in various chapters. Although both terms draw inspirations from the democratic ethos of working together in social situations, there are certain methodological distinctions which are important to indicate. Participatory research, as a term, is used in places where I intend to acknowledge and draw upon the methodological implications of the research process; and participatory work, as a term, is used in places where the work may not be part of a research project but, rather, a part of professional practice, for example, tutors working collaboratively with students in curriculum planning and delivery, assessment and other wider pedagogical processes. Participatory research, as a term, therefore, represents a research methodology (as discussed in Chapter Five, section 5.1), whereas participatory work symbolises collective work between different participants within an educational environment, the origin of which may not necessarily be research. The idea behind using both terms is to signify the distinction between the scale of work, with 'research' being more methodologically inspired (taking inspirations from Kidd and Kral, 2005; Baum, et al., 2006; McIntyre, 2008; Bovill, et al., 2011 and Cook- Sather, 2014) and 'work' being more practically inspired (taking inspirations from Dewey, 1938; Pant, 2008; Spyrou, 2011; Richards, 2011). Both terms, however, are grounded in the principles of democracy, participation and knowledge construction, as discussed above.

Participation, therefore, helps to bring student voice from policy (structures) to human (more practical and dialogic) level. This, however, does not come without challenges. A closer inspection magnifies the challenges that tutors may face as they then have to listen to the diverse voices of students based on their age, gender, ethnicity, mode of study, nationality, social class, education history and more (Porter, 2008). Creating effective staff-student partnerships in itself can present issues, as some projects or processes may demand an appropriate level of skill and establishment of trust (Little, 2011). To enable effective participation, students may need further training and rapport building between students and staff to feel empowered and to exercise autonomy in research (Maunder, et al., 2013). Another challenge is the convention of authoritarian practices, mostly associated with traditional student-teacher relationships, which can dictate the development and application of tokenistic participatory processes. The adoption of participatory principles can therefore make us question the way we think about ourselves

and our practice (Woodhead, 2005). These principles have the potential to challenge the traditional view of authority by creating a shift in our thinking and recognising students as major stakeholders in education. Attention needs to be paid to the provision of genuine opportunities for participation, as student voice, when in conflict with other major stakeholders' voices, can be disregarded in favour of more powerful interest groups (Baldock et al, 2009).

Despite these challenges, there are various research examples that show successful students' participation and their involvement as co-creators of pedagogical planning (e.g. Bovill, et al., 2011); of strategy development (e.g. Healey, et al., 2010); and as apprentice researchers and 'change agents' on learning and teaching projects (e.g. Dunne and Zandstra, 2011). Students can also contribute in decision making, including decisions about their learning and assessment, thereby influencing change (Manefield, et al., 2007). Such collaborations benefit not only students but also the staff involved, fellow students, and institutions as a whole (Maunder, et al., 2013). This makes the field of students' participation worth investing in, as the benefits can be realised at different levels, for example, at students' personal learning level, group level (course group) as well as cultural and institutional level. Students' participation in institutional processes can, therefore, be regarded as one of the major avenues through which *"students can explore and construct their own learning, gain more control over the content, direction and method of learning and develop higher-order thinking skills"* (Manefield et al., 2007: 5). The participatory traditions also argue for the place of democracy in education, not only as a way of meeting individual needs and arriving at collective decisions and aspirations, but also as a *"way of living and being in the world that intends a common good and the egalitarian freedom of democratic fellowship that shapes our daily encounters"* (Fielding, 2011: 12).

3.4 Students' participation and issues of power

Manor, et al., (2010) emphasise the transformational aspect of building students' participation into teaching and learning. It can essentially democratise education by giving opportunities to the students to share their experiences to more fully inform pedagogy and research (ibid).

Traditionally, there have always been power differences in teaching and learning relationships between the tutors and students. From a student's perspective, a tutor is believed to have a majority of the power to educate (Shor, 1992, 1996; Manor, et al., 2010; Abdelmalak, and Trespalacios, 2013); the students, on the other hand, perceive themselves to have either secondary or no power at all (Shor, 1992, 1996; Manor, et al., 2010). There is no denying the fact that tutors have greater expertise in their specific subjects than students and are therefore justified to be regarded as authority figures in that discipline. They are, generally, experienced people with a knowledge of knowing what challenges students and a broad understanding and expectations for quality work (Manor, et al., 2010; Abdelmalak, and Trespalacios, 2013). The students, however are often habituated to believe that they are totally dependent on the tutors' knowledge and therefore often feel powerless (Manor, et al., 2010). It is this distorted view of power relations in education that becomes problematic.

Manor, et al., (2010) show an intimate connection between power and responsibility. The greater the power, they suggest, the greater is the responsibility to act, and therefore, a greater sense of responsibility to do so. Similarly, less power means less ability to act and take responsibility (Weimer, 2002). The existing correlation between power and responsibility shows the disparity between the two which can be harmful for pedagogy. The powerlessness that students perceive in education may be translated into a lack of act of taking responsibility for their education (Manor, et al., 2010; Abdelmalak, and Trespalacios, 2013). It can directly affect their engagement and participation in studies. They may associate the majority of educational responsibility with the tutor to produce learning.

Manor, et al., (2010) raise our attention towards the common problems related with uncontested compliance with the power structures. The skewed assumption of tutors holding more power contributes to a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to 'learn'. With this perspective in mind, learning merely becomes a transferable object where the tutor is expected to pass a finite number of facts to the students instead of a richer conception of learning as being a 'process' that allows for examination and

meaning making from knowledge (Manor, et al., 2010). A greater problem that arises as a result of the power differentials is when the students rarely regard their fellow classmates as partners or resources. A common perception of a fellow learner becomes that of an individual who happens to be receiving knowledge from the same tutor. The opportunities for unique and valuable perspectives that the students can offer to each other are therefore lost, especially when the power and responsibility to educate are seen resting solely in the hands of a tutor. Years of conditioning teach the students to accept the information they receive from the tutors with high regard but dismiss the perspectives offered from peers as irrelevant.

Issues like these make a transition to students' participation research transformative and empowering. Inviting students to join collaborative learning partnerships helps to radicalise the idea of knowledge and exemplifies that knowledge can be co-constructed and that students too have something to offer in the process of education (Robertson, 2015). Their perspectives are often unique viewpoints, which only they can offer. Using collective views can enable them to see the potential in each other's knowledge and experiences and the generation of a common belief that other people, in conjunction with the tutor, can also make valuable contributions to learning and teaching (Manor, et al., 2010). A recognition of the capacity and ability to co-construct knowledge means students having more power in education and therefore also taking a greater amount of responsibility for their learning. A relationship like this also invites the tutor to rethink the assumptions around traditional student-tutor relationships (Robertson, 2015) and helps to generate a vision that regards learning as a collaborative and co-constructive experience.

Students' participation, therefore, can be regarded as a mechanism that could help to decentralise teaching, learning and research. A recognition of the distributed nature of power enables building of a more democratic pedagogic environment, offering richer inquiry into teaching, learning and research. In its most profound and radical form, student voice calls for a culture which not only opens up spaces and minds to the sound but also to the presence and power of students (Cook-Sather 2006; Robertson, 2015).

3.5 Examples of students' participation work in higher education

Within the HE sector, there are various examples of student voice being heard using both traditional and participatory approaches. Examples of students' participation are discussed below under the thematic categories of curriculum, quality; and empowerment and transformation; to show the individual and collective influences the use of participatory approaches can have on HE pedagogy.

3.5.1 Students' participation in curricular activities

Students' active participation in curriculum can potentially enhance their learning by enabling a deeper understanding of the content; increase enthusiasm as well as develop different ways of relating to each other (Freeman, 2014). A mutual understanding of each other's perspectives helps to create a positive sense of relationship between the students and tutors. Students tend to become more patient and start to take more responsibility for their education (Bovill, et al., 2011). They also begin to understand the tutor's struggles and think more carefully about how they can improve their own experiences in the classroom (Bovill, et al., 2011). Academics, too, report positive outcomes from students' partnership and engagement as they feel re-energised and engage more deeply in their work (Kuh, 2008; Bovill, et al., 2011).

There are examples of students' participation in expressing their views about the learning environment as well as working in partnership with faculty members as pedagogic consultants, both related to curriculum enhancement activities. Henning, et al. (2011), for example, worked with medical students in understanding their perceptions of the learning environment, in particular their clinical environment (different from classroom teaching) by using open ended questions like, 'if you could change three things about medical school, what would they be?' Allowing students to share their views about the changes in learning environment enabled the institution to find the different levels and types of support expected by each cohort. They were able to capture unique concerns raised by students in the areas of curricula, assessments and access.

A study by Cook-Sather (2011) positioned undergraduate students as pedagogical consultants to college faculty members. Students were given a role to observe the sessions and give feedback to the faculty members. The findings from the project showed that student consultants, through their engagement in the faculty, gained a more informed and critical perspective about classroom pedagogy and the life beyond classroom. They built greater confidence, capacity and agency as learners and as people. The processes not only benefitted the student consultants but also informed the researcher's own learning and practice; demonstrating a multi-layered learning effect of participatory processes.

There are further examples that have emerged in HE demonstrating more collegiate forms of students' participation work. These initiatives aim to reposition students as producers, researchers, partners or change agents, instead of consumers (Freeman, et al., 2013; Freeman, 2014). The Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching (SALT) project in Sheffield University, for example, engages students in Learning and Teaching projects. SALTs work in groups with other students from the faculty. Their participation as ambassadors helps to influence and improve ways of how students learn and how they are taught at the departmental, faculty and university level. The projects are largely student-led, with support and guidance from staff. It is the student ambassadors who identify the areas for SALT activities and plan work in a way that it most efficient for everyone (University of Sheffield, n.d.).

Another example is from the University of Lincoln, where a 'Student as Producer' project (since 2011) has been undergoing work to shift the university's focus from research-informed teaching to research-engaged teaching. Students work with other fellow students and academics, with support from student services and other professional staff, to design and deliver their teaching and learning programmes (University of Lincoln, n.d.). They are regarded as collaborators in the production of knowledge. Similarly, Birmingham City University employs students to work alongside academics to develop and implement educational development projects (Freeman et al., 2013).

The examples cited above demonstrate the value of partnership work with students. They are being consulted and approached to work in projects that raise their status from passive receivers of knowledge to active participants who have the capacity and ability to contribute in curriculum enhancement. Their participation, however, is not without

contention. There are examples where the approaches used can arguably be said to be producing a ‘consumer voice’ than a ‘pedagogical voice. Some of these examples are discussed in the following section.

3.5.2 Students’ participation and the understanding of quality

An additional area generally investigated under students’ participation is education ‘quality’. Quality may have multiple meanings and interpretations in education but a general accord amongst universities to display their ‘quality’ to prospective students and other stakeholders is through university ranking or league tables. It has become one of the contemporary measures that influences the comparison between universities’ quality, both nationally and internationally. Although there appears to be no consensus on whether these rankings are desirable or whether the criteria used to judge quality of students’ experiences are valid, the universities quest to achieving top rankings and other multiple social forces indicate the long term stay of such practices (Currens, 2011). A majority of quality enhancement work coalesces around student satisfaction (HEFCE, 2009), through large surveys, which seek to understand and evaluate the learning experiences through the perception of students who experience it first-hand (Currens, 2011).

Large surveys can give a quick feedback to the institutions on students’ views about the course and institution, overall, but their use is not without contention. There are issues with regards to the overuse (or the only use) of surveys as a student voice measure as they can quickly take the dominant and prime position in understanding students’ satisfaction. This is especially true when there is increased government pressure in making students’ experiences visible to the wider public and prospective students, as discussed in Chapter Two. With a shift towards treating surveys as a principal method of understanding student voice, there is a risk that their voices, instead of being treated dialogically, can get steered towards being used as a vehicle for getting higher ranks in league tables, for example, improving the survey score.

An over reliance on structural mechanisms of student voice can therefore be full of contention, regardless of it being insightful. It can potentially move staff away from using the time effectively to engage in meaningful dialogues with students to that of institutional compliance towards improving the survey scores. The two aims appear to be similar but the approaches they use can be different, affecting the outcomes. The dominant

institutional discourse can therefore influence the aims and methods of any participatory or student voice work. There is a risk that the staff can get institutionally socialised to believe that improving ranking in league table is a more economically productive and socially conforming way to represent a ‘good’ university (Zemblyas, 2006). Our thinking and experiences can therefore become ‘normalised’ to believe in certain aspects of reality whilst ignoring the others, which may or may not be a true representation of the philosophies of HE. An answer to this dilemma could be willingness on the part of HEIs to invest in the creation of a culture of participation where student voice is regarded as a routine education activity (Campbell, et al., 2007), in addition to the use of structural and policy driven vehicles, such as large scale surveys.

Synonymous with the argument on implicit institutional compliance is the disagreement on the use of the term ‘university quality’. Tang and Wu (2010), despite the growing acceptance of the representation of ‘quality’ through large surveys and league tables, urge to change the broad and complex term of ‘university quality’ to the ‘quality of undergraduate education’, which according to them, is a more concise and appropriate term. Their study looks at ‘the insider’s perspective’ of HE, through the eyes of the experts, with a focus upon understanding undergraduate education quality. The experts are university presidents in Taiwan who are familiar with the administrative, teaching, curriculum and evaluation aspects of HE. The results from these experts’ interviews show four important determinants of undergraduate education quality: the input (financial resource and student selectivity); process (faculty qualification, curriculum and teaching, research and internationalisation); output (reputation and performance of students and graduates); and equity aspects (inclusiveness, budget and expenses), out of which the ‘process’ determinants take precedent. The ‘input’ factors receive the least scores. This shows that experts view the role played by outstanding peers, international exchange of knowledge and the link between research and teaching to be having a positive influence upon the quality of undergraduate students’ education.

An important aspect to note in this research is that the ‘insider’s view’ only included the ‘presidents’ views of Taiwanese university education and not the students. Students are an integral part of the ‘insider’ view and have distinctive ways of seeing. They are the only ones who can offer unique insights into *their* everyday teaching and learning experiences. Tang and Wu (2010) however argue that there are certain limitations that

need to be considered before treating students as partners and acting upon their feedback. Students may be in the best position to tell us what they want from their institution and teachers, but they may not necessarily know what they need (Tang and Wu, 2010). They further argue that if we give too much weight to students' opinion, it may not only become *"a threat for the universities but also a danger for students themselves"* (pg: 283). Students' participation in pedagogical planning should, therefore, by no means, be regarded as a replacement to teachers' expertise and their key role as facilitators of learning (Bovill, et al., 2011) but an extension of that, especially in the form of mutual and co-created pedagogical environments (Kanyal, 2014b).

3.5.3 Students' participation as empowering and transformative

Other than having benefits for curricula and education quality, students' participation can also be transformative and empowering. Transformation, generally, can have different meanings for different participants (Manor, et al., 2010). The implications can be realised in pedagogy and also in research. Pedagogically, for a tutor, for example, transformation may be in terms of a transformation of understanding (Seale, 2016) or change in a *"deep-seated societal understanding of education based on traditional hierarchies and teacher-student distinctions"* (Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011: 37). For a student, transformation can be conceptualised as empowerment (Seale, 2016). Empowerment can be in relation to an empowered autonomous learner (Bain, 2010); or a student learning new ways of how to be a better learner, feeling inspired and empowered (Cook-Sather, 2010). Empowerment can also be in the form of the building of trusting relationships between tutors and students (Fielding, 2004); students having the power of producing a narrative about themselves, which may challenge the ways others speak about them, hence contradicting common perceptions (Fielding, 2004).

At a research level, the meaning of transformation can be little different. In participatory research, for example, transformation occurs when the research process brings changes in the power relationships (Gilbert 2004; Seale, 2016); changes in attitude; or changes in practice (Seale, 2016). A sense of ownership of research, sharing of research control and having choices is also linked with empowerment (Baum, et al., 2006). For some people

the process of engaging in research can itself be empowering, whereas for others, the outcome of research, as it may empower others, can be empowering and transformative (Kitchin 2000; Seale, 2016).

Seale (2010; 2016) and Seale, et al., (2014), for example, discuss the transformative influence of her work through two distinct projects, the PAIRS and LEXDIS projects. PAIRS (Participatory Approaches to Inclusion Related Staff Development) aimed at the development of inclusive learning and teaching at her university and the need to involve students (particularly disabled students) in the design and delivery of staff development materials and activities (Seale, 2010). LEXDIS (Disabled Learners' Experiences of E-Learning), on the other hand, explored the e-learning experiences of disabled learners within the university in order to increase understanding of the issues facing them and effective learning support (Seale, 2010). Transformation, in both projects, occurred for both students and tutors. The students participating in both projects had learnt something about research methods and analysis skills. Staff, too, learnt new 'big' (for example, fees) and 'small' things (for example, smiles), which mattered to students, the extent of which the staff did not know before participating in the projects (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014; Seale, 2016).

Transformation, in terms of research methodology, is generally believed to emerge from the adoption of a dialogic approach (Mercer, 2008; Wegerif, 2016) (not restricted to speech) that can instigate reflexive practice, which then has the power to transform pedagogy and attitude (Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016). A critical and pedagogic account of dialogues in participatory work is given by Freire and Macedo (1995). They argue for researchers and tutors to move beyond the simplistic and technical understanding of a dialogue and instead appreciate its epistemological potential. Dialogues, according to Freire and Macedo (1995) should be treated as a way of knowing, especially as a way of knowing the social and not only the individual. For epistemological significance, a dialogic pedagogy should involve a theorizing of the experiences shared in the dialogue process, and situate them within the politics of culture and critical democracy.

To maintain the rigour in dialogues, the discussions must therefore maintain an epistemological curiosity and opportunities for critical reflection (Brookfield, 2009). This is what makes the dialogues engaging and critically pedagogical. Critical reflection, as an ideological critique, can help the participants to become aware of the dominant ideologies, which may be responsible for perpetuating inequality or a particular way of seeing the world (Brookfield, 2009). A critical insight into such hegemonic processes and opportunities for collective critical reflection generate action that eventually may lead to transformation. Transformation, therefore is not only situated at an individual but also collective level, for its extensive pedagogical impact to be realised.

3.6 Issues and challenges of participatory work

Students' participation is taking a more central role in contemporary research, policy and processes within HE, some of which has been discussed above, in section 3.5. There are a number of benefits for adopting a student voice approach, but Bragg (2007) also warns us about the challenges that come implicitly with the application of such principles into practice. She questions the meaning of student voice by drawing on the evidence from a 'Students as Researchers' (SAR) research project in the University of Teesside (Teesside University, n.d.).

Bragg's (2007) scepticism is whether these approaches are truly innovative and emancipatory that build upon the principles of democracy, or whether these are being used as an additional mechanism of control? Are the students thus produced supposed to be more reflective and engaged because they have experienced a truly insightful process in their education or are we engaging them in an even more self-examinatory and self-regulatory process because these attributes make them more marketable for a specific future? These principles of self-regulation and self-examination, as Bragg (2007) argues, resonate closely with the neo-liberal policies of marketisation and globalisation. She, therefore, argues for consideration of the critical aspect of participatory work with students by having clear aims and objectives that are not inspired and engineered to fit with the neo-liberal economic market demands.

Another issue, identified by Seale (2010), is about the changes that come with the participatory work. Do these changes remain as unquestioned assumptions or are there any potential tensions that come with students' participation work? Seale (2010) brings our attention to Osler's (2009) work in schools where schools are perceived to be using citizenship education to encourage compliance rather than participation in democratic processes or governance. Bragg (2007), as stated above, also alerts us towards the (hidden) oppressive power of participatory work. Bragg (2007) shows the positive effects and also the power relations which can create new value hierarchies, close to the configurations of reflexive 'knowledge workers' of new liberalism. These issues of power relationship, equality and empowerment are relatively silent in the literature on student voice in HE (Seale, 2010).

Other significant issues that come with students' participatory work can be grouped around students' experiences and pedagogy. With regards to students' experiences, the students can end up constructing a hybrid identity for themselves. The current identity of students as consumers of education services may conflict with the 'researcher' role that participatory work stipulates for them. They may end up being both obligated 'to' and responsible 'for' the effective functioning of their institutions (Bragg, 2007; Taylor and Wilding, 2009). Another contested issue is students' willingness to participate. As the underpinning ideas of participation emerge from the principles of democracy, it can never be coerced upon students. Students who choose not to participate may therefore consider it to be the preserve of "*clever ones*" (Bragg, 2007: 355). Such processes can therefore have an implicit consequent of privileging the already privileged (Bragg, 2007).

At a pedagogical level, Taylor and Wilding (2009) believe that giving responsibility to students to shape the curriculum can become particularly difficult when students lack pedagogical and subject knowledge. Also, as part of curriculum enhancement, when students co-create pedagogical environments, an implicit question that remains unanswered is about the environment's sustainability. The use of participatory approaches, no doubt, enhance students' ownership of learning but it may also imply the need for redesigning of environment by the next cohort (Bovill, et al., 2011). This may particularly raise questions of time and resource management. When looking at pedagogy from a staff perspective, the dialogic nature of students' participation may also demand

the teachers to change their pedagogic styles, indirectly representing a move away from the model of professional autonomy where teachers are expected to make their own decisions about teaching quality (Bragg, 2007). It may end up as an approach to discipline the teachers in order to give real choices to students (Bragg, 2007).

Giving more individual responsibility to students for their own learning may also increase students' pressure relating to failure (Bragg, 2007). How students from other cultures view the co-created learning and teaching approaches, is yet another issue (Bovill, et al., 2011). People from different cultural and educational backgrounds may have different understandings of the quality of curricula design, which may or may not concur with the students' participation discourse.

Seale (2010) highlights some other dilemmas of participatory work, including the rejection of traditional role and relationship between teacher and students. In order for student voice work to be effective, there has to be a move away from the vertical hierarchy, so that students can be seen as collaborative partners with equal status and power. Freire (1993) suggests that dialogues between teacher and student require modesty on the part of teacher in that they should not see themselves as a case apart from the students. This helps to bridge the gap between the two parties and also helps to develop trusting relationships. Fielding (2004: 309), however, draws our attention to the lack of "*spaces*", whether "*physical or metaphorical*", where teachers and students can engage with each other as equals and genuine partners, to make meaning from their work together.

There can also be issues with time investment. Academic staff, with increased work expectations for research, management, administration and student diversity within a resource constrained environment (Nagy, 2011), might view such approaches as time consuming, and therefore resist to apply them in practice (Bovill, et al., 2011, 2016). This resistance often becomes a barrier to any participatory work. The barrier is not limited to getting started but also the strict hierarchical order in which we view participation. The influence of popular, yet hierarchical models of participation, for example, Roger Hart's model of participation (Hart, 1997) can make us too critical of our and others efforts.

Tutors need to start from a point that is realistic for them and then develop participation as their confidence, trust and skills increase (Ladder of participation, n.d.). When looking at time investment, these processes have the potential to pay back later as students eventually take a more active role in the learning process (Bovill, et al., 2011, 2016).

Yet another important challenge that demands attention is the tokenistic approach of running short term students' participation projects. Short term projects may often manipulate student voice due to external or internal pressures (for example, a response to audit requirement). There is also a risk of normalising findings as most issues that result from such dialogic engagement may sound familiar at a first glance (Seale, 2010). There may be a tendency not to engage with the issues and hence miss the opportunity of developing a participatory culture within the institution. To develop and encourage a true culture of participation it is important to link students' participation and their voices with action. It is simply not sufficient to collate students' views to provide some data for others to make decisions. Students' participation should be honed and aimed to provide opportunities for active participation where they can confidently contribute ideas and also participate in decision making and any consequent action, thereafter (Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth, 2005; Manefield, et al., 2007).

Finally, Bovill, et al., (2011) draw our attention towards the risks associated with an unquestioning reliance on the views of the less powerful as it can lead to uncritical value being placed on students' views, irrespective of the nature of those views. Furthermore, claims of participation that are not genuine but tokenistic forms of participation may result in alienating students from the academic world (Mann, 2001). Last but not least, co-creation can be threatening to students who are used to teachers dominating the classroom and, thus, may resist deviating from this norm (Shor, 1992). Some students may also be resistant to stepping out of their (comfortable) traditional passive role to engage in co-construction (Bovill, et al., 2016). The same may apply to teachers who feel more comfortable within a didactic tradition or discipline and may therefore struggle to include students as partners in learning and teaching.

Conclusion

The chapter reviewed various examples of students' participation and the benefits and challenges associated with it to give a firm grounding on the pedagogic use of these approaches in HE. The chapter also discussed the value of adopting different types of students' participation activities and measures, not restricting their use to policy driven instruments, such as large scale surveys. It is also argued that in order to realise the empowering and transformative potential of student voice work, more attention needs to be paid to the implicit issue of power and ethics and also to the application of more dialogic approaches to knowledge construction and critical reflection. A dialogic application of these approaches, within a framework of democracy and ethical practice, is discussed in the next chapter, Chapter Four, where I argue for a combined theoretical conceptualisation of students' participation in HE.

Chapter 4: Underpinning theories

Participatory work can be conceptualised using multiple theoretical perspectives, provided attention is paid to the context specific nature of work and how theories can help to understand social realities in the given contexts (McIntyre, 2008). Different aspects of participatory processes may therefore be influenced by different theoretical perspectives. My study, as stated in Chapter One, considers the social aspect of meaning making where students and staff worked together in planning and designing a pedagogical space. The work is predominantly participatory in nature and therefore draws upon theories that are inherently social in context and link with the construction of knowledge. It is these inbuilt characteristics of participatory research and pedagogy that the chapter explores, by drawing upon ideas from critical theory and social constructivism.

The details of each theoretical perspective and its link with participatory research with students is explained, making a case for the use of a combined theoretical framework to conceptualise my study. Critical theory is discussed with reference to Paulo Freire's ideas, to help answer the 'why' question of my research, and social constructivism is discussed primarily with regards to the views of John Dewey and Rupert Wegerif on knowledge construction, especially answering the 'how' question of my research. Paulo Freire was inspired by Dewey's philosophy of education, however, Freire's views are positioned before Dewey's ideas here. This reflects the order in which the theories were drawn upon for the study. Both perspectives are used to propose a theoretical model of students' participation work, with an aim to assist in the application of ideals of PR into an educational environment. The chapter, therefore, discusses key themes from critical theory and social constructivism and their potential place in HE. Central theoretical concepts from individual theorists are discussed separately as well as conceptualised together to justify the theoretical framework that guides my study.

4.1 Critical theory

The first theoretical perspective that directly links with the origin of PR is critical theory. Critical theory can be seen to be having both a narrow and broad meaning in the history of social sciences and also in philosophy. In its narrow sense, Critical Theory² designates the Frankfurt school, which reflects the generations of work of German philosophers and social theorists in Western Europe Marxist tradition who focused on various mechanisms of seeking human emancipation from oppression. This work began in the late 1920s, at the Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt, Germany, through the inaugural lecture and later work of philosopher Horkheimer (Held, 1990; Horkheimer, 1993; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). It was Horkheimer who first showed the interaction between philosophy and social science through interdisciplinary empirical social research, an approach which gradually paved way for the broader meaning of critical theory (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005).

With time, the principles of Critical Theory became generalised and researchers and philosophers who seek mechanisms to transform *all* the circumstances that disempower and oppress human beings, use a broader perspectives of critical theory, with common origins in the Frankfurt tradition. Any philosophical approach with practical aims that resonate with those of Critical Theory, could be called a ‘critical theory’, including feminism, critical race theory, and some forms of post-colonial criticism, represented in various social movements, across the world (Held, 1990; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). It is this broader sense of critical theory that provides a basis for the rest of the thesis, especially the post-colonial critique by Paulo Freire, as discussed in section 4.1.3.

4.1.1 Critical theory and higher education research

At a collective level, critical theorists use social research to understand the causes of powerlessness by recognising systemic oppressive forces. In an attempt to create a more democratic and just society, they act individually and collectively to argue for changes in

² When capitalised, Critical Theory refers only to the Frankfurt school. The use of the term is not capitalised for other forms of critical theory. The rest of the thesis refers to critical theory in its broad sense, as explained in section 4.1

social conditions of life (Usher, 1996). The processes adopted are participatory and collaborative whereby the researcher and the researched bring together their pre-understandings, with a view to emancipation (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Critical theory, therefore, is primarily concerned with the development of people in accordance with rational, democratic and emancipatory values (Fook, 2002). Critical theorists, in addition to theorising, aim to change people's understanding of their situations so that they can gain power and control over their own lives. By helping people critically reflect and become aware of hidden coercion, critical theorists facilitate less powerful people into a position from where they can free themselves from the coercion (Bowen, 2010). The people concerned are therefore able to determine the conditions where their true interests lie (Bowen, 2010). This determination clearly asks for people's active participation to be able to change their social conditions, through collective actions.

A clear link here can be made between the values and principles of HE and critical theory. Barnett (1990) believes that HE should be emancipatory, freeing students from their narrow intellectual perspectives, allowing for deep human understanding (Collini, 2011); hence building the blocks for civil society (Brennan, et al., 2004). Emancipatory, autonomic and participatory attributes of critical theory complement these abstract aspects of HE, making it a popular theoretical framework to use in student voice work.

Recent HE studies, on student voice, have used participatory research methods to engage with the vulnerability or the oppressed status of students, for example, with students with some form of disability, minority groups, as well as students as dominated by institutional hegemony (for example, see Seale, 2010 work, in Chapter Three). Others have drawn on the notions of critical pedagogy, such as those put forward by Freire (1970). Proponents of critical pedagogy argue that education must be grounded in the lives of students and that students should be regarded as active participants, rather than passive recipients, in the production of knowledge. 'Student as producer' project, through undergraduate research, at the universities of Lincoln and Warwick (University of Lincoln, n.d.; Taylor and Wilding, 2009), as discussed in Chapter Three, are two such examples that draw from the ideals of critical pedagogy.

This move of contemporary research towards critical pedagogy and theory emphasises the use of radical approaches to student voice. The move is also being promoted and supported at the sector level, for example, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) project ‘Students as Partners’, seeks to shift the focus from principles and processes of working ‘on’ or ‘for’ students to working ‘with’ them (HEA, 2013). There is, therefore, a recognition of the application of critical theory in the English HE sector and in its pedagogic research, and emphasis is now being placed on the mechanisms of oppression and the active role that students can take to recognise the conditions of oppression and overcome these, through critical reflection (Carey, 2013a). Oppression can take various forms, for example, explicitly through social-class, ethnicity, gender, race and disability discrimination, or implicitly through the use of policy, procedures and other mechanisms of interaction that favour a certain group of individuals, over others.

4.1.2 Critical theory and higher education policy and practice

Whilst using critical approaches to understanding students’ participation, it is first vital to position this work within the sector’s policy framework. This will help to understand the broader influence of structural participation on education. Contemporary education, being located within the neo-liberal economic policies, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, is going through a conflicting phase that questions the very origin and purpose of education, often explained using the notions of critical theory (Baryana, 2013). Baryana (2013), for example, asks, whether education today is for the sake of self-improvement or if it is there to serve the current political agenda of producing resilient labour force for the sake of strong economy, with the best skills in the world? The latter view often leads students and staff within educational establishments to conform unquestioningly to the socially constructed norms (Carey, 2013b), which are often shaped by the political climate. Freire (1973), expressed this conforming view as follows:

“If people are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change” (pg: 7).

Freire’s ideas originated in a different socio-political climate, in the second half of the 20th century, in Brazil, but it is an accepted view that educational establishments, even

today, generally fall short of developing critical perception amongst students on the functioning of an effective society (Baryana, 2013; Taylor, 2014). This lack of guidance often leads to unquestioning conforming behaviours on the part of students (Carey, 2013a; Carey, 2013b), a concern constantly echoed by critical theorists. Critical perceptions, Baryana (2013) suggests, can be operationalised in various ways. One of the ways this can be achieved is by creating ‘safe’ spaces for students, for them to be able to experiment and ‘form’ a voice and then to ‘share’ their views with other stakeholders in education. ‘Safe spaces’ can be interpreted as a politically safe spaces where students’ views and actions are less likely to be judged according to preconceived notions of conformity and social norms. Student perspectives, therefore, can be a powerful tool for exploring the counter arguments to conformity (Baryana, 2013).

There is, hence, a need to engage in conversations with students to discuss their various needs and priorities, for example, do they study to obtain qualifications to get into their desired employment and up-skill themselves to move in to a new career? Or do the students study to learn to enhance life skills for more fundamental and intrinsic reasons? The reality, however, may lie somewhere in between. Students may want to engage both with the intrinsic nature of HE (Bergan, 2003; Brennan, et al., 2004) as well as up-skill themselves for the economic labour market (Bragg, 2007). These questions, in contemporary education, can be probed further using the framework of critical theory.

Whilst using critical theory with student voice work, attention must be paid to ‘whose voice’? There is a risk that student voice may be suppressed by the power dynamics of HE (Carey, 2013a, 2013c). The HE system itself can oppress some students making them unable to contribute their voices (Robinson, 2012). HEIs may, therefore, reflect and amplify deep social inequalities (Harper and Quayle, 2009). There is a risk that student voice may only represent the voices of more confident and articulate, ignoring the vulnerable and the powerless (Carey, 2013a). It is also worth paying attention to the mechanisms being used, as the mechanisms themselves can be biased and further marginalise vulnerable groups. Feedback surveys and course representative systems, for example, can be empowering for some but can marginalise students and academics whose views about HE do not fit with the dominant mechanisms of the institution (Freeman, 2014). Over reliance on the use of “*speaking out*” (Carey, 2013a: 30) mechanisms, that favour the cultural resources of some

groups, over others, may come with consequences (Carey, 2013a). There are both gains and losses from the use of such student voice instruments and although gains are good, losses too can have consequences for what HE is, or can be (Freeman, 2014).

Participatory research methodology, framed around critical theory, therefore becomes a suitable approach to studying participatory work with students. The aim is to avoid the perpetuation of inequality by using methods that subsequently help to empower the participants by raising awareness of effective ways and means to communicate their voices and engage in institutional decision making. One such approach was put forward by Paulo Freire, a theory which is still used in contemporary education to address the issues of power and hegemony. His views are discussed, in detail, in the next section.

4.1.3 Paulo Freire

There are various ways in which critical theory influences participatory research. Some argue that the origin of participatory research itself lies in critical theory as critical theory illuminates both the motives and the act of participation (for example, see Lancaster University, n.d.). One of the key critical theory philosophers, whose work has influenced student voice research, is the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (for example, see Bowen, 2010; Baryana, 2013), acknowledged for his work on critical pedagogy. His views on critical pedagogy have been extensively used in participatory research.

Freire is well known for elaborating an educational theory that sits within the wider theory of radical social change, which he expressed in a literacy training program for marginalised adults (peasant farmers), originally in Brazil, in the 1960s (Freire, 1970, 1973; Lloyd, 1972; Roberts, 1994). After the huge success of adult literacy program in Brazil, Freire was invited to develop similar literacy programmes in different countries, for example, in Chile, Tanzania, Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea- Bissau. The main acclaim, however, came in Chile where he was able to deepen considerably both theory and the practice of his adult literacy program. Due to the success of this program, Chile was later recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as one of the five nations that was most effective in overcoming illiteracy (Roberts, 1994). Some of the

key concepts from his critical pedagogy, for example, conscientisation, power imbalance, marginal voice and transformation, can be applied in contemporary education and are discussed below, in relation to students' participation work.

4.1.3.1 Conscientisation and culture circles

Freire's emancipatory work originated due to his fierce criticism and reservation towards what he described as a 'banking model' of education that aimed at domestication and unquestioning conformity to economic aims of education (Roberts, 1994). In his education theory, Freire refers to the development of critical consciousness through a process of reflection and action, which became known as conscientisation (Freire, 1970, 1973; Roberts, 1994). He believed that conscientisation makes participants (local people) aware of their oppressed position and helps them develop critical awareness of the surrounding issues. When the local people become aware of their oppressed position and identify the mechanics through which inequity is perpetuated, conscientisation (critical consciousness) becomes an implicit empowering process that develops the ability in them to take action and change their circumstances (Freire, 1970, 1973; Fals-Borda, 1991).

"The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientisation" (Freire, 1993: 67).

It is this central concept in his theory, which is particularly applicable to participatory work with students. In research, a 'conscientisation' process is not only central to the role of participants but the researcher as well. Whilst engaging in participatory processes, the researcher also experiences an ongoing development of a critical consciousness, similar to the conscientisation process described by Freire. It is this consciousness that helps the researcher to take on a more "*epistemological responsibility*" (Kidd and Kral, 2005: 188), enabling her or him to question more established methodological beliefs (Kidd and Kral, 2005), which may or may not be participatory in nature.

To engage people in the development of conscientisation, there is yet another concept in Freire's education model that is useful to consider in participatory work with students. It is Freire's view of 'culture circles' (Freire, 1970). Culture circles, in his theory, refers to a group of adult learners who were invited to participate in a process of critical reflection, on the social conditions in which they found themselves. Culture circles used more dialogic methods of engagement, for example, visual depictions of everyday objects or activities to generate discussion amongst the group members (Roberts, 1994). A series of questions were asked by the instructor to problematise reality that encouraged participants to distinguish between the man-made issues and nature related problems, aiding them further to reflect critically on the conditions of oppression. The questions and answers, in the form of dialogues, led to self-reflection and critical consciousness which, according to Freire, is a pre-requisite for freedom from oppression, often referred to as conscientisation in his theory (Freire, 1970).

Deepening of analysis, critique of social reality, and a reliance upon dialogue rather than monologue or polemical methods, increase the chance of transforming conditions of oppression (Freire, 1973). Even the use of terms in his literacy training program demonstrate the liberatory pedagogy that he adopted in his work. For example, he replaced certain traditional teaching terms, such as teacher and pupils, with that of co-coordinator and group participants (Roberts, 1994). Hence, in students' participation work, taking inspirations from Freire's theory, emphasis is placed upon collaborative small group work where all participants use traditional and non-traditional methods of enquiry to understanding current circumstance, drawn from real life experiences and situations. This reality may include critical reflection upon the mechanisms of voice as well as common perceptions of something that may not be a true reflection of social reality. Freire's notion of conscientisation (critical consciousness raising) (Freire, 1970), therefore, can offer a potential solution to student voice work as it enables students to participate rationally and, more importantly, also understand the process of participation. The process of recognition and critical reflection empowers students as they can then decide whether or not they want to be involved in a study or research project (Carey, 2013a, 2013c).

4.1.3.2 Mediation of power imbalances

Another vital component of Freire's educational theory is the recognition of the implicit and explicit power imbalances between the researcher and the researched or the instructor and the participants. In order to establish a dialogic exchange in culture circles, in his literacy program, Freire used examples from everyday lives of peasant farmers to encourage their active participation and discussion. For example, he used generative words that corresponded to the most fundamental concerns, ideas and practices of farmers' lives; sequenced in an order of gradual phonetic complexity of the local language (Roberts, 1994). Freire believed that any constructed lived experiences are mediated by power relations within social and historical contexts (Freire, 1970, 1973) and in order to overcome these barriers, participants need to identify themselves with the education and literacy program that is offered to them.

When opportunities are built-in within educational programmes to enable participants to share and draw upon their experiences from everyday life, it encourages diversity, discussion and therefore negotiation. Group discussions, when facilitated by an instructor or tutor, can enable the formulation of dialogic interactions. These interactions, when combined with critical reflection, have been found to be having the potential for emancipation (from oppression), leading to the development of a more egalitarian and democratic social order (Ponterotto, 2005). It is therefore the adoption of non-threatening mechanisms that can encourage active participation by students. It is important for the participants to feel at ease to contribute in a program; and for the tutor to regard all kinds of participation as worthwhile (Kellett, 2010).

In contrast, when mechanisms are applied uniformly, without any negotiation and dialogue, to fulfil institutional requirements, student voice can be manipulated and used for the purposes of those in power; for example, through accommodation (where voices are reassured and reconstructed), accumulation (voices used to provide knowledge to strengthen the status quo) and appropriation (voices used to legitimise the position of a dominant group) (Fielding, 2004). It is, therefore, vital to acknowledge the power relationships in student voice mechanisms to avoid disguising complex and manipulative relationships, which may have negative implications for students (Freeman, 2014).

In research, this is where it becomes vital to choose suitable mechanisms for understanding students' participation. Not all instruments, such as the sole use of large scale surveys or spoken feedback, for example, can necessarily help to mediate power imbalances as they can represent the dominant culture. As stated earlier, these mechanisms can sometimes, ironically, contribute in perpetuating social and economic inequalities (Harper and Quaye, 2009; Robinson, 2012) and may favour the cultural resource of one group, over another (Carey, 2013a; Freeman, 2014). Education and mechanisms of students' participation, therefore, must be grounded in the lives of students (Freeman, 2014), so that they can identify with those processes and take an active role in shaping their own educational experiences.

4.1.3.3 Marginalised voice

In addition to conscientisation and power imbalances, a third key concept from Freire's critical theory that underpins participatory work with students is that of 'marginalised' voice. His original work in Brazil was focused upon the introduction of a literacy program for poor, socially disadvantaged, illiterate peasants and hence the 'marginalised' people. It was the socio-economic condition of the peasants that made their voices marginalised (Lloyd, 1972; Roberts, 1994). When applied in contemporary educational research, the groups that engage in participatory work may not necessarily be marginalised, technically, but the ideas that emerge from engagement may become marginalised and normalised due to not being regarded as new and exciting (Seale, 2010). Also marginalised might be the ways in which the voices are represented. As argued earlier in Chapter Three, the participants may not have any choice but to project their voices using the cultural-historic mechanisms and tools, which may not work in all participants' favour.

Another way in which student voice can be seen as marginalised is by regarding their knowledge and experiences as inferior and non-academic and, therefore, not of high value in university education. Students generally regard the tutor as the possessor of 'truth', an authority symbolised by power (Shor, 1992, 1996; Manor, et al., 2010; Abdelmalak, and Trespalacios, 2013), hence giving more legitimacy to tutor's knowledge. This one sided power relation creates imbalance in any joint work (Freeman, 2014). When applied in research between students and staff, the tutor must therefore seek to stay neutral to all

presumptions and socially constructed identities of students, for example, a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ student, a concept which is often socially constructed and linked with assessment success (Freeman, 2014). To overcome the issue of marginalised voice, each participant should be regarded as an expert in his or her own way and learning constructed by drawing upon their previous knowledge and experiences. To include the ‘excluded’, referred to as ‘marginalised’ above, “*pushes the scholarship in new direction and make us think outside the box*” (Cahill, 2007: 330).

4.1.3.4 Transformation

Transformation, a vital (fourth) aspect in Freire’s theory, possesses a prime position in participatory research. It is often realised in the form of social change (Pant, 2008) that arises as an outcome of the shared processes as well as personal transformation (Cahill, 2007). The impact can also be extensive, in that it can eventually help to transform an institution (Cahill, 2007; Potter, 2008). To make the pedagogical experience transformative for students, Freire and Macedo (1995) put forward three core conditions. Firstly, they suggest that the learning relationship between the student and the tutor should be equal; secondly, there must be elements of critical reflection; and thirdly, the pedagogical methods should be problem based rather than didactic. The fulfilment of these three conditions, Freire and Macedo (1995) suggest, helps to transform the individual both personally as well as socially, through action and social change.

Carey (2013a) however cautions against unquestioning acceptance of transformative pedagogy in the current times. A transformative curriculum, he argues, may only interest a small group of students because it challenges the employability focused pedagogy that dominates the contemporary HE system. A majority of the students have been found to favour the marketised system of HE (Nordensvärd, 2011). There is also a possibility that, due to students experiencing and growing within a market driven education since childhood; even though they may be interested in a transformative, student-centred education practice; they may not be satisfied with the reality of the overall experience (Carey, 2013a).

The criticism and challenges of transformative education lead us to a wider question of whether critical theory can give us all the answers we seek to get in students’ participation

work in contemporary HE? The section below discusses some criticisms of critical theory and proposes a combination with another theoretical perspective, social constructivism, to add to the research.

4.1.4 Is critical theory on its own sufficient to be used in students' participation research?

Critical theory, as discussed above from a Freirian perspective, can be seen as a means for emancipation from coercion, whether explicit or implicit coercion. However, when used as a framework in a thesis, all theoretical ideas should be reviewed critically. The lofty ideals of critical theory, for example, can be criticised for promoting elitist views of a 'better world' that society should aspire towards (Roberts, 1994). Freire's theory, for example, received allegations of elitism and imperialism and was seen as an educational program that presented a hierarchical view of consciousness (ibid). He was criticised to be propagating a Western mind- set by privileging the notions of agency, change, critical thought and progress in his literacy program over the traditional, non-questioning and non-intervening cultural beliefs (Roberts, 1994).

The concept of 'a better world' conveys a mutual agreement and recognition by people, who live within it, and a presumption that they all have a common understanding of the word 'better'. 'Better', however, is a relative and subjective term and can have multiple interpretations. So, who is qualified to say what is 'better'? (Bowen, 2010). Similarly, the implicit connotations are that the common people, who are in 'need' of liberation, do not appear to be knowing 'what is good for them' and the critical theorists know 'better'. One could therefore argue, that, if used in isolation, the ideals of critical theory itself could place the theorist and researcher in a morally or intellectually superior position (Roberts, 1994; Bowen, 2010). The researcher, therefore, can be seen as a person who seeks to 'develop' the less powerful.

The social reality, or the concept of 'better', on the contrary, needs to be negotiated and mutually agreed. It is this 'co-construction' that may facilitate the realisation of the relative and the individual value of the term 'better'. This is where the theoretical argument of participatory work crosses boundary with social-constructivism. To understand social

reality, it needs to be ‘co-constructed’ by the people living within it. The next section, therefore, explains the place of social constructivism in participatory research. Its philosophical and pragmatic aspects have been applied in educational environments for one hundred years, and they continue to inspire contemporary education even now.

4.2 Social constructivism

Social constructivism extended work on constructivist approaches to knowledge construction. The constructivists, notably Piaget (1959), focused upon discovery and lone learning, thereby determining the intrinsic nature of knowledge (Bednar, et al., 1992; Bada, 2015). Constructivist learning theories had huge influence over the educational practice in the early- mid 1900s, but they were later criticized for having ignored the power of social and cultural influences on knowledge construction (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Nola, 1997).

The social and cultural aspects of knowledge construction were addressed through the extension of constructivism to social constructivism. The epistemological basis for social constructivism (and constructivism) is interpretivism, where knowledge is believed to be acquired through involvement with content instead of imitation or repetition (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). The importance of culture and context is highlighted in the social constructivist theories of Vygotsky, Bruner and other educationists, such as Dewey, and also within the work of more contemporary thinkers and educators, for example, Lave and Wenger, Mercer and Wegerif. Whilst all these key theorists are associated with social constructivism, it is John Dewey (1933/1998), who is often regarded as one of the philosophical founders of this approach. The origin of social constructivism, philosophically, can be related to Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* (1897) where he asserted the organic relationship between the psychological and social sides of education, and education itself coming about as a result of the learner's empowerment within a social situation. A learner, he said, develops a view of himself or herself in relation to the group, through participation in group (community welfare) activities, instead of holding an egocentric view (*ibid*). Dewey placed emphasis upon social life experiences and the role that these can play in knowledge creation. Independent and shared versions of knowledge, he believed, are to be created through interactions among people (Roth, 1962).

Leading social constructivist theorist, Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, identified the role of social and cultural processes in the mechanism of learning (Palincsar, 1998). His concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is regarded as one of the major theoretical contributions in learning and development theories, emphasises the importance of two levels, the actual level- which is *“the level of development of a child’s mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already completed development cycles”* (Vygotsky, 1978: 37) and the potential level, which is the level, that the children can achieve with help from more knowledgeable others, for example, the teachers. Vygotsky, therefore, defined the ZPD as *“the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”* (Vygotsky, 1978: 38). The actual development level, therefore, for Vygotsky (1978), characterises retrospective mental development and the ZPD characterises prospective mental development. The prospective mental development, he argued, is achievable by working within the social-cultural contexts, with the more knowledgeable other, who may be peer(s) or the teacher, or both. In his view, it is this interdependence of the social and individual processes in learning that leads to the construction and co-construction of knowledge (Palincsar, 1998). Learners, therefore, participate in a range of joint activities, and whilst internalising their joint participation, they develop new knowledge and understanding of the world and culture around them (Palincsar, 1998).

Similarly, Bruner, influenced by Vygotsky, considered learning to be an active, social process, in which learners construct new ideas and concepts based upon their current and pre-existing knowledge, in constant contact with the teacher (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). Bruner believed that a teacher should try to encourage learners to discover principles for themselves; and that the teacher and learner should engage in an active dialogue in order to meet this end (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). He introduced the idea of ‘spiral curriculum’ where he believed that the curriculum design should enable the learners to continuously revisit ideas and facts to be able to build upon what has been learned previously (Bruner, 1996).

Extending upon social constructivist ideas, another aspect of social learning is encapsulated within the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). Situated learning, typically, refers to an apprenticeship model of learning that occurs in social situations (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). The term apprenticeship is used as a reference to master craftsmen and young apprentices, who look, observe and learn and are guided in their efforts to master a new skill by a skilled expert (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The apprentice, by sheer proximity to and social engagement with the master and other more expert participants, acquires the skills and knowledge (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). This is also described using the notion of legitimate peripheral participation. The apprentice or learner becomes a legitimate participant, as the learner will eventually learn the skills and acquire the knowledge that is commonly held within the group. However, at first the learner is not a central but a peripheral member of the group, thus the idea of legitimate peripheral participant (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010).

Through the concept of the legitimate peripheral participant, Lave (1991) emphasises a decentred view of learning, recognising its social aspect, suggesting that learning is socially co-constructed within the experienced, lived-in world, through learners' legitimate peripheral participation in ongoing social practices. She argues that the process of changing knowledgeable skill occurs through membership in a community of practitioners; and that the mastery (of tasks) is an organisational, relational characteristic of communities of practice (Lave, 1991). Lave, therefore, regards learning as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practitioners. Writing with Wenger, Lave further explores learning as a social process that occurs largely from experience of participating in daily life with others, within a specific context (Lave and Wenger, 1991). With time, this collective learning process results in practices that are the pursuits of our participation in social group(s), thus creating communities, referred to as communities of practice (Wenger 1999). Lave and Wenger's notions of situated learning, therefore, suggest that learning involves a process of engagement in a 'community of practice'. Communities of practice are generally groups of people who interact regularly and share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better (Wenger, 1999). Our membership within communities of practice might vary from that of a core member to the ones more at the margins.

There is a link between the idea of learning being situated and the need for authentic learning tasks. Selinger (2001), for example, suggests authentic tasks to be the ones that learners can relate to their own experience inside and outside the learning environment and the tasks that an experienced practitioner would undertake. Pritchard (2014) argues that when learning is made up of authentic tasks, there is a greater probability that learners would engage with the task and also with the ideas and information involved with the task. These ideas of authentic learning can be related back to the ideas put forward by other social constructivist theorists, such as Bruner (1996). The role of a familiar context is highlighted within authentic learning as the learners working with the new ideas in a familiar context are more likely to engage with the ideas than if they were to be presented in an alien context (Pritchard, 2014).

In more recent times, the work on learning, and in particular, the role of language, dialogue and participation in social learning processes has been developed further by psychologists, educators and researchers, including Neil Mercer and Rupert Wegerif. Mercer and Wegerif have worked together on various research projects and extended the understandings of oral language for thinking and the role of dialogues and reasoning in learning and teaching (for example, Wegerif and Mercer, 1996; Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). Their work has built upon the foundational work of Vygotsky, and Mercer and Wegerif both have each proposed different extensions to Vygotsky's theory. Mercer, for example, argues and concurs with Lemke's (2001) view that social constructivist learning is not limited to social interaction but more significantly to the role of longer time-scale constancies and how these approaches restrict, enable and interfere into moment-by-moment activity. He concurs that Vygotsky's concept of ZPD notably describes the way a child's intellectual capacity changes over time to reach new levels, with the dialogic support or scaffolding of an adult or a more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). Mercer, simultaneously, argues that the ZPD is fundamentally a static concept, representing an individual's mental state at any given point rather than a dynamic, dialogic process (Mercer, 2008). Mercer, instead, introduces a new concept, the *Intermental Development Zone* (IDZ), that centres around the different ways a teacher and a learner can stay attuned to each other's changing states of knowledge and understanding over the course of an educational activity (Mercer, 2000; Mercer, 2008). IDZ, according to Mercer, is "*represented in talk by explicit references to shared*

experience (present, past and future), common tasks and goals, but can also be sustained by tacit invocations of common knowledge which are intelligible to the participants” (Mercer, 2008: 10). The quality of the IDZ, Mercer suggests, is dependent on the contextualising efforts of those involved. If the participants’ dialogues fail to keep minds mutually attuned and focused upon the task, the IDZ collapses and the scaffolding of learning stops (Mercer, 2008).

Mercer, also extends the work of Dreier (1999) and Rasmussen (2005) on trajectories of participation, a perspective that encourages and provides a temporal focus on the social nature of learning. Participation trajectories focus upon individual social actors’ patterns of involvement in social processes, within multiple settings, such as school and home. Mercer (2008) extends this idea of participation trajectories and suggests a learning trajectory of not individual but multiple speakers, who move together through a series of related interactions, within the same institution (for example, school), and he calls it a *dialogic trajectory*. For a successful dialogic trajectory to establish, he (Mercer, 2008) suggests certain conditions, for example, he highlights the importance of having a shared history amongst the participants. He views shared history not necessarily as a comprehensive history of an event or the shared experience of the participants, but rather those features of shared knowledge which are relevant to the task in hand to invoke dialogues. Equally important are the temporal development of the dialogue, which includes information about the progress of the talk; and the trajectory of the event itself to make participants aware of the projected future, for example, how much time they have to spend on the task. Although the process of the dialogue is important, but for dialogues to thrive within educational environments, their pedagogical relevance and educational value is also imperative. Therefore, as part of dialogic trajectory, Mercer (2008) also suggests that a consideration towards the educational outcomes of the event is equally essential. This can include any evidence of participants’ learning as a result of dialogic engagement.

Building upon Mercer’s views on dialogic education and working alongside him on various research projects, Wegerif also advocates for a dialogic pedagogy to support the view of shared understanding in group work, especially through critical discussions and co-reasoning (for example, Wegerif and Mercer, 1996; Wegerif and Scrimshaw, 1997;

Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes, 1999). As a researcher and an educator, Wegerif's work has been influential on considering dialogues as an important pedagogical instrument in learning and teaching, especially within technology education. He proposes a dialogic theory of education where he reviews learning through dialogue with the Internet. Taking inspirations from Russian writers Bakhtin and Volosinov's work on dialogue, who believe that meaning is never simply given but is created out of the interaction between different voices and different perspectives and that any utterance needs to be seen as a link in a chain of communication (Bakhtin 1986; Volosinov, 1929/86); Wegerif supports the dynamic notion of dialogue where *"participants are not merely seen responding to what other participants do, but they respond in a way that takes into account how they think other people are going to respond to them"* (Wegerif, 2001: 2). This circularity in dialogue is referred to as mutual attunement (Rommetveit, 1992). To sustain the dynamic and circular notion of dialogic learning, Wegerif (2010) believes that it is important to pay attention towards the opening, widening and deepening potential of dialogues. By 'opening' he refers to the establishment of ground rules, for example, participants being able to ask open questions and listen with respect to each other. Broadening refers to increasing the degree of difference between perspectives in a dialogue while maintaining the dialogic relationship; and deepening is associated with reflection, especially challenging any assumptions and pre-judgements. Dialogues, therefore, according to Wegerif (2001, 2010), offer a huge potential in learning and teaching, thus emphasising and reinstating the value of social aspect of learning.

Parallels can be drawn between these different social constructivists' views of knowledge construction, for example, Dewey's psychosocial views of knowledge construction; Vygotsky's proposition of social-cultural influences on learning and Mercer's and Wegerif's views on dialogic pedagogy. They all emphasise the prime role of social interaction in learning (for example, Dewey, 1938; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Mercer, 2004, 2008; Wegerif, 2001; 2010) and cognitive development, describing knowledge as proceeding from the inter-mental (between people) to the intra-mental (individual knowing) (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). Social constructivism has subsequently been extended and developed further, often classified under neo-Vygotskian perspectives (for example Bruner, 1977, 1979; Cole, 1992; Rogoff, 1995). These neo-Vygotskians, and others, have been

extending the debate on the role of language, students' participation, community and culture on knowledge construction.

With its contributions from various scholars and theorists, social constructivism is often seen as 'social construction' of ideas about the world. Some of the social constructivists' ideas have been translated from different native languages into English, for example, Vygotsky's ideas were originally written in Russian and later translated into English, arguably with some misconceptions and alterations to fit with US or Western European understandings (Daniels, 2005). Social constructivism, in itself, therefore, can be regarded as a socially constructed understanding of the ideas of various scholars. In general terms, social constructivism can be summarised as a theoretical perspective that:

“characterizes development as a process (dynamic) instead of structure (statics); as an activity instead of a passive maturation; and as an ongoing, contextualised interaction mediated by language and other semiotic devices in a culturally and historically relativised contexts instead of a solitary practicing of an ‘internal machinery’ of cognitive skills”

(Stetsenko and Arieviditch, 1997: 161).

Social constructivists, therefore, as argued above, believe that reality is constructed through shared human social activity (Kim, 2006). They also believe that knowledge is a human creation, constructed by social and cultural means (Prawat and Floden, 1994; Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). It is the social interaction amongst individuals, and their interaction with their environment, which lead to the creation of meanings and understanding (Kim, 2006; Pritchard and Woollard, 2010). Learning, therefore, becomes a social and participatory process when individuals engage in social activity, with a range of others, and when new or repeated sensory input (for example, words, pictures, stories, dialogues and much more) is related to pre-existing knowledge and understanding.

A social constructivist teacher, therefore, values learner reflection, cognitive conflict, peer interaction and also understands learners' pre-existing conceptions, thereby guiding the activities to support them and then build upon them (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010).

In HE research, the focus is not so much upon development but the processes and activities that one uses to construct knowledge draw extensively upon cultural and social tools of students such as language, technology, and many more (for example, Wegerif, 2015, 2016). The theories (and key concepts) that are particularly useful in the context of my HE research are discussed in the next section.

4.2.1 John Dewey

John Dewey (1859 - 1952), an American psychologist, philosopher, educator, social critic and political activist, is seen by many as one of the most significant contributors to the development of educational thinking in the twentieth century (Giles, Jr. and Eyler, 1994; Fairfield, 2009; Jackson, 2012; Devendorf, n.d). He is recognised for his contribution to education, especially for arguing for a prominent place for democracy and students' experience. Dewey is regarded as one of the fiercest critics of traditional education systems, whose views and publications gained popularity with the advent of compulsory education in the West, especially during the late 1800s and the turn and rise of the twentieth century. His earlier writings and work focused more upon school education but the later work and generic application of school education was soon realised across different levels of educational institutions.

4.2.1.1 Dewey and democracy

The first concept that I draw upon from his philosophy is that of 'democracy' in education. At the very end of the nineteenth century, Dewey articulated the misfit between the educational aims and methods of his time and the rapid social, cultural, political and economic changes in society. With the changing social conditions at that time, such as the advent of democracy and industrial conditions, Dewey argued that no one could actually prepare a child for any precise set of conditions to match the pace at which the society was changing. No one knew exactly what conditions the children were going to face in future, say, in the next twenty years of time (Dewey 1897). The best preparation, therefore, he asserted, was not to follow a strict regime of traditional education but to enable children to get command of themselves, to be able to have full ready use of their capacities and capabilities in diverse conditions (Dewey, 1897). One of the ways to prepare children's

capacities and capabilities, he proposed, was through the introduction of democracy in education, to mirror the ways in which society was changing and developing. Dewey, therefore, strongly advocated for the inclusion of democracy in education and saw it as a way of government that would enable citizens to enjoy freedom, but in a well organised civilization. For him, democracy was a central ethical imperative in education (Dewey, 1903/1916).

“Democracy means freeing intelligence for independent effectiveness-the emancipation of mind as an individual organ to do its own work. We naturally associate democracy, to be sure, with freedom of action, but freedom of action without freed capacity of thought behind it is only chaos” (Dewey, 1903: 193).

As apparent in the quote above, Dewey argued that if educational establishments ignore the trait of democracy as a spiritual force, which is the freedom of intelligence, both students and teachers are negatively affected. A lack of recognition of democracy, for him, raised a conflict and discrepancy between the relatively undemocratic practices in educational institutions; with the growing expected application of democratic principles in general social life (Dewey, 1903). This misfit, he argued, needed to be addressed by introducing the notions of democracy in education. Democracy, for Dewey, needed to rest on the principles of ethics rather than something technical (Dewey, 1903). These ethical principles, such as removing the authoritarian role of a teacher, he believed, would enable the building of a relationship of responsibility and freedom of mind and discovery between the students and teachers. The teacher, Dewey argued, needed to have the power of initiation and constructive endeavour and students, would then develop their individual mental powers and adequate responsibility for their use (ibid).

Dewey demonstrated his commitment and conception of democracy in his own school (opened to children in 1896 in the University of Michigan, for details, see Phillips, 2014) where the school was regarded as a community of learners. Dewey was equally concerned with developing the minds and activities of both students and teachers (Devendorf, n.d.). His ideas gained popularity through his publication, ‘Democracy and Education’ (Dewey, 1903/1916), where he reasserted democracy as a way of defining culture.

4.2.1.2 Dewey and experience driven education

A popular book that extended Dewey's thoughts on democracy, was 'School and Society' (Dewey, 1990). In this book, Dewey argued for democracy to be "*born a new generation and education to be its midwife*" (Devendorf, n.d.). By this he implied educational institutions to be characterised by engagement with activities that are important for the students in their current and future lives.

Dewey argued for yet another vital educational approach, experience based education, which is the second concept from his educational philosophy that I intend to use in my work. Dewey challenged the authoritarian and pre-ordained knowledge approach of traditional education and argued for the need for experiential education, often known as progressive education. Dewey (1938), therefore, advocated for an activity based education where freedom was given to students, but his approach towards freedom was the one with a caution. Dewey was critical of a "*completely free, student-driven education*" (Kirschner, et al., 2004: 8) as he believed that students often do not know how to structure their own learning experiences for maximum benefits (Kirschner, et al., 2004). He wanted education to be grounded in real life experiences and proposed that, within educational institutions, students should be provided with opportunities to think for themselves and articulate their thoughts, as an alternative to rote learning (Dewey, 1938). The issue with traditional education, he argued, was adults trying to teach materials that had no basis in learners' lived experiences. The gap, he argued, between the adult (with mature knowledge and experiences); and the experiences and abilities of young children, is so wide that "*the very situation forbids the active participation by pupils in the development of what is taught*" (Dewey, 1938: 19). Teaching material that forms part of children's culture, for example, material drawn from their everyday life experiences and interests; together with critical thinking skill, he asserted, was a far better utilisation of education, against the memorisation of rote knowledge.

It is these two concepts from his philosophy of education, democracy and experience-based education, which I intend to draw upon in my work. I am recontextualising his views for the current education system as Dewey's philosophy, one must bear in mind, was influenced by the social situations at that time, for example, the two World Wars (Garrison, 2008).

There were different prevailing issues at that time, such as child labour, and a dire need for the states to create more schools to accommodate children and to enable them to learn skills that they would need to thrive in a non-agrarian society (Devendorf, n.d.). It was also a time when society was going through a period of conflict, contemplating the meaning and application of the concept of democracy in political and social lives.

4.2.1.3 Democracy and experience driven education in contemporary education

Dewey's views on democracy and experience based education can be applied in today's educational contexts. Both concepts can be seen to be interlinked. The ideals of Dewey's democracy can be related to more recent work of participatory democracy (for example, Englund, 2000; Freeman, 2013, 2014). Educational institutions, these authors assert, should use such processes which draw upon students' everyday experiences, thereby reducing the gap between teachers' abstract knowledge and students' experiential knowledge. The creation of such situations where students can draw upon their previous knowledge and lived experiences, enable the conditions for active participation in knowledge construction. The role of the teacher, instead of presenting abstract knowledge to students, is to be aware of and draw upon students' prior and current experiences when they present facts, concepts and values for critical discussion. Students, therefore, would evaluate different views of arguments and negotiate learning with an openness, taking and accepting decisions mutually, thereby absorbing ways of living and learning together (Englund, 2000; Fielding, 2011).

It is these pedagogical processes that enable the preparation of students for educational experiences and participation within the community of the school and university; and also for a social and work life beyond educational institutions. Experience and democracy, in a true learning situation, therefore, have both lateral and longitudinal dimensions (Hall-Quest, 1998), where reasoning and dialogues are used to educate students. It is these reasoning and social learning approaches, which I explore using another social-constructivist, Lev Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in the next section.

4.2.2 Lev Vygotsky

Vygotsky, like Dewey, can also be called one of the founders of the social constructivist perspective, since it was his theory that showed the vital role that culture and social contexts can play in learning. According to Vygotsky (1962, 1986), learners' social and cultural knowledge evolves through active engagement with physical and social environments. The quality of pedagogical processes develops through interaction between people, and people and objects, within learning contexts. This perspective takes into account the values, norms, culture, traditions, contextual specifics and heritage of society (Nola, 1997). The main role of a teacher, therefore, is to support these ideas by enabling children to participate in collaborative learning activities, where they can draw upon their cultural tools with (more competent) peers and teachers, within safe environments (Vygotsky, 1962). A provision of opportunities for freedom of expression, where both the teacher and the learner can participate actively, share knowledge and develop a common understanding of mutual experiences, is important (Vygotsky, 1962).

One of the best known concepts in Vygotsky's theory is the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD). Unlike constructivism, which focuses upon the active role that the learner plays in constructing and internalising meaning through discovery learning, with a limited role for the teacher; social constructivism shows the critical importance of the role of a teacher or more knowledgeable other (peer or adult), who actively assists in the learning process. An essential feature in social constructivist learning, according to Vygotsky, is that it creates a ZPD, that is:

“learning awakens as variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the learner is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Once these processes are internalised, they become part of the learner's independent development achievement” (Vygotsky, 1978: 90).

In other words, in social constructivism, mediated social activity is the key to learning (Thompson, 2013). It can however be argued that in this teacher-learner interaction, it is the teacher who organises learner's activity, starting from a material or concrete form. Knowledge acquisition and construction originate when the material form of an activity

transforms into mental forms during the teaching-learning process. New knowledge, therefore, originate in the material form of an action, and only after transformation, in the course of certain interaction between the teacher and the learner (ZPD), they become mental actions (Stetsenko and Arieviditch, 1997). So, for higher order learning to occur, learning has to start from a social (interactional) level but then needs to be moved into an individual level, a process often referred in Vygotsky's theory, as 'internalisation' (Vygotsky, 1978). The unit of analysis for 'learning' in such methodologies is therefore individual rather than social. It is however the social aspect of learning that my study intended to look at, making me not to choose the ZPD concept in my conceptualisation and analysis. The insights offered from Vygotsky are however invaluable and provide a comprehensive understanding of learning from a cultural, social as well as individual perspective. The collaborative learning processes, being the focus of my work, made me consider the use of dialogic approaches in contemporary education, which I extend upon in my next section, by using Wegerif's views on dialogic education.

4.2.3 Rupert Wegerif

Another educationalist, drawing extensively on social aspects of learning is Rupert Wegerif. Wegerif's central idea on education is to draw students together and support them to participate in dialogic learning, resonating with Dewey's ideals of democracy and experience based education, as discussed in sections 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.2, above, and drawn from Mercer's ideas on dialogic pedagogy (Mercer, 2000, 2008). Wegerif believes that a dialogic approach is essential in pedagogical environments as it helps to move beyond the monologic concept of learning, as portrayed in most traditional learning theories, including those of Piaget and Vygotsky (Wegerif, 2013b). He draws the meaning of the word dialogue from Greek words 'logos' and 'dia'. 'Logos' means 'reason/ discourse/ word' and the word 'dia' meaning 'across or through' (Wegerif, 2016). Therefore the combined word dialogue, for Wegerif, means the generic process of making meaning across a gap of difference, which brings multiple perspectives into play (Wegerif, 2016). Dialogue, therefore, in this sense, is not restricted to communication between the two people, but can be used in contexts where multiple perspectives are taken into account. Monologue, on the other hand, can be regarded from an etymology of "*single voiced*" (Wegerif, 2015: 63) which implies

that there is only one correct version of reality and one correct method of thinking (Wegerif, 2015).

Learning, which is often described in monologic terms, therefore, can be reconceptualised from isolated moments of experience into more dialogic ways of communication and knowledge construction (Wegerif, 2016). For a dialogic learning to sustain, it should give rise to a new question, and so on, leading to the formation of dialogues amongst participants and a certain level of openness to each other's views (Wegerif, 2016).

Wegerif critiques Vygotsky's implicit assumption of the openness of the notions of dialogue, especially within the concept of ZPD, which is essentially regarded as social in nature. Wegerif argues that ZPD is seen as a space where teachers and students share their perspectives in order to see things from each other's view point, which, at first glance, sounds dialogic (Wegerif, 2013b). ZPD, however, can be seen as a subordinate to dialogues which reflects a monologic vision of education, which leads students away from a participatory way of thinking towards the use of pre-established concepts. The role of a teacher is to participate, or rather attune herself or himself into students' ZPD to help them move from their "*fuzzy ill-formed initial ideas*" (Wegerif, 2013b: 59) into something more coherent and consistent, which matches with the concepts already in culture (Wegerif, 2013b). The more experienced adult becomes a mediator who guides the student to do things in the "*right way*" (Wegerif, 2013b: 61). Wisdom, however, does not always arise as a result of interactions within the ZPD space or internalising the thought but also by engaging more fully in dialogues with others, with different voices (Wegerif, 2013a, 2013b).

Wegerif's notion of dialogue resonates with Fielding's (2004) proposed methodology of 'dialogic alternative' and participatory democracy (Englund, 2000; Fielding, 2011), as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, which moves the methodological focus from speaking *for* participants (students) to speaking *with* participants. Dialogic pedagogy, therefore, becomes a mutual and two-way process where both parties learn simultaneously, and not just the student; and also becomes deeper and more critical, where participants question each other's assumptions (Wegerif, 2013b).

4.2.4 Social constructivism and higher education

When applied in HE, social constructivism takes into account the mediated nature of knowledge via various cultural tools, such as language and interactional activities, which can be a combination of verbal, visual and other forms of participatory cues (grouped under the concept of dialogue). The aim is to help build knowledge about self, educational institutions, everyday experiences and society through reflection and meaning making (Shore, 2008).

In a social constructivist learning environment, dialogues, therefore, play a vital role as they become a means of mediation between the student and the world, responsible for shaping and extending students' thought (St Pierre Hirtle, 1996). Mediation through language, in the form of dialogue and reasoning, helps to develop and sustain a culture of enquiry that is critically co-constructed and negotiated between the tutor and students (Wegerif, 2015, 2016). The use of enquiry helps to extend boundaries of knowledge construction when prevailing or existing knowledge or presumptions are less likely to get accepted without questioning (St Pierre Hirtle, 1996). Enquiries are dialogic in nature, drawn from students' everyday experiences and understandings, thereby giving students opportunities for active participation (Dewey 1938; Englund, 2000; Mishra, 2014). A democratic, social and critical learning experience for students is therefore at the heart of social-constructivist practice.

A learning community, grounded in social constructivism, therefore, coheres with Dewey's and Wegerif's views in that the key components of their theories are embedded within learning and teaching approaches. The tutor, for example, makes explicit links with students' experiences to inform pedagogy (Dewey, 1933/1998) and uses them to establish a mutual, two- way communication (Dewey, 1925/1981). For two- way learning to flourish, social constructivists also focus equally on power dynamics where staff endeavour to create a culture or environment of participatory democracy (Dewey, 1903/1916; Englund, 2000; Fielding, 2011), to facilitate the development of ethically sound and mutual relationships amongst all participants (Dewey, 1903/1916). Knowledge is therefore not regarded as neutral, but rather a dynamic entity which is mediated and created through social interactions (St Pierre Hirtle, 1996).

4.3 Implications for my study: conceptualising students' participation using the interplay of critical theory and social constructivism

Both theories, critical theory and social constructivism, as discussed above, originated from different ideological positions, but the link between the two arguably, can be established. The scope of critical theory is wider than education and has its origins in social emancipation of more marginalised groups. Social constructivism, though rooted more specifically into education, illuminates the social aspect of learning and knowledge construction, bringing forward notions of equality through participation and democracy; and also via the value it attaches to students' previous learning and experiences. It is the co-construction of knowledge through dialogues and the explicit and implicit learning that affects both students and tutors, which connects social constructivism with critical theory. Social constructivism, therefore, can potentially offer a pragmatic way to apply the ideals of critical theory into practice. The methodological application, as evident from earlier discussions, is possible through participatory research. Participatory research, again, has its origin engrained in emancipatory work, like critical theory, but emphasises the social aspect of knowledge construction, drawing upon participants' local experiences and knowledge, hence showing a pedagogical coherence with social constructivism, too.

It is this interaction between critical theory and social constructivism, which I refer to as *critical social-constructivism* that I use as a conceptual framework for my study. The application of theories sits beneath the wider umbrella of participatory research, which comfortably accommodates various concepts from both theoretical perspectives. The details of participatory research and its position in my research is discussed further in the next chapter, Chapter Five. The figure below (figure 4.1) illustrates the interaction between the two and shows how the concepts from both theoretical perspectives can be studied and utilised under the umbrella of participatory research.

Critical social-constructivism that I derive by combining social constructivism with critical theory, as discussed above, overlaps with the idea of critical constructivism, which itself is grounded on the notions of constructivism. Critical constructivism, like most social constructivist approaches, asserts multiple perspectives of knowing and understanding (See section 4.2, above). To social constructivists, nothing represents a

neutral perspective and critical constructivism, too, emphasises a pluralistic orientation in understanding epistemological realities (Kincheloe, 2008). A combined theoretical perspective in education, therefore, can also be drawn from critical constructivism where students take the role of researchers, and tutors, co- researchers (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2005). There are various examples from practice where critical constructivism has been applied to study different educational phenomena, using different pedagogical and theoretical concepts from critical theory. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2005), for example, apply it to post- formal thinking and teaching asserting the value of a democratic and informal but intellectually disciplined classroom where students and tutors, through reasoning, enquiry and interaction, are able to create and co-create knowledge. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2005) set forth the case for creating classroom conditions where students can become sophisticated researchers, who are able to produce their own knowledge and, when facilitated by an adept tutor, construct their own curriculum. Kincheloe (2008) also argues for a place for critical pedagogy in HE to address the much wider social and educational issues surrounding intellectually depressed students who struggle to engage critically in their learning when they find that much of their higher education consists of the similar rituals of rote learning that dominated their school education, hence contributing to the discourse of transformative education (extending the work of Freire, 1973; Freire and Macedo, 1995).

Another researcher and educator advocating for critical constructivism in educational research is Bentley (2003). Bentley (2003) and Bentley et al. (2007) also utilise critical constructivism under the construct of critical pedagogy, especially to discuss students' partnership in classrooms. A critical constructivist pedagogy, Bentley et al. (2007) argue, can facilitate the *"students to shape and reshape their own conceptual biographies through the development of intellectual tools and attitudes about the social basis of knowledge"* (Bentley et al., 2007: 2). Parallels here can be drawn between Freire's notions of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 1973; Freire and Macedo, 1995- see section 4.1.3) and Kincheloe's (2008) and Bentley et al.'s (2007) arguments on the use of critical constructivism in education. They all emphasise the social aspect of learning and the role of critical dialogues in extending the learning and teaching experiences of students and tutors.

A recognition of critical constructivism, therefore, can provide opportunities to a participatory researcher to build various openings within the research to help participants not only build ideas but also reflect upon their thinking and decision making. An exposure to reflective processes and critical knowledge construction, arguably, has the potential to help graduates challenge the production and reproduction of social power structures in society (Bentley et al., 2007). An acknowledgement of the social nature of knowledge, therefore, can help to give space to the learners to value the cultivation of critical communities of inquiry in order to establish a new democratic social order (Bentley et al., 2007).

Similar to participatory research, critical constructivism renders itself to seek benefit from a variety of social, cultural, philosophical and theoretical positions, giving the intellectual freedom to the researcher to formulate a rich conception of the phenomenon under study. The implications of adopting a multiple theoretical and methodological study validates the researcher to use a variety of research methods and theoretical constructs, a phenomenon, referred by Kincheloe (2008) as “*bricolage*” (pg: 8), which I also found useful in my own study.

Whilst these inspirations from critical constructivism (Bentley, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004, Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2005; Bentley, et al., 2007; Kincheloe, 2008) offer important insights, I have preferred, instead, to use the term ‘critical social- constructivism’, as it resonates more closely with the combined ideological principles of social constructivism and critical theory (mainly, Dewey, 1897, 1903, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Mercer, 2008; and Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016). Critical constructivism, although grounded in the notions of constructivism, predominantly displays the ideological beliefs of critical theory. The ideas and beliefs are in accordance with those of Freire (which I have already discussed above, in section 4.1.3), who in turn, was mainly inspired by a Marxist view of human emancipation from oppression. In this thesis, although, the participatory nature of the educational research project aligns with critical constructivism, but in order to engage more explicitly and fully with the social aspects of knowledge construction, I draw more strongly, than the critical constructivists, upon democratic, dialogic learning and therefore, describe the theoretical conceptualisation for the work as critical social-constructivism (see figure 4.1).

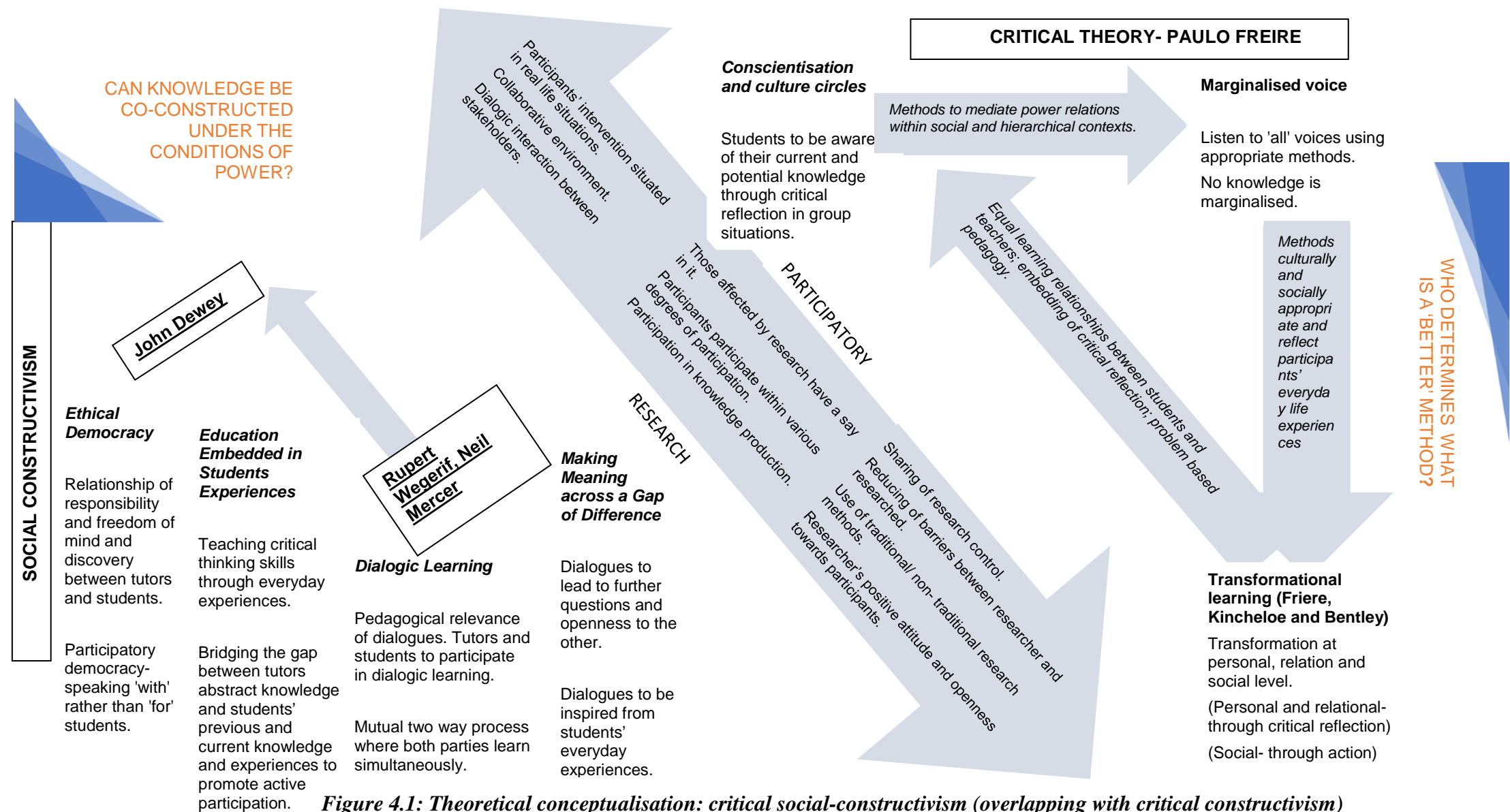


Figure 4.1: Theoretical conceptualisation: critical social-constructivism (overlapping with critical constructivism)

Of particular relevance in this conceptualisation, as illustrated in figure 4.1, are Freire's notions of critical pedagogy that include aspects of conscientisation (culture circles and critical reflection), power relations, marginalised voice and transformation; Dewey's views on democracy and experience embedded education; and Wegerif's assertion on dialogic learning. The dialogic understanding of literacy education, as articulated first by Freire, proposes that education is not culturally or politically neutral. He places value on relationships and believes that it is the mechanisms used to develop and foster relationships that contribute in the building of different kinds of communities (Freire, 1973). The extent to which these relationships can be collegial and mutual, can be established with the help of social constructivism, especially, through Dewey's notions of ethical democracy (1903/1916) and Wegerif's view of dialogic pedagogy (2015, 2016). All these theories and concepts, either in isolation or in collaboration, have influenced the data collection and analysis of my project, as explained in the implementation of the project and data analysis chapters that follow.

As evident from figure 4.1, Dewey's ethical democracy and Freire's conscientisation can be regarded as pedagogical ideals which can be applied in educational contexts by establishing and opening dialogic relationships between tutors and students. Dialogues can take different forms, such as speech, activity, problem solving, writing and other more subtle and symbolic forms of communication, such as creative text and drawings. With the careful creation of a safe dialogic space, both students and tutors can participate, listen and learn simultaneously from each other. Listening, therefore, leads to greater inclusivity, reducing the likelihood of marginalising groups or individuals. Dialogues provide a framework for activity based education where stimuli, such as a task to plan and develop an ECRR Room as a pedagogical space, give opportunities to students; especially ECS degree students, a majority of whom are already in practice; to participate and draw upon their previous and newly acquired knowledge and experiences, and co-construct new learning through critical reflection.

Knowledge co-constructed in a more equitable environment, with the inclusion of problem and activity based situations; and embedding of opportunities for critical reflection, has the potential to transform individuals, groups and even institutions. ECS

students, through their collective participation, were therefore able to make use of their previous learning and experiences, and presented a critically co-constructed plan and design for an ECRR Room. The processes reflected the ethos of democracy and participation, concepts that underpin the theoretical curriculum of participants' academic course in the university. Knowledge and skills that the ECS students brought, acquired and co-constructed during their participation in the project are therefore likely to help them further in their academic and also professional contexts (Weimer, 2002).

The methodological application that I utilised for my study, therefore, drew from critical theory and social constructivist frameworks. Social constructivism, as stated earlier, is often regarded as a social construction or reconstruction of ideas of learning as contributed by various theorists, ranging from classic Dewey and Vygotsky to new educationists, like Wegerif. Similarly, Paulo Freire's ideas on critical pedagogy were developed in an effort to democratise education in Brazil, which led to the perception of pedagogy as a means to political liberation and revolution (Elias 1994). In Freire's writings, pedagogy had a specific or emancipatory purpose (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011). The adoption of these two theoretical frameworks, developed in different socio-cultural contexts and times, were being applied cautiously to offer lenses of meaning making in contemporary HE. Their application, in the conceptual analysis of my work, arguably, is far away from the original locations of their initiators but the concepts are used as a vehicle for critical engagement with the meaning making process.

Conclusion

The chapter discussed different theoretical perspectives and their position within my study. Inspirations, particularly, were drawn from critical theory and social constructivism, especially, Freire, Dewey, and Wegerif's views on critical pedagogy, democracy, and dialogic learning, respectively. The ideals from each theory were discussed and argued for inclusion in participatory work with students. The chapter also reviewed the methodological application of key concepts from each theory, leading to an amalgamation of ideologically separate, yet related theoretical ideas, proposed as

critical social- constructivism. The use of critical social- constructivism in knowledge construction, especially for HE collaborative learning activities, is argued and contextualised for my research, with ECS students. The influence and application of the underpinning theories on my research is extended and argued further in the next two chapters on methodology and implementation of the project.

Chapter 5: Methodology and research design

In the previous chapter, I argued for the inclusion of a combined theoretical perspective as a framework to support my study. Concepts from critical theory and social constructivism, in particular the views of Freire, Dewey and Wegerif, were used to theorise the approach to research. This chapter extends that discussion and argues for the application of those theoretical ideas into a participatory research methodology. The research itself focused upon the use of participatory approaches in understanding HE students' views and meaning making processes; and the implication of these approaches on wider pedagogical practices, in this case, the planning and development of an educational space, in the form of an ECRR Room. The ECRR Room was intended to provide students with curriculum enhancement opportunities through the provision of practical resources and development of research skills. The study, therefore, sits within the broader area of participatory research, with the following aims and objectives:

1. To analyse the use of participatory approaches in developing a co-constructed and critical understanding of a pedagogical space in the form of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room).
2. To analyse the benefits of students' participation in a pedagogic activity that supports their learning and personal development.
3. To critically reflect on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project as an academic and a participatory researcher.

In Chapter Two and Three, I argued that students' participation in HE is generally limited to feedback mechanisms, largely used for quality enhancement purposes (Seale, 2010; Cook-Sather, 2011; Bovill, et al., 2011). There is a dearth of the utilisation of student voice in pedagogic processes, which are more dialogic, empowering and transformative in nature (Jaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014), indicating insufficient conceptualisation of participatory research in HE (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014). My research contributes to the pedagogical discourse in HE by providing a methodological framework for the use of participatory approaches in understanding students' views; and is likely to have both pedagogical and empowering benefits for the participants,

including myself as a researcher. The research aimed to assist in the development of a pedagogical space; with prospects for students' learning at personal, relational and social level. This ambition suggested the need for a small scale; primarily, a qualitative study; which could be meaningful for both students and staff; and could provide opportunities for both groups to share their views and perspectives in a mutual, shared and democratic environment. It was, therefore, paramount to select appropriate research methods that would enable the students to value their own knowledge and experiences; and also develop their capacity to participate critically in group situations (Pant, 2008), alongside the members of staff.

The chapter, therefore, presents a methodological account of my study, which enabled the adoption of democratic processes (Dewey, 1897, 1903/1916), in a pedagogical environment. The aim was to use dialogic mechanisms (Fielding, 2011; Wegerif, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2016), which were participatory, rather than representative in nature, to help in the co-construction of knowledge about the needs and purposes of an ECRR Room. The chapter starts with a discussion of the ideological, methodological and epistemological position of participatory research (PR), and its position in my study, with ECS students. The value of an open-ended research methodology, with reference to participatory group meetings, is also discussed. The chapter, overall, gives an account and a justification for the methodological approach, selection of research participants, role of the researcher and the methods employed in working in partnership with students, to understanding their views and perceptions of an ECRR Room.

5.1 Ideological, methodological and epistemological position of participatory research

Participatory ideals originated as a reaction to the (world) 'development' paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s that primarily had a top-down conception (International Institute of Sustainable Development, n.d.). The formal social science methods of the late 1950s offered little involvement for the stakeholders, who would undergo 'development', and happened to be the majority poor of the 'developing' world (International Institute of Sustainable Development, n.d.). Participatory development, therefore, arose as a reaction to this top-down perspective of looking down upon the 'less powerful' (ibid). The growth

of participatory work, as a research approach, can be traced to the work of Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda and the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1982; Fals-Borda, 1980, 1987, 1991), whose (social) work with oppressed communities in South America, Asia, and Africa, in the 1970s and 1980s, helped towards establishing alternative approaches to counter the hegemonic nature of research (Minkler, 2004; McIntyre, 2008).

Fals-Borda (1980, 1987, 1991) and Freire's (1970, 1973, 1982) work aspired to empower the marginalised and disenfranchised people, particularly the "*poor and working-class people of colour*" (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009: 24). The methods they used to work and research 'with' common people contested the view of participants as mere recipients of social change; and challenged the governance of universal laws for measuring human behaviour through positivist research, thereby questioning the traditional researcher-researched dichotomy (Lancaster University, n.d.). The whole idea of PR at that time was to argue for a place for the participants within the research process. Participants, who were generally common people, were seen integral to the process of change. PR, therefore, produced a valid and vital turn in research convention, claiming for the inclusion of alternative methodologies that would enable the participation of common people as researchers. It was this establishment of alternative approaches to conventional research (Minkler, 2004; McIntyre, 2008) that gave PR a "*liberatory orientation*" (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009: 24), whose prime aim became to counter the hegemonic nature of research for constructing knowledge that related to the daily life and work of common people (McIntyre, 2008).

Following on from its initial work, PR, especially with the rural and socially marginalized communities, has been commonly realised in the form of: Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in the 1960s (Pant, 2008); Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) in the 1970s (Bergold and Thomas, 2012); Community- Based Participatory Research in the 1970s (CBPR) (Goins, et al., 2011); Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the 1980s' (Burgess, 2006); and, more recently, community engagement and community-academic partnerships, amongst others (Goins, et al., 2011). Participatory research, therefore, has been used as an umbrella term for different approaches of

participatory enquiry, originating mainly from criticisms of positivist research and a critique of the role of the external researcher in the less developed world, especially when working with the marginalised groups (Riet, 2008; Lancaster University, n.d.).

The conceptual framework of PR, rather than being uniform, can vary, depending upon the context and aims of the work, ranging from participatory learning and action, to community engagement and community–academic partnerships (McIntyre, 2008; Goins, et al., 2011). Regardless of the approach taken, emphases are generally placed upon: political education; liberation of marginalized people; local participation in knowledge production; and on interventions situated within real-life experiences (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009); and all these experiences are supposed to be situated within collaborative environments (Gouin et al., 2011).

These characteristics of PR makes transformation and social justice (for the less powerful) the fundamental concern of its work. The primary aim is to bring changes in the living conditions of the communities involved through adoption of non-traditional research methodologies (Riet, 2008). The use of non- traditional methods enable the researchers to work ‘with’ communities often characterised by low levels of literacy, limited experience of interaction with government or bureaucracy and language barriers (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998).

Participatory research, therefore, has made its own ideological position as an alternative approach to conventional research (Minkler, 2004; Cahill, 2007; McIntyre, 2008; Riet, 2008; Pant, 2008; Rodríguez and Brown, 2009; Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Its epistemological framework provides a bottom-up approach that places emphasis upon the critical insights of the community collaborators (Cahill, 2007). It is idealised as a theoretical standpoint and collaborative methodology that is designed to ensure that those who are affected by the research project have a voice in that project (Ozer, et al., 2010). PR, therefore, in itself, is regarded as an empirical methodological approach in which local people (affected by a problem under investigation) engage as co-researchers and contributors in the co-construction of knowledge that is relevant and meaningful to them (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009).

There are certain empirical assumptions and methodological strategies embodied by PR that make it different from other social science research, for example: the principle of PR to see local co- researchers as possessing expert knowledge, derived from their everyday participation in the contexts (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Pant, 2008; Rodríguez and Brown, 2009); the methodological approach of PR to create democratic, social and politically safe spaces for the participants to contribute freely within various degrees of participation (Kellett, 2010; Bergold and Thomas, 2012); its unique partnership approach which seeks to break down barriers between the researcher and the researched (Minkler, 2004); and the researcher's positive attitude and frame of mind that includes respect, genuineness and openness to experiences (Kidd and Kral, 2005). PR, therefore, should not be underestimated as a particular method but valued as an orientation to research that may employ a number of qualitative and quantitative methods (Minkler, 2004).

The above ideals of PR suggest it to be regarded as a research approach that is ethically and morally more inclusive and democratic than traditional research (Riet, 2008). Epistemologically, therefore, it focuses upon 'knowledge for action' rather than the conventional aim of research as generating 'knowledge for understanding', which may be independent of its use in planning and implementation (Dewey 1938; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). PR, therefore, can be regarded as an appropriate philosophical and methodological approach for the study of human action, especially within the domain of social sciences (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Pant, 2008; Riet, 2008). It considers the social aspect of reality through studying humans' dialogic interactions (Riet, 2008), which may include exploration of experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders (Ainscow, n.d.). The dialogic nature of PR positions it within an interpretivist paradigm, inclined more towards the qualitative methods of investigation (whist not ruling out the possibility of quantitative measures). Participatory researchers, however, argue that relevant methods flow from the collaborative research questions and could, therefore, be either qualitative or quantitative, or a combination of both (for example, Kidd and Kral, 2005). PR, as a research approach, transcends the common debate on research methods as its prime concern is collaborative decision making, including the selection of context

specific research methods. The research may start from a qualitative method of dialogic communication but the open discussion may eventually lead to the selection of more structured quantitative methods (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008).

PR, therefore, includes a range of methods and techniques that can be used according to the knowledge and experiences of the local participants (International Institute of Sustainable Development, n.d.). These can be either novel methods or methods derived from traditional research. The underlying assumption is that creation of knowledge is not limited to written or spoken words but includes active representations of ideas, use of symbols, drawings, storytelling and even direct activity in the context of the study (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008).

Participatory researchers often make use of the vivid, graphic and concrete features which enable them to work efficiently within different degrees of commitment and motivation of the participants (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998). Novel approaches can be activity based and involve visual representation, such as video, art, mapping, modelling, diagramming, photography and time lines; or they can be interactive workshops; peer research and estimations, such as ranking (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008; Crivello, et al., 2009; Lancaster University, n.d.). PR can also include conventional approaches like semi-structured interviews, case studies; traditional surveys and oral histories (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008); as long as the use of these methods assist in breaking down imbalances of power between the researcher and the researched and enable representation of participants' everyday life and culture.

An important distinction to recognise here concerns the difference between participatory methods and a participatory approach. Traditional research may include participatory methods, but that does not make it participatory research in a full sense (Lancaster University, n.d.). It can alter the character of otherwise more traditional research (ibid) but, for a participatory research design, the researcher has to respect the ideological perspectives of PR and implement it throughout the process of research, for example, from conceptualising a project to the dissemination stage (ibid). Local knowledge and

perspectives, therefore, not only get acknowledged; rather form the basis for research and planning in PR (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995).

The ideological position of PR, as evident from the discussion, above, can therefore be summarised as a commitment to the full democratisation of both content and method (Kidd and Kral, 2005). It is this ideological position of PR upon which the methodology of this study sits, but implications are being realised in an educational rather than a sociological context.

5.2 Pedagogic use of participatory research in my study

My research, more specifically, sits within the pedagogical context of PR, undertaken for the purpose of knowledge co-construction between students and tutors in an HEI, where I took inspirations from other similar work being done in the sector (for example, Rodríguez and Brown, 2009; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014; University of Lincoln, n.d.; University of Bath. n.d.), as discussed in Chapter Three. The pedagogical influence was intended to be realised in two distinct ways: firstly, by drawing upon participatory knowledge co-construction methods, as derived from learning theories by Freire (1970, 1973), Dewey (1897, 1903, 1938), and Wegerif (2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2016), to work in partnership with students (see Chapter Four, above, for details); and, secondly, in relation to my own professional development as a participatory researcher and an academic in the field of ECS, situated within a contemporary HEI.

There is evidence of PR methodologies being utilised to elicit reflective practice amongst HE staff (for example, Duffy and O’Neil, 2003; Campbell, et al., 2007; Seale, 2014 et al.). The implications of PR need to be extended beyond the theoretical and methodological aspect of academic disciplines to include critical reflective practice (Jaitli, 2010), where tutors get the opportunity to utilise, build and critically reflect upon their personal epistemological beliefs in learning and teaching, for example, in classroom practice (O’Siochru and Norton, 2014). Evidence, however, suggests that there may not always be synergy between tutors’ personal epistemological beliefs and classroom practice, and in some cases, the two may even contradict (Olafson and Schraw, 2006).

One possible explanation that O'Siochru and Norton (2014) give for such conflict is "*contextual constraints, such as curriculum, policy and traditions in teaching*" (pg: 197) which, as discussed earlier in Chapter Two, are in a state of transition in HE due to the embedding of a more commercialised market based education system within the sector (Shore, 2008; Carey, 2013b; Freeman, 2014). The changes are likely to place undue pressure on tutors to rush through the curriculum, to face market demands; with fewer opportunities to engage with theoretical concepts, such as democracy and participation, with students. It therefore becomes essential to critically reflect on our professional practice, which in this context, is in the form of my role as a facilitator of a participatory project, and an academic in the field of ECS, based within a contemporary HEI. If we do not take the opportunity to reflect upon what we do, there is a risk that we may become so ingrained in our work that we may unconsciously continue to hold on to the constraining conventions, which may limit us from challenging existing practice and making any changes (Kember, 2000; Norton, 2009).

If tutors continue to struggle to display their epistemological beliefs through their practice, then an alternative way to look at learning and teaching can be by reflecting upon the ways these epistemological beliefs inform the delivery of that discipline (O'Siochru and Norton, 2014). The discipline knowledge of early childhood, as stated earlier in Chapter One, is underpinned by the notions of democracy, inclusivity and participation (QAA Subject Benchmark Statement, 2014). Norton (2009) asserts the influence of subject discipline on our everyday practice. My orientation to practise is likely to be influenced by the experiences that I had as a student whilst learning the subject (Norton, 2009) and also by my evolution as a researcher through my post graduate studies and continual professional development (CPD) activities. The discipline influence, therefore, extends beyond the past learning and teaching experiences and includes epistemological and cultural determinants (Norton, 2009), which I have been accumulating through my engagement with various research and CPD activities. My practice as an academic is influenced by: what I learnt and experienced as a student (which was built around the principles of democracy and equality); the subject that I teach (for example, children's rights, as discussed in Chapter One); and what I read and attend for my CPD (for example, Dewey, 1897, 1903, 1938; Freire, 1973; Dahlberg

and Moss, 2005; Wegerif, 2013a, 2015, 2016) and attendance at various national and international education conferences.

From my reading and previous research experiences, I recognise that PR is widely being accepted as making important contribution to the knowledge base of early childhood sector (for example, Clark and Moss, 2006; Clark 2010; Murray 2014, 2015) but it is a continuing struggle to make early childhood research more democratic, participatory, empowering and deeply ethical and political in its orientation (Winterbottom and Mazzocco, 2016). This struggle resonates with the political climate within the early childhood field, in which there is increasing pressure on providers to implement standardised tests, driven by educational policies and reforms that are primarily positivist in nature. This shift towards adoption of more positivist methodologies in practice is affecting the training of professionals in HEIs, as institutions, too, in an attempt to prepare prospective practitioners for their future roles, are beginning to make more use of didactic curriculum materials rather than open pedagogical approaches (Winterbottom and Mazzocco, 2016). These didactic approaches, sometimes, are used as substitutes and not extensions to the existing curriculum and learning and teaching approaches, hence creating a lack of participatory culture for knowledge co-construction.

Practitioners and tutors who value (social) constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, therefore, are feeling marginalised. There is, hence, a need to re-emphasise participatory and democratic conceptualisations of EC epistemology to inform future (and current) practitioners by implementing these ideals more explicitly into our own practice (Barceló et al., 2013). My study contributed to this argument in two ways: firstly, it considered different participatory approaches for involving students in pedagogical discussions for knowledge co-construction; and secondly, it offered opportunities for me to reflect on the ways my epistemological beliefs were affecting the wider pedagogical processes of developing an ECRR Room with ECS students.

5.3 Participatory Action Research or Participatory Research?

As explained in Chapters One, Two and Four, above, my intention was to work towards creating a participatory space where staff and students could openly discuss their views and perceptions of an ECRR Room; and design it as a meaningful pedagogical space for use by both. The emphasis, therefore, was on locally defined priorities and perspectives (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995) within an HE context. Two closely inter-related research methodologies, Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Research (PR) seemed to be the appropriate approaches to undertake this work. The methodological principles of both approaches are the same, with both approaches primarily focusing upon collaboration (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005), but there is a subtle difference between the two; with PAR placing more emphasis upon action and change; and PR upon collaborative research activities.

The prime aim of my study, unlike PAR, was not to explicitly co-produce change (Lancaster University, n.d.) but to produce knowledge in collaboration with students and staff. PR, therefore, with its underpinning participatory approaches, was the appropriate methodology to enable a partnership approach between the researcher and the researched (Minkler, 2004). The joint process of knowledge-production was anticipated to lead into new insights on the part of the researcher and participants (Bergold and Thomas, 2012), where both would enter into a reflexive process, becoming co-learners and co-interpreters (Mannion, 2010). The participatory methods were also suitable to enable me to study my own actions of forming relationships with students and seeking to document our shared knowledge and communications in an egalitarian way (Gouin et al., 2011). The joint knowledge thus produced offered opportunities for change but change, unlike in action research, was not the driving force of my research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012).

Besides the subtle differences between PAR and PR, I am cognisant of their similarities and overlap; and their interchangeable use in research literature. I am therefore not dismissive of the overlap, but refer to the methodological approach in my work, in this thesis, as PR rather than PAR.

5.4 The value of using open-ended research methods

Qualitative methods are believed to be more naturalistic and participatory modes of enquiry that can help a researcher disclose the lived experiences of individuals (Lincoln, 1992). An open-ended investigation aids the researcher to uncover unanticipated findings which can aid content for further exploration (Leko, 2014). It is this fluid nature of research that helps a researcher to understand and describe research participants, rather than predict and control them (MacDonald, 2012), a notion that fits well with the participatory nature of my enquiry. Research based on social situations, at an epistemological level, generates collective responses and therefore cannot represent a single objective reality. Participants represent multiple realities which are based on subjective experiences and circumstances, often influenced by their lived experiences (MacDonald, 2012). More open ended research methods help researchers to listen to these subjective views, thereby putting participants' voices at the forefront, enabling the researcher to engage in a more holistic examination of the phenomenon under study (Leko, 2014).

A choice of open ended research methods (as participatory group meetings) was therefore regarded appropriate to give opportunities to my research participants to draw upon their previous and newly gained knowledge (Dewey, 1938; Richards, 2011) about ECS and its related research and pedagogy. It was anticipated that the fluidity of methods would help the participants communicate views through a medium of their choice that was more likely to match with their lived social and educational experiences (Dewey, 1933, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Ponterotto, 2005; Kidd and Kral, 2005; MacDonald, 2012). The choice of methods, however, could be either qualitative or quantitative (or mixed), depending upon the participants' preferences. The selection of qualitative or quantitative methods, as discussed earlier in section 5.1, does not apply strictly to PR. The nature and type of methods to be used emanate from the collaborative discussions and decisions made by the participants (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008). The approach may be primarily qualitative or quantitative, but the methods selected can be a combination of both. This became more evident to me as a researcher as I progressed through different phases of the ECRR Room project, with the students.

5.5 Participatory group meetings

The selection of participatory meetings, as a research strategy, was based on two fundamental assumptions. Firstly, it was designed to enable the individuals to provide rich sources of information on a topic; and, secondly, stimulating individual and collective responses through participatory group meetings was intended to generate material that would have been difficult to collect through other methods (William and Katz, 2001). In a group discussion, for example, a comment from a participant could encourage a train of thoughts in another participant, and so on, leading to the development of new ideas and ways of connecting participants' circumstances and stories, to specific situations. These stories may have been difficult to capture through other methods, like questionnaires or individual interviews. The focus, therefore, was more upon the research participants, who were anticipated to guide the flow and direction of discussion, than on the dominant role of the researcher (Freire, 1970, 1973; William and Katz, 2001).

My role in participatory group discussion was that of a lead researcher, guiding, but taking care not to dominate. In my facilitative role, I was responsible for providing a subtle structure to the discussion, however, the details of the dialogues were mainly influenced by the participants' input (Dewey, 1903; MacDonald, 2012). The structure and content of discussions was influenced by the similar ECS backgrounds, knowledge and experiences that we all held as participants. As a researcher, I facilitated and introduced the topic and also supported the group members hold discussions amongst themselves (Overseas Development Institute, 2009).

The benefits of participatory groups were mainly twofold. Firstly, as the group tapped into different opinions and multiple views of participants' experiences (Overseas Development Institute, 2009), it provided me with rich and high quality data, that gave a "*tiny glimpse of the (students') world*" (William and Katz, 2001:3) which a researcher or tutor would not normally experience otherwise (William and Katz, 2001). Secondly, participatory group discussions also led to participants' empowerment due to their recognition as experts; the development of a sense of collectiveness by working closely

with me as a researcher and other participants; and also by having had an experience of being able to articulate their views and speak in public (William and Katz, 2001).

The selection of participatory group meetings in my study, therefore, helped me to organise a forum for all participants in which dialogues were to be initiated and experiences shared (Dewey, 1903, 1933; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Wegerif, 2013 a, 2013b, 2015, 2016). Also, as participatory group lent itself to using more open ended methods, it was anticipated that the discussion and exchange of ideas amongst participants would emanate the development of critical and practical knowledge (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Freire, 1973, 1970), applicable in the ECRR Room context.

5.6 Research participants

With the study's prime aim to explore meaningful ways of engaging with students to develop an ECRR Room, the immediate participants were the students studying on ECS courses, for whom the space was being proposed to be developed. The room was to be made available to students, ranging from Year 1 undergraduate to postgraduate studies. An appropriate way of approaching students was by selecting tools that formed part of students' everyday social and educational life in the university (Krishnaswamy, 2004).

Electronic media is one of the major ways through which university connects and communicates with its students; and students, too, use the electronic tools, such as Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and student e mails, to correspond with the university. These tools are very much part of students' and staff everyday routine communication activities at the university. I, therefore, decided to use students' university e mail and announcements on the VLE to reach to all ECS students in the department. Recruitment information was also distributed via classroom announcements, leaflets in social areas (like canteen) and posters in the corridor where lessons were mostly timetabled. All recruitment material, including student e mail, VLE announcements, leaflets and posters, outlined the need for recruiting 20 students, who were to be selected on a first come first served basis (see appendices 1.0-1.3). Twenty

was anticipated to be a large enough number to represent diversity of thoughts amongst students and still small enough to enable us to engage in in-depth conversations.

As a response to these recruitment methods, 25 students expressed interest in participating in the study. All 25 students were invited to attend a briefing meeting, through student e mail (see appendix 1.3), with an expectation that a small minority might not be able to attend or continue with the project. Out of these 25 students, 20 came forward to attend the first meeting. In the end there were, therefore, 20 ECS students from the department, ranging from Year 1 undergraduate students to doctoral researchers, who participated in the study.

The table below (table 5.1) illustrates the breakdown of student participants and the range of different levels of ECS courses. The data and findings however, are not reported by individual contribution, rather as collective co-construction of ideas for an ECRR Room, as perceived and shared by all these participants. The participants in the table are not arranged in any order of priority. They were assigned an alphabetical letter in the same order as they consented to participate in the study.

S.No.	Participant	Level of course
1.	Participant A	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
2.	Participant B	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
3.	Participant C	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
4.	Participant D	Masters Year 2, Level 7
5.	Participant E	PhD
6.	Participant F	Masters Year 2, Level 7
7.	Participant G	PhD
8.	Participant H	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
9.	Participant I	Undergraduate Year 1, Level 4
10.	Participant J	Undergraduate Year 2, Level 5
11.	Participant K	Masters Year 2, Level 7
12.	Participant L	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
13.	Participant M	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
14.	Participant N	Undergraduate Year 1, Level 4
15.	Participant O	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
16.	Participant P	Undergraduate Year 2, Level 5
17.	Participant Q	Undergraduate Year 3, Level 6
18.	Participant R	Undergraduate Year 1, Level 4
19.	Participant S	Undergraduate Year 2, Level 5
20.	Participant T	PhD

Table 5.1: List of student participants by course

Due to the participatory nature of the project, an invitation was also extended to colleagues in the department, through staff meetings and staff e mails. Three colleagues and an administrator (with responsibility for prospective ECRR Room) expressed interest and also participated in the study by attending various participatory group meetings. The diversity of membership was essential to allow for collaboration between tutors, students and the administrator, to take into account the experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders (Pankaj, et al., 2011), which is a prime characteristic of PR (Richards, 2011). The knowledge brought by the researcher, staff and students, when combined, was expected to alter the system and produce a

pedagogical space by listening to the views of all, instead of a few privileged people (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

The inclusion of organic processes like collaborative discussion and feedback mechanisms from students, tutors and administrators (through participatory group meetings) was intended to challenge the traditional ways of thinking and decision making (Richards, 2011), which otherwise, generally, only allow a preferred minority to contribute in decision making. Considering the open collaboration between students and staff, from a pedagogic position, made student voice an integral element of the project but not the *only* element. The process also included other stakeholders (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Brydon-Miller and Maguire, 2009), like, tutors and an administrator, who also showed keen interest and stayed engaged in different phases of the project, but more at a facilitative level (Overseas Development Institute, 2009). The participating staff were briefed by me, at the beginning of the project, on the nature of the participatory project and their supporting roles within it.

The diversity of participants in the study therefore represented an organic move, which was an attempt to steer away from traditional learning–teaching roles and bureaucratic structures to encompass a more participatory structure. The opening of membership to both students and staff for institutional decision making, was anticipated to help policy with practice (for example, see Goal 3 of University Corporate Plan as explained in Chapter Two, section 2.3), a process that Richards (2011) calls double-loop learning. This practising of participation is especially true in ECS programmes where the discipline places strong emphasis upon children’s rights, democracy and planning learning through listening to children’s views (Luff and Kanyal, 2015). The learning and teaching in ECS programmes, therefore, validates the inclusion of democratic principles into our own practice, to model open and inclusive listening strategies for prospective and current ECS practitioners and leaders (Barceló et al., 2013; Kanyal, 2014b).

5.7 My role as a researcher

As discussed earlier, in section 5.6 (above), the role of a researcher in participatory group methods is generally that of a facilitator. My role, therefore, was primarily aimed to introduce the group to discussion topics and also to give each discussion topic a loose structure (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012). Inspirations for my role, theoretically, were taken from Dewey’s (1897, 1903) notions of ethical democracy; Wegerif’s views on dialogic relationship (2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2016); and Freire’s views on conscientisation (1970, 1973), as discussed in Chapter Four. I wanted to establish opportunities for open communication of ideas in meetings, using dialogic methods of participants’ choice, whether in writing, speech or by visual means, that would lead to pedagogical knowing in an early childhood context. I also wanted to build opportunities for critical reflection where participants would be able to critique and discuss their own and each other’s views. The aim was to build a dynamic community that would be open to negotiation but also challenge any presumptions and pre-conceived ideas that lacked rational explanation.

To enable me to put these theoretical ideas into practice, my role was guided by various features of ‘radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation’ (Lancaster University, n.d.) and ‘characteristics of effective and genuine participation’ (Lansdown, 2001) to help me make the environment of the meeting groups as participatory as possible. Lansdown (2001), however, argues that there are no fixed formulae for effective participation, as the creation of any such blueprints can take away the opportunity for participants to be involved in design and development of the project. However, as a result of learning from different participatory initiatives in the past, as discussed in Chapter One, I took inspiration from the following frameworks of participation to inform the working of participatory group discussions.

The table below, table 5.2, shows the radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation, as exemplified by Lancaster University (n.d.), for participatory research with adults. I found definitions of the ‘mode of participation’, the ‘nature of user involvement’ and the ‘relationship between research and users’ helpful in assisting me

to structure the overall environment and also facilitate group discussions in participatory group meetings.

Mode of Participation	Nature of User Involvement	Relationship between research and users	
Co-option	Token; representatives are chosen, but no real action	On	↑ more 'traditional' ← more 'radical'....
Compliance	Tasks are assigned, with incentives; researchers decide agenda and direct the process	For	
Consultation	Users' opinions asked, researchers analyse and decide on a course of action	For/With	
Co-operation	Users work together with researchers to determine priorities; responsibility remains with researchers for directing the process	With	
Co-learning	Users and researchers share their knowledge to create new understanding and work together to form action plans with research facilitation	With/By	
Collective Action	Users set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it out, in the absence of outside researchers or facilitators	By	

Table 5.2: Radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation

Source- Lancaster University (n.d.).

The tabular illustration helped me to distinguish and appreciate the mode of participation in participatory group meetings, which, as inspired from table 5.2, was around the principles of 'co-operation and co-learning', highlighted on table 5.2 to indicate the level of students' participation in this project. These two modes of participation were chosen as they fitted with the aims of my study, which was to co-

produce knowledge about the use of ECRR Room, in a democratic environment. The indicator of the ‘relationship between research and user’ (see table 5.2) was also helpful in reminding me of the position of the researcher in PR. Being a facilitator, I used to go to participatory group meetings with a loose structure of the meeting in my mind (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012) and then worked together with the participants to share our knowledge to determine priorities and form action plans for future meetings (Lancaster University, n.d.).

Another framework, although drawn from children’s participation work, but helpful whilst carrying out projects, is the ‘characteristics of effective and genuine participation’, as developed by Lansdown (2001). The ‘characteristics of effective and genuine participation’ offer practical advice on contemplating participation whilst conceiving a project. It also helps to reflect on project’s value and provides further pointers for project methodology. The figure below shows the practical advice on how to promote participants’ involvement within projects, as suggested by Lansdown (2001):

PROMOTING CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC DECISION-MAKING

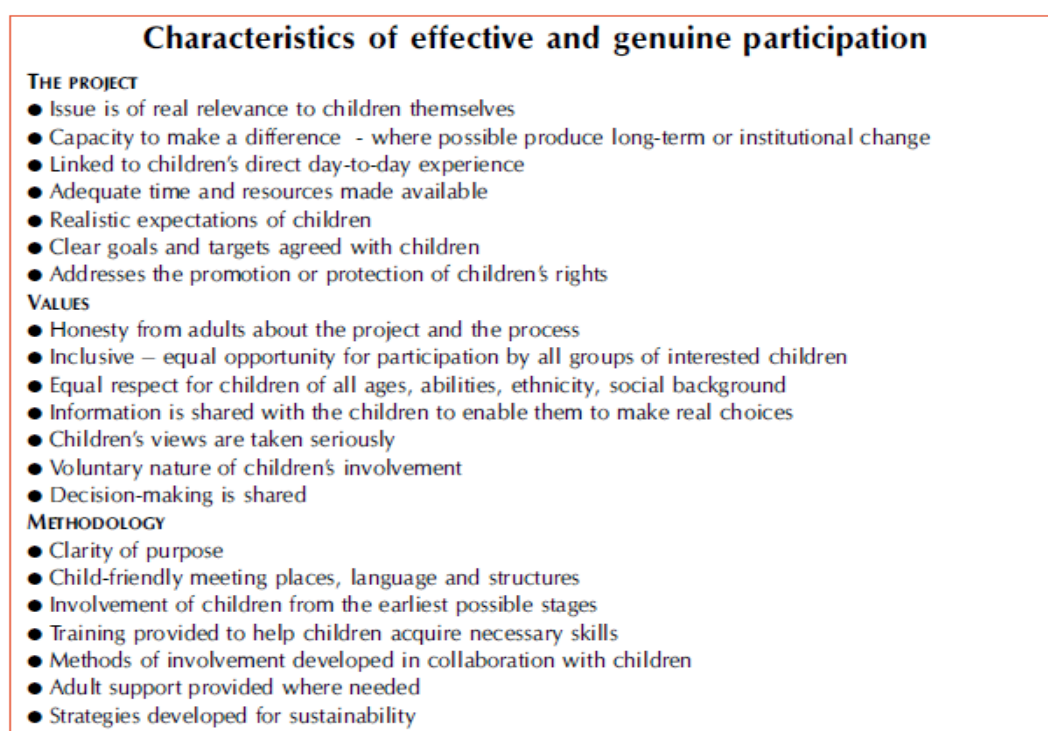


Figure 5.1: Characteristics of effective and genuine participation

Source- Lansdown, 2001

As evident from figure 5.1, the characteristics of participation are described separately for: the project itself; the values behind participation; and pointers for the methodology of the project. Starting with the project, the issue under investigation should be of real relevance to the participants; their engagement should develop the capacity in them to bring about change; the project itself should be linked to participants' everyday experiences; with realistic expectation to engage with the process; and should only be started after an agreement on the goals and objectives has been reached.

These two guiding frameworks (as shown in table 5.2 and figure 5.1) were used as practical advice to support my role as a facilitator in research, and that in turn, informed the working of participatory group meetings. These principles guided me to build opportunities for students to contribute ideas, within various degrees of participation, and reminded me to avoid making any judgements about the quality of participation, by regarding all forms of participation as equally good, including silence (Kellett, 2010). Both guidelines were later shared with the participating students, at a debriefing event, to assist them in evaluating their participation in the project.

Another supportive resource that helped me to grow as a participatory researcher, was my research journal, which I maintained from the start of the study. The journal included an account of my personal learning, experiences and reflections (Bolton, 2014) from various processes and products of the participatory work, as the project went along. The journal also included information on my learning from different research seminars and trainings that I attended, at that time. Of particular relevance were the meetings that I had with my supervisors and the knowledge and understanding of participatory research that I gained by attending and presenting at Participatory Enquiry Forums (PIFs), held as research seminars within the wider faculty; as well as by attending and presenting at Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) annual conferences, in Autumn 2015 and 2016. The entries of my research journal were kept personal, but the learning that emanated by reflecting on it, continually shaped my role as a participatory researcher as the project went along; and also helped me to critically reflect on the whole process, after the ECRR Room project was finished.

5.8 Working group and research group

Recognising the diverse levels and therefore different abilities, needs and interests of student participants, the participatory group was further divided into ‘working group’ and ‘research group’, with the membership of both groups open to all participants. The working group consisted of a mixture of students and staff and an ECRR Room administrator, who met to develop the aims and objectives of the research and also agreed the roles of research participants. The group also discussed the nature, structure and scope of the study. The reason for focusing discussions around the aim, scope and participants’ roles was to enable the participants to understand the social situations in which they would find themselves, when engaged in the process (Barreteau et al., 2010). It was also anticipated that the process would help students in capacity building by learning research skills and techniques, a process identified as empowering by various participatory researchers (for example, Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, 2008; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014).

The reason for opting for working and research groups was also to allow maximum flexibility to participants, as not everyone would be willing to make a full contribution to the study. It recognised the fact that participation is along a continuum, with no single entry and exit points. The input from members therefore ranged from limited to full participation (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Nhamo, 2012). All forms of participation were regarded as good, avoiding any hierarchical assumption in the quality of participation (Kellett, 2010; Barber, 2009).

In the working group, the members were encouraged to share their perceptions of an ECRR Room through a medium of their choice (from a list of preferred methods formulated by them), to record their views. The research group, on the other hand, focused on data analysis and an initial sharing and dissemination of the project’s findings within the department. The members of the working group consisted of all participants; twenty students, three members of staff and one administrator; and research group consisted of the volunteering members from the working group, including, students,

staff, administrator and myself as the lead researcher. The number of participants varied in different research group meetings.

The groups met once in a week for six weeks to give enough thinking and reflection time (Campbell, et al., 2007). Opportunities for verbal and written communication were built-in to be more inclusive in recording participants' views. The membership was capped at first twenty respondents, a condition made clear in all forms through the recruitment material. All participants, towards the end, whether they belonged to the working or research group, were invited to come for a debriefing event, where they were also asked to fill in a feedback form in the form of a semi- structured questionnaire. The feedback form included questions to record students' views on their participation in the project (see appendix 14).

Data collection, therefore was through participatory groups, in the form of working and research group meetings. The participants, in total, were invited to attend six meetings, the first three being working group meetings (WGMs); and the other three, research group meetings (RGMs). The first WGM was project briefing that included a discussion of research ethics and negotiation of informed consent (see appendix 2.1 and 2.2); further two working group meetings focused on discussing participants' views on the ECRR Room. The first two (of three) RGMs focused on research analysis training and the analysis of actual data that were collected in WGMs. The final RGM was a debriefing event, with students invited to complete questionnaires for a project evaluation. A summary of the purpose of working and research group meetings can be found in table 5.3.

To record the data accurately, all meetings, whether working or research group meetings, were video recorded, with participants' agreement. These video minutes were also intended to help me, and other participants, to critically reflect on the process of participation, towards the end of the project. To aid critical reflection, all video recordings were made available to the participants, in the debriefing event (RGM 3); and also revisited by me, at a later stage, after the completion of the ECRR Room project, to elicit my reflexive accounts (Bolton, 2014), as a participatory researcher.

Video minutes, therefore, were used to act as provocation and an aid to promote reflection (Haw and Hadfield, 2011), to encourage critical thinking. It was anticipated that video minutes would give the participants and myself a facility to watch a piece of recorded footage from WG and RG meetings, to help move our thinking beyond the physical and instant action, to thinking about what the participants had contributed and why (Forman, 1999).

In addition to video minutes, the discussions within participatory group meetings were documented on flip charts, by a volunteer in the group; and a report of the meeting, written as word documents, by myself, immediately following the meetings, whilst the details were still fresh in my mind. The summary report included notes from flip charts, video recorded meetings and, as mentioned, information drawn from my memory. The report was not a verbatim account of the meeting but an overall summary of the key points of what was discussed and decided in the meetings (for an example meeting minutes, see appendix 4). Following each episode of the meetings (Working and Research groups), being the lead researcher, I used to send this summary of meetings to all participants via e mail, inviting them for further comments or consensus, and after hearing from the participants, the summaries were documented as agreed final notes of the meetings. The summary would therefore be sent and agreed by the members prior to the next meeting. This routine helped to establish participant validation, where all participants would check the summary for its accuracy of meaning and the degree to which they concurred with the discussions within those meetings (Cotterell, 2008).

To summarise the research design, the study comprised of the following four phases, as shown in table 5.3, building upon the principles of participatory research:

Phase	Details
Phase 1 Recruitment	Reaching students to get an initial expression of interest via university e mail, announcement on VLE, leaflet, poster and briefing in lecture sessions. From here, 25 students put themselves forward to participate in the study and 20 finally came to attend the first meeting (and subsequent meetings).
WGM 1- Briefing and consent	<i>Briefing of the project and informed consent</i> This was the first (welcome) meeting and included discussion on participatory research, its aim, its place as an alternative form of research, the origin and philosophical position of participatory research and project summary, in the form of an introductory training. Students were given participant information sheet, consent and withdrawal forms and were advised to come back with a signed (consent) form to show their agreement for participation in the project.
Phase 2 WGM 2 and 3	<i>Working group meetings</i> The meetings aimed to discuss and decide on a research question, research methods; and collect students and staff views on the use and design of an ECRR Room. An initial interpretation of participants' views was also part of these meetings.
Phase 3 RGM 1, 2 for analysis and RGM 3 for debriefing event	<i>Research group meetings</i> The aim of the research group meetings was to analyse all information collected and collated by the working group, using various participatory techniques. Discussion on dissemination opportunities, students' feedback on their participation in the project and finally debriefing and identification of next steps was all part of the remit of research group meetings.

Table 5 – 5.3: A summary of participatory group meetings

5.9 The use of participatory research: implications for my study

There were various reasons that contributed to selection of PR as a prime research methodology in my study. The planning and development of a shared pedagogic space itself was inspired by the democratic methodology of PR. PR has the capacity to engage individuals as co-researchers, especially the ones who have personal experiences of the research topic (Funk, et al., 2013). All participating students were enrolled either into undergraduate or post graduate ECS programmes, giving them a common grounding of

the academic subject; and also a common understanding of the basic needs and purposes of early childhood resources and research. Belonging to the same subject area also gave them common institutional and disciplinary reference points to draw upon, which assisted in establishing rapport between participants, both students and staff (Maunder, et al., 2013). The common status of ECS students, therefore, became the first and foremost reason to select PR as a research methodology. This mutual status gave them a personal experience of the research topic; and a shared grounding in the subject area, which helped in the facilitation and generation of meaningful discussions (Maunder, et al., 2013; Funk, et al., 2013).

The second reason for adopting a participatory methodology was due to its claim to be a democratic framework built upon the notion of researching ‘with’ and ‘for’ subjects rather than ‘on’ subjects (Lancaster University, n.d.). As the main aim of my study was to create a shared pedagogical space using methods that respected meaningful partnership between the researcher and participants (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Goins, et al., 2011; Wegerif, 2013a, 2013b), PR seemed the most appropriate methodology. PR is different from traditional research in not being directed by an outside researcher and seeks to engage the subjects in getting their voices heard (Dold and Chapman, 2012). It is however important to note that many methods used in PR are drawn from mainstream disciplines and conventional research, but with varying degrees of participation (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995). The use of various participatory methods, therefore, enabled engagement and listening to students’ views, as well as establishing a partnership environment amongst all participants.

The third reason for selecting PR as a methodology was its suitability in giving opportunity to local knowledge and perspectives to form a basis for research and planning (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995). Treating research subjects as partners and respecting their knowledge and capabilities is regarded as one of the fundamental principles of PR (Participatory Methods, n.d.). Participatory Research, in this case, helped to take into account the views of the students who came from diverse educational, practice and work backgrounds, as discussed in Chapter Two, above. Their knowledge and understanding of early years subjects and practice ranged from that of novice ECS

students to that of experienced early years employers and practitioners. The use of PR and its approaches, therefore, helped to take into account students' local knowledge and perspectives, which when combined with that of staff, was anticipated to generate rich data. The local co-researchers, therefore, contributed their newly formed and expert knowledge, drawn from everyday experiences (Dewey, 1938; Rodríguez and Brown, 2009), either as practitioners or as ECS students, in forming the pedagogic environment of an ECRR Room.

The fourth reason for choosing PR methodology was due to its consideration towards power issues between the researcher and the researched. As my study involved working 'together' of students and staff, a methodology that provided a basis for meaningful partnership was needed. This partnership could only be effective if the methods adopted would allow for distribution of power between the researcher and the participants. It is this location of power between the researcher and the research subjects that distinguishes PR from other conventional research methodologies, making PR a methodology of relationships and equitable power (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Participatory Methods, n.d.). These parallel power relations, in my research, were realised in the form of shared decision making activities between all participants, through carefully chosen participatory methods in working group and research group meetings, as discussed above in section 5.8

It is these distinguishing features of PR that made it different from other conventional research methodologies, helping me to reject other research methods and approaches, in favour of PR. The working group and research group meetings were therefore facilitated within the framework of PR, whilst being cautious of various inherent issues and challenges of PR (as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.6, above).

Conclusion

The chapter presented a methodological account of theoretical perspectives through the adoption of participatory research approach. A case is argued for the inclusion of PR in educational contexts, by taking example from my study. I have argued that PR

can create openings for a full engagement between different participants, hence creating a democratic space for multiple interests and methods to inform HE pedagogy. The use of participatory group meetings in the form of working and research groups has been discussed and justified for knowledge co-construction purposes; as well as to shift the power inherent in traditional approaches of learning and teaching. The positioning and relationships between different research participants, including that of a researcher is examined, with regards to developing capacities amongst students to work as co- researchers. A description of working and research group is included in the chapter only to give a brief summary of the research design to the reader. The actual details of the working of the WG and RG are described in the next chapter, Chapter Six. The chapter, overall, discussed the application of PR with students studying on the ECS programmes, arguing for the development of a partnership approach of working collaboratively between students, staff and an administrator.

Chapter 6: The implementation of the project

In Chapter Five, I discussed the ideological and methodological position of PR and its application in a pedagogical context, taking examples from my project. To support the validity of the research, the next step was to select appropriate methods to listen to participants' views about the ECRR Room. Due to the participatory nature of the work, a dialogic approach towards understanding student voice was chosen (Freire, 1970, 1973; Fielding, 2011; Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016). An open ended approach, of participatory group meetings, was selected to allow participants to exchange dialogues within a democratic environment (Dewey, 1897, 1908; Englund, 2000; Fielding, 2011; Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016); and respect each other's previous and current knowledge and experiences (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, 2008). The participatory group meetings were designed to give all participants, including myself as the lead researcher, a fuller insight into understanding each other's views and meaning making processes (Bryman, 2012).

This chapter extends the discussion and provides further details of participatory group meetings. The meetings were organised into working and research groups, as explained in Chapter Five, with opportunities for parallel participation from students and staff. Three different phases of research, which ranged from recruitment of participants to WGMs, to data analysis in RGMs (see table 5.3, a summary of participatory group meetings, in Chapter Five), are discussed. The chapter is, principally, a descriptive account of the implementation of the project, to provide transparency of the processes for the reader. I also provide theoretical reasoning for selecting working and research group meetings as the primary approach for listening to the views of students.

6.1 Phase 1: Recruitment and introduction

This was the first phase of the project focusing on developing and sharing ideas for the ECRR Room. It started with the recruitment of participants, as explained in Chapter Five, and negotiation of informed consent. After recruiting the participants, the initial phase consisted of a briefing event where all participants were welcomed and introduced to the project and also to the notions of PR (Barreteau et al., 2010). They

were invited to participate in discussions to construct the working order and content of the rest of the project. This initial group, therefore, became the working group for the project where decisions regarding the project title, research questions and research methods were made. Discussions were held in a participatory group, called the ‘working group meeting’ (WGM).

Prior to conducting any participatory group meetings, especially WGMs, an initial perception of ECRR Room from students (all ECS students in the department, especially the ones who could not participate in the project but were keen to share their views on ECRR Room) was collected through an online survey. The survey was made live by the department to all undergraduate and postgraduate ECS students through the virtual learning environment (VLE). The survey was not part of this study but the results were shared with the working group members, with an expectation for them to be considerate of other students’ views whilst deciding on the resources and activities for the ECRR Room. The survey, therefore, served as a vehicle to stimulate discussion amongst the initial WGMs. The summary findings from the online survey can be found in Appendix Three.

6.1.1 Working group meeting 1

This was the first of six meetings that were held as part of the participatory project. All twenty five participants who had expressed an initial interest in the study were invited to attend this meeting. Out of these twenty five, twenty came forward to be a part of the project. A breakdown of the participants can be seen in table 5.1, in Chapter Five. The meeting was as an opportunity to brief participants about the project and discuss their role and the scope of the study (Barreteau et al., 2010). Also discussed was the role and place of PR in education and the various benefits that students might derive from participating in a university based student voice study (Krishnaswamy, 2004). The briefing, led by me, was inspired by what Krishnaswamy (2004) regards as the benefits of joining a PR and included discussion points like:

- how students’ participation would give them control over research that can potentially affect their experiences in the university;

- how such research would enable ownership in design, process and results and hence an opportunity of getting students' views built into the ECRR Room;
- opportunities for learning and building research skills;
- building relationships and networks with fellow students and staff;
- the value of recognising different perspectives – hence reducing the chance of conflict; and
- increasing the chance of success and usefulness of research- how the impact could be bigger with everyone's involvement.

(Adapted from Krishnaswamy, 2004).

Participants were also referred to the elements of community-based participatory work (Goins, et al., 2011), to emphasise the collective nature of the ECS academic community; and included the following elements in the introduction, with opportunities for further discussion and questioning:

- recognition of the participating group as a 'community';
- the opportunity to build on participants' strengths and resources - as an ECS academic community;
- facilitation of collaborative partnership in all phases of research; including, research methods, data collection, data analysis and dissemination;
- integration of knowledge and action for mutual benefit of 'all' participants; and;
- promotion of co-learning.

(Adapted from Goins, et al., 2011)

All documentation regarding ethics, for example, participant information sheet, consent form, withdrawal form, were given and participants were advised to sign and return the form in the next meeting. Permission was also sought to record participants' ideas on flip charts, take photos and video record meetings. The details of ethics and related implicit issues are discussed in detail, in the next chapter, Chapter Seven. Participants were shown the results of the online survey, alongside its VLE link, for them to be able

to read the survey (and the results) again, in their leisure time. A physical tour of the space, where the ECRR Room was about to be opened, was given to all participants to visualise and trigger any subsequent planning and designing of the room.

From the first meeting it became apparent that students showing an interest in the study belonged to different ECS courses in the department. It ranged from the undergraduate course (level 4, 5 and 6) to doctoral researchers. This variation made it difficult to identify a common time slot where the maximum number of participants could come and attend the meetings. It became evident that one meeting was not going to be sufficient to accommodate all students in a given time frame. The group, therefore, was divided into two - Tuesday and Wednesday groups - with almost equal numbers of participants belonging to each group, including students and staff. The ECRR Room administrator was able to split her attendance into both Tuesday and Wednesday group meetings. Each meeting was therefore repeated twice, with different participants, for six weeks, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, but the outcomes from each meeting were shared with everyone, in an attempt to maintain the coherence of the project.

The first meeting, called the working group meeting 1 (WGM 1) was however carried out only once, as this was the first time when all twenty student participants and staff had come together to discuss the nature and scope of the study. Decisions about project participation were made together in order to maintain the realistic awareness of participatory methodology (Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Goins, et al., 2011). Various constraints were identified and noted down, for example, time constraints, varying degrees of understanding of participatory approaches and participants belonging to different levels of courses; and how these differences could affect the study (Krishnaswamy, 2004). A rough working structure for participatory group meetings was also agreed, for example, keeping a minimum gap of one week between meetings to enable thinking and reflection time (Campbell, et al., 2007); the lead researcher to collate ideas from Tuesday and Wednesday groups and generate a summary of meetings, to be then e mailed to all participants for consensus; and, sharing of meeting agendas, one week prior to the meetings.

Care was also taken during the briefing meeting not to mislead participants about their degree of involvement and level of influence in different stages of research, from initial planning to the implementation stage (Lancaster University, n.d.). To manage participants' expectations (Goins, et al., 2011), students were reminded of their integral position in the project but also that they were not the only participants. They were made aware, right from the beginning, that the project also included other stakeholders, for example, staff and an administrator, who were also keen to be engaged in different phases of the work (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Brydon-Miller and Maguire, 2009), but more at a facilitative level (Overseas Development Institute, 2009).

6.2 Phase 2: Working group meetings 2 and 3

Phase 2 of the project constituted of detailed discussions and decisions about the needs and resources of an ECRR Room, with an aim for the space to complement students' academic experiences in ECS courses. Phase 2 comprised of two meetings, working group meeting (WGM) 2 and 3. WGM 2 focused more upon making decisions regarding research methods; and WGM 3 started an initial analysis, by putting together participants' ideas on what they wanted to see in the pedagogical space (ECRR Room). The working order and decision making processes in both WGMs are discussed below.

6.2.1 Working group meeting 2

Working group meeting 2 was conducted twice, with two different sets of student participants and members of staff (Tuesday and Wednesday group). Similar topics were discussed and issues explored which were later collated and summarised by me and sent to everyone for their consensus (Cotterell, 2008). Any outcomes shown in this and the following chapters are, therefore, a collated summary of Tuesday and Wednesday working and research group meetings.

Prior to WGM2, participants were sent an e mail, summarising the outcomes of WGM 1, and also outlining a rough structure for WGM 2 (appendix 4), which included three foci. The first task in the meeting was to give the project a title; the second task was to

write questions that would help participants to share their views on the ECRR Room and; the third task was to discuss research methods that would be most suitable to help participants answer the mutually agreed research questions. Inclusive decisions and sharing control of the research agenda was thought to help establish student participants as powerful agents within the project (Baum, et al., 2006). Collaborative discussion within WGMs was also thought to challenge the rigid ways of thinking and decision making (Richards, 2011), which was more likely to have happened in the absence of student participants.

The meeting started with a recap of WGM 1 outcomes, collection of consent forms and sharing of the aims of the study. All participants were reminded of the documentation of group discussion in flip charts (by a volunteer) and the video recorded evidence of meetings. The video camera was not manned but left on a stand in a corner to record the working of the meeting. The three tasks, as described in the paragraph above, were undertaken. Although I have been referring to the room as an ECRR Room, throughout the thesis, but the name itself was discussed and agreed upon in WGM 2.

To initiate discussion, encourage everyone's participation and find common grounds, an ice breaker note card activity was carried out (Krishnaswamy, 2004) (table 6.1). All participants, including myself, were asked to fill out an anonymous card to complete the following sentence:

"In two years time, I would like our Early Years Resource Room to have/be _____".

Table 6.1: Note card activity at the introductory meeting

After completion, all cards were collected, shuffled and read aloud randomly by group members. The note card activity therefore helped to build a momentum for discussion and also helped in formulating a common perception of participants' views on ECRR Room, setting out a focus for the rest of the meeting.

After an initial warm up through the note card activity, the group decided to give the space a name and came up with the idea of Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (one of many ideas - for example, Early Years Resource Room, Education Resource and Research Room). The group also discussed various options to giving project a title and agreed upon:

'Listening to students' views in the development of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room'

With an agreed project title, the group shifted its focus to the second and third tasks of the meeting, which were, (a) to formulate and discuss research questions, the answers to which would help in realising the purpose of ECRR Room; and (b) to discuss and decide the use of appropriate research methods to document participants' views on the ECRR Room. It is acceptable in PR to first identify a problem or theme and then develop questions of an exploratory nature and the methods of answering these questions (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008). The discussion with students on research questions and research methods was intended to recognise the local methods of knowledge gathering as valid, as well as to make me (the researcher) aware of students' local processes for coming to consensus and taking action (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

To support the validity of research, the methods had to remain authentic to students' knowledge and experiences (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009). The methods were also anticipated to help make findings applicable in the local context (ibid), as the language and ideas students would use will reflect the early childhood context, to which they all belonged. The whole process of engaging participants in research was also aimed to help me, the researcher, to become aware of the lived experiences of participants (Kidd and

Kral, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005), for example, what methods of data gathering and recording do students prefer and why, making the whole process co-constructive and mutual (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, 2008).

Being the first meeting, I had already prepared some warm up questions to give discussion a start and to give meeting a loose structure, with enough room for negotiation and reframing of priorities (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012). The questions I thought at that time to be appropriate to help achieve the aims of the study are shown in table 6.2. These were only the initial questions which were open to discussion and amendment by the working group members.

Initial questions	
1.	What is your perception of an ideal Early Childhood Resource and Research Room within the Department of Education?
2.	What do you see yourself, your friends and your tutors doing in the Resource and Research room? (Please try and see that everyone is doing something)
3.	What are your choices of resources that you would like to see included in the ECRR Room. How do you think these resources will be helpful for learning and research in early years?
4.	How would you like to design the ECRR Room? You can share your thoughts through a layout of the map or a general perception of the themes/ focal points.

Table 6.2: Initial questions framed by the lead researcher to realise the purpose of ECRR Room

The questions opened up a discussion where participants exchanged their views and decided to revise the questions that I had written, into a list of specific questions. The built- in mechanism of open discussion, therefore, helped to include and listen to the views of all participants (Kidd and Kral, 2005), and not just the lead researcher.

The revised questions that resulted from working group discussion, are shown in table 6.3.

1. How do you see the Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRRR) useful for your course?
2. What do you see yourself, your friends and your tutors doing in the ECRRR? (Please try and see that everyone is doing something)
3. How would you like the ECRRR develop the following EC themed areas?
 - a. **Knowledge**
 - How can we display the key concepts of early childhood pioneers?
 - How can we display the key theorists and their ideas on childhood and early education and care?
 - b. **Policy**
 - How can we best showcase the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)?
 - How can we offer opportunities to engage with different key areas of the National Curriculum?
 - How can we widen the scope and possibility to include Special Education Needs?
 - What other relevant national/ international policies/ frameworks can be included and how?
 - c. **Practice**
 - What tools and resources you think will be needed to enable students develop ideas and skills to engage with practice?
 - d. **Research**
 - What will be the best way to display the up-to-date information on current researches on childhood; early childhood education; policy and practice; without duplicating the library resources?
 - How can we develop our own culture of research as an EC community?

Table 6.3: Revised and agreed questions to assist participants in forming and sharing their views on the ECRR Room

After a mutual agreement on the questions (which, as evident, were changed from my initial questions to a socially co-constructed list of questions), the meeting focused upon the third and the last task of the day, which was to discuss appropriate methods of data collection. Again, as discussed earlier, I initiated the discussion by sharing my views on multiple methods of data recording (appendix 4). A mutual decision was then made,

based on group discussion, on the most suitable methods of data collection for the project (table 6.4). Emphasis was placed for everyone to answer the same questions (table 6.3) through preferred research method(s). The group generated and agreed upon the following list of methods (table 6.4) which they thought were appropriate to document and share their views on the ECRR Room.

Research methods thought to be suitable by the group	
1.	Recording- audio/ video
2.	Writing- manual/ computer
3.	Poster
4.	Drawing
5.	Pinterest (www.pinterest.com)
6.	Mind map
7.	Photography/ pictures
8.	Post-it notes
9.	Interview- face-to-face/ phone/ webcam by the lead researcher

Table 6.4: Agreed list of suitable research methods to record participants' views on the ECRR Room

After an agreed list of research methods, participants were encouraged to choose one of the methods to record their views and perceptions of an ECRR Room, using the questions, noted in table 6.3, during the gap week, between WGM 2 and WGM 3. The aim was to help all participants communicate their views through a medium of their choice that would match their lived experiences, as well as to make it easier for everyone to participate, instead of choosing one dominant method of meaning making (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005).

To summarise, WGM2 concluded with a suitable name that the participants agreed to give to the pedagogic space (ECRR Room); a project title; a list of research questions to help participants structure their views on the proposed ECRR Room; and a list of research methods which the members of the working group believed were suitable in answering the agreed research questions. The second WGM, therefore, encouraged

participation through the identification of a shared problem and methods, using research techniques that were the best-fit for the situation in an educational context (Mackenzie et al., 2012). My role, other than initiating and facilitating group discussion, was simply as one partner in the research process (Lancaster University, n.d.). After WGM 2, a summary of the meeting was e mailed to all participants (students and staff), for their consensus, with a reminder of the date and agenda for next WGM.

6.2.2 Working group meeting 3

The third and final WGM started with a recap on WGM 2 outcomes and the agenda for WGM 3, which was already sent to all its members, one week prior to the meeting. The focus of WGM 3 was to record and discuss participants' perceptions of an ECRR Room, which they had already recorded prior to the meeting, using one of the agreed research methods guided by the research questions (table 6.3). Participants were asked to look at each other's responses by picking up a random response, laid on the table, and discussing it further within the group. All ideas were noted on flip charts and also recorded as video meetings.

Using the ideas noted on flip charts, WG members drew an initial list of resources and activities that they believed would be useful within an ECRR Room. They further summarised what was discussed earlier, by looking at the flip charts and a summary report of previous meetings. Various similar ideas were put together into separate themes, in the form of a table, that were then discussed for their relevance within an ECRR Room. The table was further discussed and refined, and in some occasions, questioned for validation and consensus (Cotterell, 2008). A final version was produced at the end of WGM 3 (as shown in appendix 5).

This formed the initial analysis of ECRR Room, where working group members generated themes of resources and activities for further analysis by the research group. The initial analysis, therefore, referred to the key components and themes as discussed in WGMs, which were documented in flip charts as well as in meeting report summaries.

The summary of thoughts, written in the form of a table (appendix 5), helped with establishing clarity and accessibility of ideas (Cotterell, 2008).

At the end of WGM 3, participants were further asked to take one response each and come back with any additional ideas and views, if any, to the RGM. WGM 3 was the end of phase 2 of the research. All participants were thanked for their contribution in the project so far. They were further invited to extend their participation by continuing to be members of the research group, whose primary aim was to critically analyse the data produced by the working groups. All participants, except one, wished to continue working in the project, therefore changing student membership from 20 to 19 students, in total. The staff number also changed from 3 to 2. The ECRR Room administrator continued to participate in the research and attended all RGMs. The WGM 3 minutes, from Tuesday and Wednesday groups, were again collated and summarised by me and sent to all participants for their consensus, before being agreed as a final summary.

Figure 6.1 below summarises the working order and outcomes of WGMs:

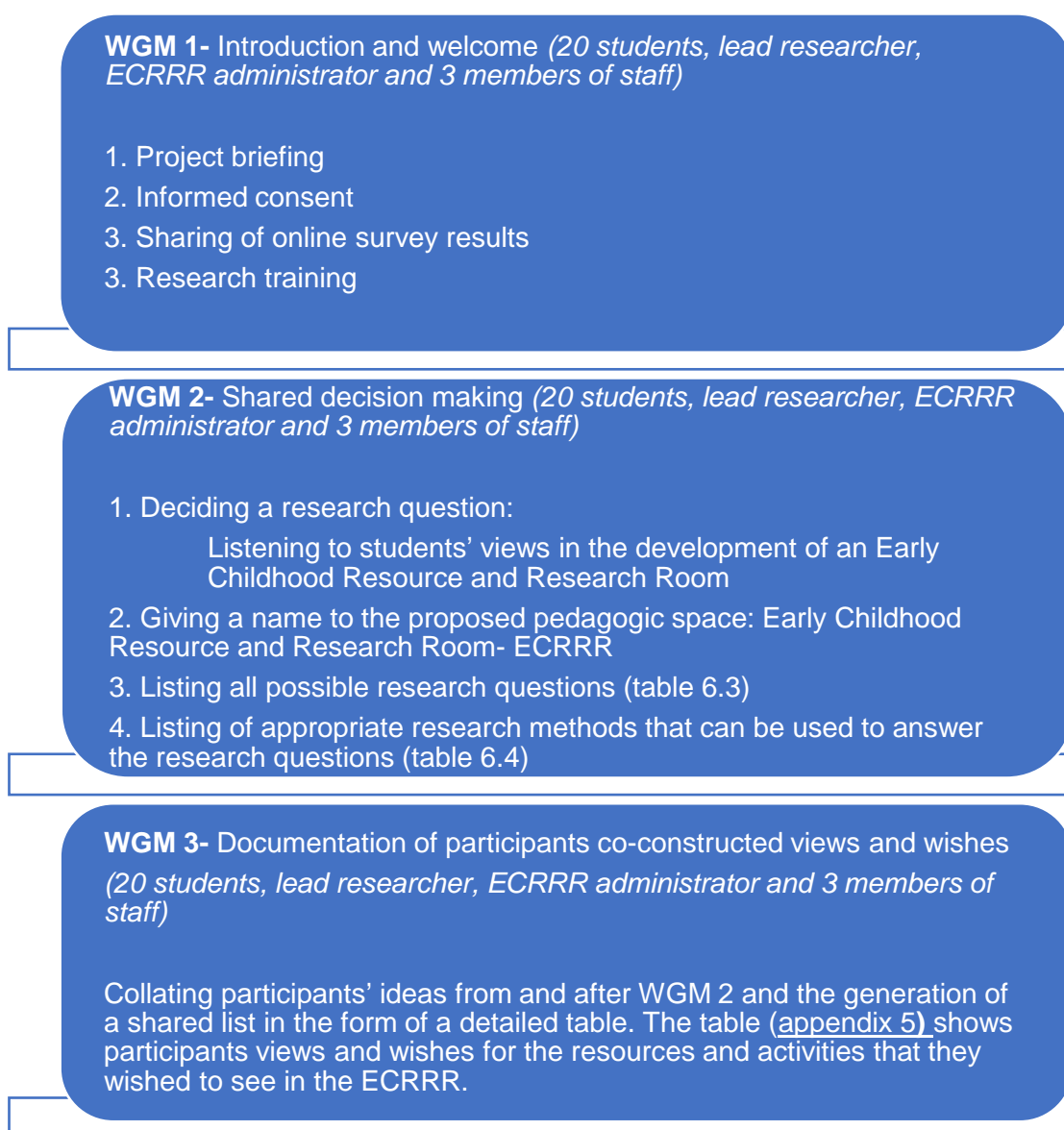


Figure 6.1: Summary of the working order and outcomes of working group meetings (WGMs)

6.3 Phase 3: Research group meetings 1, 2 and 3

The third and final phase of the project aimed at critiquing and analysing further the data that was produced by the working group members. RGMs, therefore, were an extension of WGMs which extended the project by allowing for critical reflection and priority

setting of ECRR Room resources and activities, within an ECS pedagogical context. Critical analysis was intended to help participants move away from their descriptive ideas (Pant, 2008) by prioritising, critiquing and challenging any uncritical views (Bovill, et al., 2011) and false consensus (Veale, 2005). The details and working of the three RGMs are discussed in the sections below.

6.3.1 Research group meeting 1

The main aim of the research group was to analyse the data that was generated using participatory methods in WGMs. It was therefore deemed necessary to first introduce participants to research analysis, located especially within PR methodology. The first part of RGM 1, therefore, focused upon research analysis training.

To impart data analysis training, especially to encourage criticality within a participatory context, I piloted a model: reflexive interpretive framework (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001), that looked at data interpretation, but in a reflexive way. To apply this reflexive interpretive framework, I used a combination of Krishnaswamy's (2004) critical matrix activity and Susan Hart's (1996) innovative thinking. The combination of the matrix activity and innovative thinking was intended to help participants pose a series of questions to each other in order to critically engage with the data (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001); and also agree an order of priority for resources and activities (Krishnaswamy's 2004; Cotterell, 2008) for the ECRR Room. The sharing and questioning of each other's views was seen central to critical decision making and was vital to avoid the hiding of unequal participation (Veale, 2005). The idea was to move beyond the personal preferences of themes, and critically consider the social, structural and procedural issues that would impact on ECS students' pedagogical experiences, through the ECRR Room.

The discussion in the training focused upon finding ways to critique and reflect on the agreed dimensions of the ECRR Room (appendix 5), to make it a more realistic and pedagogically relevant space. Critical criteria were therefore needed to evaluate what was produced earlier in WGM 3. The construction of these criteria was guided by

Krishnaswamy's (2004) matrix activity, which was initially loosely drawn by me and then opened to the research group members for further discussion and modifications, a phenomenon similar to other group activities in the WGMs. The initial matrix included an evaluation of each ECRR Room theme against the criteria of time effectiveness, pedagogical impact, ecological impact and collaboration impact. Each themed item was to be given a score of either high (3), moderate (2) or low (1) priority, based on the identified and agreed criteria. The method, therefore, included the creation of an evaluative matrix, using a quantitative method of analysis; but the scoring of matrix itself was informed by rich exchange of ideas and questions amongst the participants. Prior to scoring, it was first decided to give each theme of matrix a loose definition, for group consensus. The definitions and scoring method of the matrix is explained in Appendix Six.

Before doing the matrix activity, it was vital to prepare the group socially and emotionally, as the discussions could include intense questioning from each other. The possibility of tension and any subsequent dissent between members was likely to happen and, therefore, was paramount to be considered at the time of training itself. For the reflective interpretive framework to work in group situations, it was important for the members to listen to each other's views and perspectives in a mutually respectful environment, before coming to a common consensus (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001). To encourage healthy critical discussion in RGMs, Susan Hart's work on innovative thinking was introduced to the group. Innovative thinking involves a number of questioning moves in response to first interpretation of events, which in this case was the initial tabling of data by the working group (WGM 3) (shown in appendix 5).

To maintain the ethos of respecting everyone's participation in the group, all participants were advised to consider the following questions whilst giving individual scores; and also while sharing and questioning each other's scores in the group. The following questions from Hart (1996: 224), as shown in table 6.5, were adapted in this situation and used as a base to formulate the critical dimension within RGMs. Before each participant could give an individual numeric score to separate themes, they were advised to carefully think about the following questions, as shown in table 6.5:

<i>Can I make any contextual connections?</i>	Participants were advised to think about the contextual influences in the university. For example, the themes that have been listed within appendix 5, were they already accessible via other sources and facilities in the university? Would it lead to duplication of resources and activities?
<i>Taking the other's view: what could be the logic and purpose of the other person's response from within their own frame of reference?</i>	For example, why has the other person given it a different score from mine? What are the differences and similarities in our views about the inclusion or exclusion of that theme within the ECRR Room?
<i>Noting the impact of feelings</i>	How do I feel about this? What do these feelings tell me about what is going on here? For example, how do I feel about the discussion within the group? How do I feel about the agreements and disagreements? In case of any discontent, how is everyone reacting to it, whilst working within the overall emotions and spirit of the group?
<i>Suspending judgement</i>	What else do I need to know before making a judgement about this? For example, have I carefully thought about all possible options? Is there anything that I need to consider, especially after hearing other fellow participants views and their scores? Is the score that I have given a fair score? Do I need to change it in the light of group reflection?

Table 6.5: Questions adapted from Hart's (1996) 'Innovative Thinking' to protect participatory group's spirit, whilst applying a reflexive interpretive framework in RGMs

The inclusion of these questions in RGM 1, prior to giving each theme a final numeric score, helped to maintain the healthy analysis ethos of PR. Here, a group of people, within the same cultural context (students from ECS courses), met to discuss an issue (the creation of a pedagogic space in the form of an ECRR Room); shared and recorded their views; and were going to critically reflect on the decisions that they had taken. The aim was to use critical reflection to draw a further plan of action for the ECRR Room, based on the conclusions drawn from what they had learned from each other (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001).

After the analysis training, the group decided to revisit Appendix Five that was developed at the end of WGM 3. They reorganised the table to include, expand and collapse certain themes for a final version of ECRR Room resources and activities before they could evaluate it against the matrix activity criteria, in RGM 2.

6.3.2 Research group meeting 2

After the analysis training, inspired by Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) reflective interpretive framework; and adapted from Krishnaswamy's (2004) matrix activity and Hart's (1996) innovative thinking probes; RGM 2 focused upon completion of the matrix activity with the research group members. The groups, again, were split into Tuesday and Wednesday groups, and any summary produced was a collated work of Tuesday and Wednesday participatory group meetings.

Before completing the matrix activity, the group decided to make one change in the matrix template (appendix 6) and rephrased 'collaboration impact' into 'social'. The inclusion of the word 'social', for them, had a wider meaning and implications than 'collaboration', for example, 'social' included questioning around belongingness, social events and social identity. The participants agreed to consider questions such as; whether the resources, overall, would relate to EC courses in the department; would the space, in particular, reflect EC students' identity; would the space be welcoming and inclusive to students from other Education courses; would the set-up allow flexibility to organise any social events, such as charity and employability events? The criteria or scoring was left

the same, which was a score of 3 for high relevance, 2 for moderate and 1 for low relevance.

Another change that the group decided to make was to add a section on 'responsibility' to the matrix. It was not included in the scoring exercise but the group decided to discuss whose responsibility would it be to look after and also update each theme. For example, the purchase and management of creative art resources, would it be the role of management, or tutors, or students, or a combined responsibility of all?

In RGM 2, participants first gave an individual score of 1, 2 or 3 to all listed themes of resources and activities. Each theme could either get a maximum score of fifteen (highest score of 3×5 criteria = 15) or a minimum score of five (low score of $1 \times 5 = 5$); with 1 being the low relevance score, 2 being moderate and 3 being a highly relevant score. The scores were then open for group discussion. Participants had to reveal their scores, with the associated reasons, and also listen to the scores and reasoning of other participants. It was anticipated that, whilst working on the matrix, there would be agreements and disagreements within the group and participants would work towards agreeing a 'common score' for each category of themes. The reasoning behind the score, that each individual participant gave, was followed by group discussion, encouraging an exchange of critical questions and reasoning with each other; all structured around the agreed criteria of cost effectiveness, time effectiveness, pedagogical impact, ecological impact, social impact (and responsibility). The probing, cross-questioning and discussions were oriented towards the agreed research aims (as agreed in WGM 2 and shown in table 6.3), as well as the academic and practice premises of ECS courses in the university. Participants were reminded of the 'innovative questions' (Hart, 1996) at the time of group discussion, to protect the emotions of the participants as well as to promote criticality and rationality whilst making collective decisions.

Each group (Tuesday and Wednesday group), therefore generated one final matrix table, out of individual multiple versions. The sum of the collective ratings gave each potential theme a relative value or priority, compared to the other themes and helped to narrow down a long list to a handful of critically agreed priorities. The matrix, therefore,

represented a co-constructed and a critically reflective version of socially agreed priorities, which the students wished to see within the ECRR Room (appendix 7).

6.3.3 Research group meeting 3

Research group meeting 3 was an opportunity to revisit participation and debrief the outcomes of the project. All members of the working and research group were invited to attend the debriefing event. The meeting, again, was divided into Tuesday and Wednesday groups. It was attended by 17 students and one member of staff.

The meeting started with a recap on the summaries from all working and research group meetings. All data collected for the project, for example, through flip charts and video recorded minutes, were brought back. The data were made open to the participants to go through any information and discuss any issues or areas that they wished to revisit, reflect or extend upon. A short evaluation form was also given out to participating students, for them to evaluate their participation in the project. It was an anonymous form, given as a hard copy (appendix 8), and responses were collected either towards the end of the debriefing event or later through office reception, as convenient to the participants.

To critically review the participatory mechanisms in my study, before students completed their evaluation forms, they were shown the guiding features of ‘radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation’ (Lancaster University, n.d.) and ‘characteristics of effective and genuine participation’ (Lansdown, 2001), that I referred to as a researcher whilst conceiving the participatory project (as illustrated in Chapter Five - figure 5.1 and table 5.2). The two models were shown to the students to help them review and evaluate participation opportunities in the project. The filling of the evaluation form was naturally followed by an open discussion about the project and students’ participation within it.

Towards the end of the discussion, a final ‘note card’ activity was carried out, like the one done in the introductory meeting of the project, to help close the loop of the project;

and also to keep the discussion and students' participation alive. The students were asked to complete a note card activity and hand it over to the lead researcher.

The note card activity had the following questions for their further involvement in the project:

Name:

Course details (Course title and year group):

I would like to be involved in the following way(s) in the participatory project and/ or the running and organisation of the ECRR Room

.....

OR

I would not like to be further involved in the participatory project and/ or the running and organisation of the ECRR Room; but would like to share the following ideas for its future use

.....

Table 6.6: Note card activity at RGM 3 debriefing event

The ideas from the note card activity were shared anonymously within the group and various options of continuing participation, discussed.

All participating members were also given a list of dissemination opportunities, both internal and external events; and invited to present the outcomes and analysis of the project with the lead researcher. The students chose and agreed to participate in an internal Brown Bag seminar (informal research seminars at faculty level); and an externally funded, Higher Education Academy (HEA) research seminar, that was being hosted by the department at that time. The students who volunteered to participate, worked further with the lead researcher in choosing the information that

they wanted to disseminate from the project, to internal and external audiences. The presentation preparation and their delivery was shared equally amongst the students and the lead researcher, giving us a joint opportunity to say what we wanted to say, hence, opening the academy to volunteering participants (Lancaster University, n.d.). The members were able to help, select and edit the data in order to get the message across to the wider audience (ibid).

Figure 6.2 below summarises the working order and outcomes of RGMs:

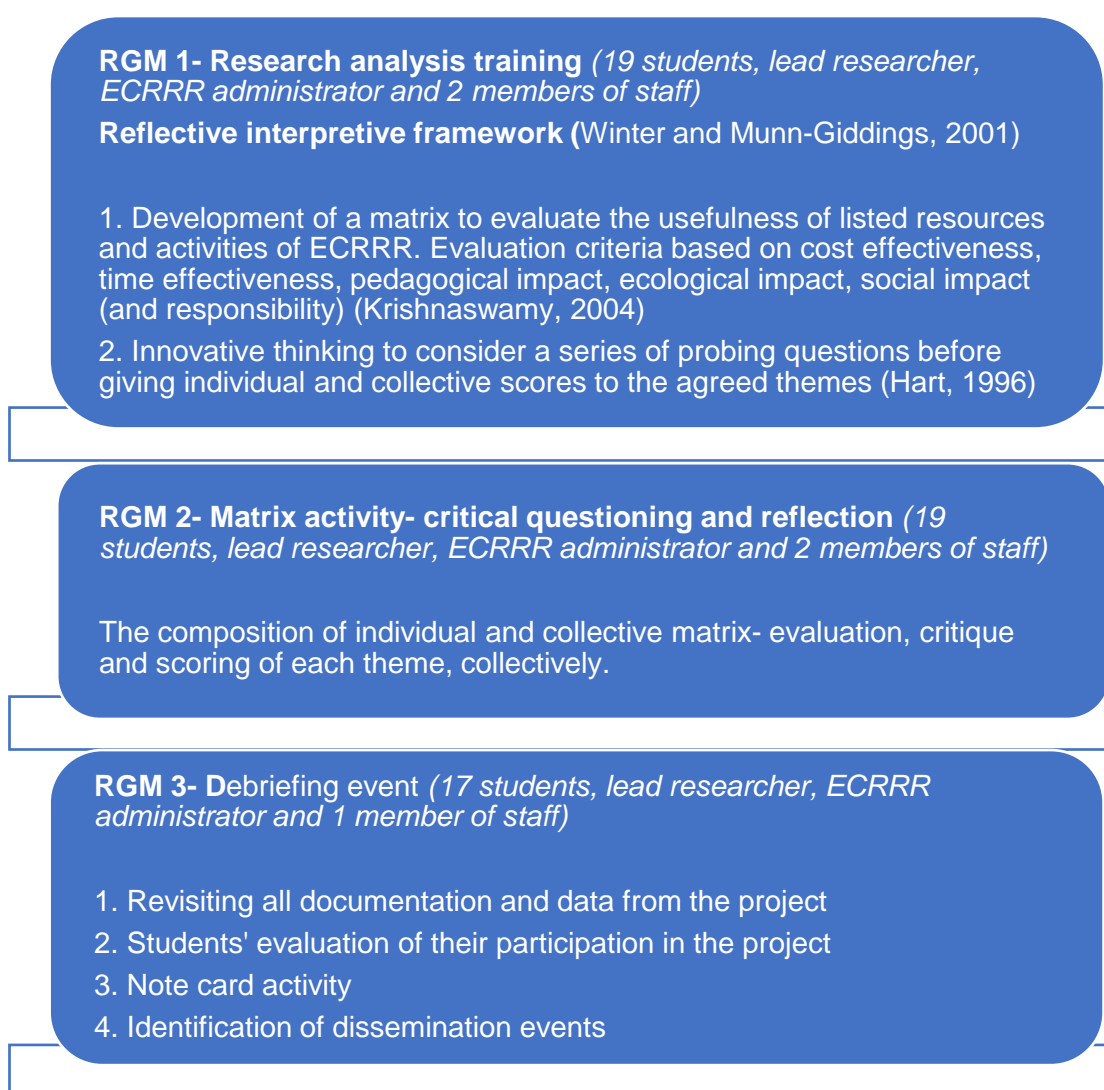


Figure 6.2: Summary of the working order and outcomes of research group meeting (RGMs)

After an initial evaluation of the participatory work, in RGM 3, the project was declared 'closed' and all participants were thanked for their valuable participation in the study. Students were encouraged to form an ECRR Room group for future discussions around the effective running and pedagogic use of the space.

6.4 Theoretical underpinning and the design of working and research group meetings

The project, overall, recognised students as central players in WG and RG meetings. Their voices were regarded vital as they were the ones who were going to be most likely affected by the working of the space (Ozer, et al., 2010). Giving them a status of co-researchers, therefore, only helped to co-construct knowledge that was relevant and meaningful to them (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009).

The sharing and consensus, drawn in WG and RG meetings, were built upon the epistemological principles of social constructivism and methodological application of participatory research. The working of meetings was facilitated by dialogic approaches of meaning making (Riet, 2008; Wegerif, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2016) and formation of democratic environment (Dewey, 1897, 1903; Fielding, 2011). Dialogues reflected various communication forms, for example, speech, writing, layouts, spider diagrams (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008); and democracy was reflected through the recognition of staff and students as parallel researchers (Bergold and Thomas, 2012), contributing ideas in open forums of participatory group meetings (Fielding, 2011), within various degrees of participation (Kellett, 2010). The partnership approach between staff and students was sought to break down power differentials between the researcher and the researched (Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Minkler, 2004; Participatory Methods, n.d.). The freedom of participation was organised in a facilitative environment (Dewey, 1897, 1903), where the lead researcher structured and facilitated the working of participatory group discussions (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012). The meetings, overall, were conducted with a positive attitude and frame of mind, including respect, genuineness and openness for the experiences of others (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

Opportunities were also built-in for experiential learning (Dewey, 1938); firstly, by inviting students to participate in an activity that was grounded in a real life situation, the development of an ECRR Room; and secondly, by providing opportunities for participants to be able to choose research methods, to record their views, that formed part of their everyday experiences in social, professional and educational lives (Dewey, 1938).

The working of research group meetings portrayed resemblance with Freire's cultural circles and the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1970, 1973). The critical questioning and subsequent prioritising was anticipated to help participants develop critical awareness about the surrounding issues, which could impact on their pedagogical experiences within the university. This critical reflection, often referred to as conscientisation, had the potential to become an implicit empowering mechanism by developing the ability amongst participants to take collective action, and change the circumstances, according to their local needs, expertise and status as ECS students. The students did not need an advocate to bestow her or his generosity, or speak on their behalf, but the process of critical engagement (conscientisation) itself paved way for empowerment, through which they were able to make critical decisions. The RGMs, therefore, served a purpose similar to that of cultural circles, in Freire's literacy programmes in Brazil (Freire, 1973- see Chapter Four, section 4.1.3.1). Series of questions, that the students asked each other, were anticipated to help them problematise reality (which was in the form of a co-constructed list of resources and activities for ECRR Room) and distinguish between what was pedagogically relevant (or not so relevant) and what was needed (or not needed) to enrich their ECS curriculum experiences.

The embedding of opportunities for discussion and critical questioning, whilst collecting and analysing data (Freire, 1970, 1973), encouraged partnership, mutual respect and equality amongst the participants, as well as the application of more sustained and elaborated ways of thinking (Freire, 1970, 1973; Englund, 2000). The quality of reflection became as important as the quality of data collected. It also implied that new and useful insights were able to be generated by critically reflecting on carefully selected

responses, rather than including a vast amount of data (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001).

With regards to the benefit of participation to students, other than getting their views built into the design of an ECRR Room, the project also offered them opportunities for capacity building. Capacity building can be linked with the opportunities that the study provided to its members to learn research skills (Krishnaswamy, 2004); build relationships and networks with others (Krishnaswamy, 2004); recognise and value different perspectives (Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014); experience participation in practice (Jaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014); and generate new forms of knowledge (Jaitli, 2010); thereby contributing to transformation in the form of a social and research change in an educational institution (Jaitli, 2010; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014).

A summary of research and theoretical inspirations shaping the methodology and research design of my study is summarised in Appendix Ten.

Conclusion

The chapter discussed and defended the methods used to listen to students' views while planning the resource and research needs of an ECRR Room. Students' participation, especially through various stages of working and research group meetings, helped to co-construct and critique resource and activity needs of the ECRR Room. The meetings had encouraged individual members of the participatory groups to discuss, share and critically reflect on each other's views, suggesting that the combined theoretical perspective of social constructivism and critical theory, empowered the participants to co-construct knowledge about the ECRR Room. The enabling of the conditions to allow for an open exchange of ideas amongst participants was salient to the operation of working and research group meetings. These vital features of participatory group meetings were engrained into the ethical basis of participatory research, discussed further in the next chapter, Chapter Seven.

Chapter 7: Ethics

The obtaining of informed consent, wellbeing of participants and power imbalance between the researcher and the researched are the most common ethical issues in any research, according to Thomas and O'Kane (1998). These issues become even sharper in PR due to its ideological position which is grounded in democracy and emancipation. It therefore became vital for me to consider ethics right from the beginning, from the conception of the research idea. Doing participatory research, one could argue, was itself an ethical choice, due to the space being chosen to be developed in partnership with students. Having a separate chapter on ethics, for this reason, became considerably significant, rather than arguing it as a part of methodology.

The chapter examines various ethical issues that are prominent in education research, and, in particular, participatory research. The implications of ethics for my study and its design are explained; and various ameliorating aspects that I considered while working with research participants, are discussed. Implicit dilemmas that I faced as an insider and outsider researcher while collecting and analysing data are also deliberated upon, with emphasis being placed on the 'in-between' space.

As stated earlier, the whole project itself was an ethical choice, but the chapter is positioned as number Seven in thesis to help the reader put discussion into a context. Various terms and concepts used in the chapter, which are specific to my research, can only be put into context after being familiar with the methodology and implementation of the project.

7.1 Ethical issues in participatory research

Facing ethical issues is a common dilemma in (educational) research. Different authors and researchers have suggested various ways of dealing with these dilemmas. Thomas and O'Kane (1998), for example, suggest several steps to make research more participatory and ethical. First, they suggest that attention should be paid to participants' roles, which can range from simply 'taking part' or 'being present' to knowing that one's

actions will get taken note of and may be acted upon, leading to empowerment. Second, participants' choices over their involvement should be regarded as a crucial step in research as participation can never be coerced, but must remain voluntary. Third, when meeting with participating members, the researcher should use a range of tools for communication to allow for flexibility in research. The adoption of a varied repertoire of verbal and non-verbal techniques can help the researcher to adapt to the needs and preferences of individual participants. Fourth, participatory activities used in research should enable the members to shape the agenda, draw upon concrete events in real life and have opportunities to handle things rather than "*just talking*" (ibid: 342). The processes should also encourage dialogue, joint analysis and learning. Fifth, each time the researcher meets with the participants, there should be some structure but enough space left for negotiation over the shape and outcome of meeting(s).

Morrow and Richards (1996), similarly, suggest more ways of conducting ethically sound research. A general approach to making research ethical, according to them, is by drawing upon non-invasive, non-confrontational and participatory methods, as these can help to encourage the participants to interpret their own data (ibid). Time invested in selecting appropriate methods can also help to minimise the power differentials between the researcher and the researched, especially at the point of "*data collection and interpretation*" (ibid: 100).

In addition to Thomas and O'Kane (1998) and Morrow and Richards (1996), Lancaster University (n.d.) also advocates for the selection of participatory methods to allow the participants to self-represent themselves without being dependant on the researcher. The ability of the participants to project their views, using appropriate methods, gives them agency, an opportunity that might often be limited in traditional research methods. Lancaster University (n.d.) also asks the researcher to be attentive about accountability, which is generally on the part of the researcher to the institution as well as to the participants. Social responsiveness and reflexivity are also integral to ethics as they make us think about the aims and actions generated from research as well as the position of researcher as a human being first, and a researcher second (Lancaster University, n.d.).

Researcher's attention to representation, agency, accountability, social responsiveness and reflexivity, as discussed above, calls for ethical rigour. To maintain this rigour, Lancaster University (n.d.) further suggest three main dimensions - ethical iterative; ethical relationality; and the negotiation of competing ethical views. For iterative ethics, ethics and any related paperwork needs to be developed step-by-step, to take account of changing research priorities and procedures. This may, however, be difficult to achieve completely due to institutional constraints, such as the ethics committee not accepting phased reviews, or the committee taking a long time to consider phased reviews, hence drawing attention towards the practical constraint of time. For maintaining relational ethics, the ethical framework needs to be negotiated with research participants, taking into account their feelings and beliefs. It is mainly concerned with sharing; for example, the researcher to share developing aims, research process, analysis, control, benefits and problems, with the research participants, with opportunities built in for genuine interchange and openness to different ideas and mutual problem solving (Lancaster University, n.d.).

The ethics of reciprocity involves treating the research participants in the same way as the researcher would want to be treated herself/ himself. If the participants are involved in collecting and producing data, for example, which would benefit the researcher, then participants too should be given a choice to be included in analysis, presentation and dissemination of findings with the researcher. The last dimension, according to Lancaster University (n.d.), is about the negotiation of competing ethics. This refers to having a clear discussion with the participants about research and its aims, right from the beginning. It calls for an acknowledgement of different positions and needs of the participants, with the building of sufficient talking and discussion time, to be able to negotiate and reconcile any difference of opinions. All these aspects of ethics, as discussed above, and throughout the whole of the study, are essential to consider while conceiving and embarking on any participatory work. Their implications and use in the design of my research is discussed in the following section, section 7.2.

7.2 Making my study an ethical study

Drawing inspirations from Morrow and Richards (1996); Thomas and O'Kane (1998); and Lancaster University (n.d.), there were several ways in which I endeavoured to make my work as ethical as possible. Firstly, to enable participation, transparency and empowerment; it was made as clear as possible to participants from the outset (through the participant information sheet and first briefing meeting- for example, see appendix 2.1 and 2.2) that their participation and any action arising from it would get taken note of and would be acted upon. Secondly, I also created opportunities for participants to participate in the framing of research questions, collection, interpretation and analysis of research data (see table 6.3 and 6.4, in Chapter Six). The choice of picking a research instrument, out of a mutually agreed list of research methods (see table 6.4 in Chapter Six), enabled the participants to select a medium of their choice to exchange ideas. This opportunity for sharing the control of research agenda, process and analysis, helped to establish students as powerful agents, thereby enabling empowerment (Baum, et al., 2006). Thirdly, the inclusion of thinking and reflection time, in between meetings (at least a week's gap in between participatory group meetings), gave students a chance to review and refine what they wanted to tell (Campbell, et al., 2007). Fourthly, the use of group processes helped to create a space where participants were able to collectively (re)interpret research data and do further work on the material brought by individual students (for example, see figure 6.1 and 6.2 in Chapter Six for WGM 3 and RGM 2 summaries). Finally, at the last RGM, a prospect of sharing and disseminating the ECRR Room project's findings was also offered to students.

The involvement of students with the lead researcher in selecting and editing data was intended to get an agreed message across to the audience. The reciprocity and sharing of ideas for dissemination, therefore, helped to provide an opportunity to participants to present and publish research findings within the academy, with the lead researcher (Lancaster University, n.d.). Opportunities were also built in for everyone, during data collection time, to comment on the meeting minutes and summaries before they could be taken as final documentary evidence of the project (Cotterell, 2008).

The participatory group meetings and various processes within it, for example, the choice given to participants to join the working or research group (or both), the construction of appropriate methods for recording their views, the opportunities for both verbal and written feedback, and the inclusion of thinking and reflection time; all enabled the participants to self-represent, without being dependent on me, the lead researcher. The opportunity to project their views, was aimed to give participants agency, a prospect that could have been limited had I completely relied upon non-participatory methods. The utilisation of various methods for research activities also helped to avoid the elitist language, which may or may not have been meaningful in students' everyday context; and the common academic grounding of participants in the field of ECS made them not to rush to discard any issues, however trivial they may have appeared (Lancaster University, n.d.).

The accountability was on my part, as a lead researcher to the institution, and also to the participants. Accountability was addressed through the research briefing and debriefing events that included more structural and institutional ethics procedures of giving out participant information sheets (appendix 2.1) and collecting informed consent (appendix 2.). Participants were also made aware of their rights, especially the right to withdraw from study, without feeling any obligation to explain the reasons for withdrawal to the researcher (appendix 2.2). Social responsiveness and reflexivity were maintained by considering my role as a human being first and a researcher second. My role as a facilitator, inspired by Lancaster University's 'radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation' and 'characteristics of effective and genuine participation' (see table 5.2 and figure 5.1 in Chapter Five), enabled me to be reflexive of participants' needs and research aims, at all times. Ethics of reciprocity was partly attained by including the participants of the study in presenting and disseminating the findings (with me), as discussed above, within the wider faculty and university. Reciprocity, arguably, can also be said to be achieved by the experiences and benefits that the project offered to students in relation to learning research skills and wider scholarship.

Another important aspect in ethics, according to Lancaster University (n.d.), is about the negotiation of competing ethics. This was partly achieved by having an open discussion

about research, its aims and scope in the briefing meeting. To acknowledge different positions and needs of the participants, sufficient talking and discussion time was built in within the working and research group meetings. This built-in time enabled the negotiation and reconciliation of any difference of opinions, allowing the views of different participants to be heard.

The ethical rigour in my study was therefore maintained by paying attention to participants' agency, researcher's accountability, and opportunities for reciprocity. The potential for negotiating competing ethics was also built by designing the project in a socially and educationally responsive manner and by considering participants' and researcher's reflexive positions. There were, however, some critical moments where I thought that I could have done more to make my work more ethical. Iterative ethics, for example, was difficult to achieve. For iterative ethics, the ethics application should have been developed step-by-step, with the participants, considering changing research priorities and procedures. This proved particularly difficult due to institutional constraints, such as the ethics committee being sceptical, or taking a long time to consider phased reviews, at that time. The purpose and structure of ethics committees in the institutions, generally, are more geared towards traditional research methodologies (Lancaster University, n.d.).

The adoption of phased review process would have meant, to first, recruit the participants to the project; and then develop ethics application with them. It was hard to follow this order of iterative ethics, without knowing who the participants were going to be. Moreover, during that phase in my EdD work, the approval from ethics committee was considered as one of the major milestones of study. Hence, the concern about timescale and study becoming too protracted, with students dropping out if the project lost momentum due to waiting for ethical approval, subliminally made me complete the institutional ethics procedure by myself.

In order to overcome the issue of iterative ethics, more attention was paid towards relational ethics. For relational ethics to occur, I had to take into account participants' feelings and beliefs. The atmosphere, especially when any tiered relations were involved,

was made to relax to avoid any hierarchical imposition onto participants. The relaxation was about sharing; sharing the developing aims, research process, analysis, dissemination, control, benefits and problems; with the participants (Lancaster University, n.d.). The atmosphere of working and research group meetings was lightened, for example, with the use of refreshments, giving meetings an informal flavour. The opening of academy to participants, especially when the students got involved in selecting the content and presenting research findings with me, the lead researcher, also helped to strengthen the relational ethics. On reflection, however, I think that had I spent more time in writing and developing the ethics form with students, iterative ethics, too, could have been achieved, alongside relational ethics.

Overall, I believe, my study enabled the students from different levels of ECS courses to participate with staff in planning and designing a pedagogical space, whilst being respected as equal participants by staff and also by each other. If I was to do this work again, I would certainly go for a phased ethical review where an initial submission of the application can be made to recruit participants. A more detailed application can then be submitted after consulting the ethical positions with participants.

7.3 My insider- outsider position

A contested ethical position for a researcher to be in is that of an insider and or, an outsider. Both positions have been theorised over time, across disciplines, giving differing definitions (Milligan, 2016). Researcher's membership in data collection, as an outsider or insider, plays a direct and intimate role in the quality of data collected and analysed. As an insider, a researcher can either share characteristics, roles and experiences with the participants or can be an outsider to the common characteristics shared by the participants (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Concerns regarding situational identities and the relative power that a researcher can exert in the research process, makes it pertinent to look at the position of a researcher (Angrosino, 2005).

Taking this view, my position as a member of staff made me an outsider to the student community, to the ones who participated in this research. The open-ended approach of

study, grounded in PR, however, also made me an insider, where I primarily took a supportive role in facilitating working and research group meetings. My dual position as a tutor and also as a participatory researcher challenged the binary division of insider-outsider researcher. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) put forward, researchers, using more open ended, fluid approaches, are very much part of their study as they are firmly embedded in all aspects and processes of research. For example, while documenting data, participatory researchers tend not to lose participants' voices in a pool of numbers. The researchers, instead, carry the voices with them as they work through the transcripts, and analyse data to represent the identities, characteristics and experiences of the participants. The authors argue that, in more fluid research methodology, the effect of our personhood on analysis is mutual. Our personhood affects analysis and the analysis affects our personhood, too. It is, therefore, difficult to remain (and neither is desirable) a true outsider in an open-ended study, like mine, at all times.

The role of a critical researcher, on the other hand, also makes it impossible to become a true insider as the research is framed around particular aims and methods, shaped by the researcher's aspirations. Within these two distinct positions, there is also a space "*in-between*" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 62). It is this in-between space that shaped my role as a researcher, and I chose to reject the constructed dichotomies of an outsider-insider; and embraced the complexity and richness of the space 'in-between' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016).

Participatory research is known to have the potential to enable the development and understanding of both new insights and mutual understandings of an insider-outsider position, within a given context (Milligan, 2016). The nature of working group and research group meetings, for example, allowed me to take the in-between position, within varying degrees of participation, depending upon the purpose and content of the meetings. Hellowell (2006) validates the "*subtly varying shades of insiderism and outsiderism*" (ibid: 486), and argues that the same researcher can slide along both directions, during the research process (Milligan, 2016). At the initial stage of the project, for example, during the introduction and briefing at WGMs, my professional position as a tutor, and participants' role as students, pushed me more towards the

outsider position. Whereas, as the project progressed and I took the role of one of the participants, it pushed me more towards the insider role, making me contribute actively, but alongside others in participatory group meetings. Staying in an outsider position, for too long, in a PR, can be ethically risky. The exclusive position of an outsider can affect the level of genuineness with which the researcher would want to have meaningful dialogues with the participants (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

There was also a possibility that the freedom and flexibility of continual dialogue between the staff and student participants may have become influenced by the tutor's implicit compliance with institutional agendas, which in this instance could have been institutional ways of using the given physical space. There was a remote possibility that the dominant institutional discourse, whatever it may have been, could have influenced the aims and methods that I chose to collect data. It was therefore important to consider student voice work with a caveat of getting influenced by the institutional pressure of using the space in a certain way.

There is always a risk of becoming institutionally socialised by believing that its way is the only economically productive and socially conforming way to represent a 'good' pedagogical environment (Zemblyas, 2006). At a generic level, a researcher's thinking and experiences, therefore, can become normalised to believe in certain aspects of reality (Zemblyas, 2006). Research in work based environments, therefore, can be a concept full of contention and makes us question the methodology involved in student voice work. It makes us look critically at the potential impact of student voice on epistemological and research assumptions around the production, management and dissemination of knowledge. In the ECRR Room project, for example, the institutional way of using surveys could have been regarded as the only socially and educationally conforming way to project students' views. This would have restricted my understanding and appreciation of the epistemological potential of students' participation, thereby, marginalising the potential of their knowledge and experiences in university education.

In such cases, where staff undertake research in their own workplaces, taking an 'in-between' researcher's role, Asselin (2003), suggests that the best position to take is to

collect data with open eyes but at the same time assume that she or he knows little about the phenomenon being studied. The researcher may be aware or even be part of the culture where the study takes place but she or he might not know and understand the sub-cultures within it. Keeping my eyes open to what was being contributed by colleagues, an administrator and student participants, but at the same time keeping a check on my assumptions, helped me to contribute and embrace the complexity and richness of data that came through working and research group meetings. What came out of the meetings, for example, a collective view of the ECRR Room (see appendix 5), would have been difficult to be achieved by a single participant, or by the researcher taking exclusively an outsider or insider position.

My dual membership of being an ECS tutor as well as a co-researcher, therefore, helped to provide a level of trust and openness to the participants, giving them a starting point (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). It gave a commonality that afforded access into student groups that might otherwise would have been closed to me. There was a willingness on the part of participants to share their views and experiences because of an assumption of common understanding of the subject matter (ECS) and shared distinctiveness (all working together in the same project), that generated an overall feeling of oneness (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

7.4 Issues relating to the ‘in-between’ insider- outsider position

There are many benefits of taking a dual researcher role, presented above as the ‘in-between’ space, but it can also lead to certain ethical dilemmas. One such dilemma is about participants’ willingness to give consent. The consent from research participants (mainly students) means negotiation for access to and use of data. The participants, in a student- staff relationship, are bound to expect openness, anonymity and confidentiality (Tickle, 2001). This trusting attitude on the part of participants could have been conflicted with the dual role that I took as a researcher and a tutor. The expectation from this dual identity certainly increased the capacity for practical wisdom (Tickle, 2001) but also raised the issue of me, the researcher, wanting to serve the interests of my (work) community and colleagues.

The insider (paternal) role could have urged me to portray a narrow view of the work culture. According to this view, there was already a fair representation of student voice on what could be accommodated into this newly proposed physical space, for example through the online VLE survey (appendix 3). Structured mechanisms, however, may not always portray the dialogic and participatory democracy that I aimed to engage with, through this project. The critical and outsider researcher role, on the other hand, demanded a true representation of students' views, whilst being aware of any implicit power imbalances between the participants. A dual perspective, like the researcher's 'in-between' space, therefore, can be helpful, but can also make the selection of research methods risky and difficult to sustain. Pendlebury and Enslin (2001) argue that these perspectives can also be seen as putting the researcher in a position of power that may tempt her or him to betray the trust of those researched, for example, by manipulating student voice to fit with institutional dominant agendas, highlighting the vulnerable side of PR.

Tickle (2001), under such circumstances, suggests the researcher should put educational ethics before research ethics and establish enabling conditions that are geared towards maximising (professional) self-fulfilment, instead of taking a protective parental role, advocating for the less-powerful voices. The carefully chosen participatory methods, as discussed earlier in Chapter Six, therefore, provided students with enabling conditions where they were able to speak for themselves, without being dependant on me to 'represent' their views (Tickle, 1999). To overcome the issues linked to my dominant position in research as a tutor and the implicit institutional agenda around the usage of space, the participatory group meetings were convened in an informal environment (with tea, coffee and cake), to break down the hierarchical relationship between myself and the students (Seale, 2010). The inclusion of a participatory methodological approach and the dialogic communication (Wegerif, 2013b 2015, 2016), allowed me to speak 'with' rather than 'for' students, and helped to develop an alignment between 'student voice', 'dialogic research' and 'participatory approaches'; all of which were integrated into participatory group meetings. Moreover, my conscious attempt to develop a positive attitude and frame of mind that included respect, genuineness and openness to varied experiences, helped to break down the implicit hierarchy between the researcher and the participants (Kidd and Kral, 2005).

The study was made participatory by not seeing power as an arbitrary construct. Power was shared with participants by writing a collective research agenda (Participatory methods, n.d.); by building time and space to talk about the issues that concerned them (Campbell, et al., 2007); by building atmosphere in working and research group meetings where there were no right or wrong answers (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998); and by giving participants the opportunities to “*interpret and explain their own data*” (ibid: 343). The open and fluid nature of working group and research group meetings, therefore, enabled all participants to put their ideas forward, thereby diminishing the bias of privileging a few (Bragg, 2007).

7.5 Students' expectations and learning

Managing participants' expectations is a crucial element of PR. The issue becomes even sharper in students' participation work, due to the penetration of consumerist culture into education, as discussed above in Chapters Two and Three. Managing students' expectations, at all levels, therefore became a vital aspect of my research. In order to achieve this, participants were briefed about research aims and objectives at the beginning of the project and also about the participatory approaches to data collection. The value and importance of listening to students' views in the construction of an ECRR Room was articulated to them, but they were also made aware of the value of respecting other participants' contribution (such as, staff). The purpose of participation was articulated as to not make a final decision but to make valuable contributions which would then be discussed and debated in research group meetings (which they were invited to be part of).

An implicit question about the study that might have remained with students is about the benefit of participation on their learning. As Krishnaswamy (2004) says, the process of conducting participatory research is as important as the research outcomes; students therefore were anticipated to learn about participatory approaches through their involvement in the study. Also, there was this opportunity of getting their expression of views built into the provision of an ECRR Room. The project also provided opportunities for reflection on their own capabilities, which could partly go into their Professional

Development Portfolios (Campbell, et al., 2007). The processes involved were also anticipated to help in capacity building through participation in various research processes, such as data collection and data analysis.

Conclusion

The whole process of doing insider- outsider research with students, therefore, can be seen as a way of opening critical and reflective practice, through which we can challenge the dominant discourses of meaning making (which may exercise power on and through us), to help us construct counter-discourses, leading to the development of alternative research approaches. This way, researching within one's own workplace can be seen as an emancipatory activity, where we free ourselves from dominant discourses of power and understandings and develop our own alternative ideologies which may have the power to be morally and ethically more satisfying (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Winter, 2015).

Attention to ethical issues, as discussed in this chapter, assisted in forging meaningful student involvement in all phases of research via: power sharing between researcher and student participants; mutual respect for difference in knowledge amongst the team members; co-construction of knowledge and; finally, implications for new policy or "*socio-educational initiatives*", that arose with the completion of the project (Nhamo, 2012: 13). The co-constructed knowledge on ECRR Room, through participatory group meetings, is discussed further in next chapter, Chapter Eight, where I share the major findings from the project.

Chapter 8: Findings from working and research group meetings for the co-construction of ideas for the ECRR Room

Given the emphasis of the project on students' collective views, it was important that data analyses processes were group oriented, engaging, understandable (Jackson, 2008) and inclusive of the student community. Data analyses, therefore, included student participants who volunteered to be part of the working and research group meetings. The involvement and engagement of the stakeholders, mainly students, was considered vital for their active participation in the research (Pankaj, et al., 2011). Many participatory studies fall short of involving participants in analysis but, with this study, I wanted to fully explore the potential of engaging students in the entire project, from the stage of designing the research question to the stage of data analysis and dissemination.

The chapter, therefore, analyses findings from the project that emerged as a result of the discussions in working and research group meetings. It gives an account of the co-constructed understanding of the different ways in which students wanted to use the space as an ECRR Room. The project itself started with the following objectives in mind, as stated in Chapters One and Five:

1. To analyse the use of participatory approaches in developing a co-constructed and critical understanding of a pedagogical space in the form of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room).
2. To analyse the benefits of students' participation in a pedagogic activity that supports their learning and personal development.
3. To critically reflect on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project as an academic and a participatory researcher.

This chapter focuses specifically on the first two objectives of the study. It draws upon the collective nature of data collection in working and research group meetings to examine how the use of participatory approaches enabled a co-constructed and critical understanding of an ECRR Room, amongst the ECS students; and also whether the whole experience of working in a participatory project benefitted the participants,

particularly the students. Findings are presented in the same order as they emerged, firstly, based on a co-constructed understanding and development of ideas about the resource and research needs of the ECRR Room; and then a critical analysis of the same data to prioritise the pedagogical needs and influences of the ECRR Room, on ECS courses. Last but not least, the chapter also shows findings from students' semi-structured questionnaires, which they used to evaluate their participation in the project.

8.1 What constituted data in working and research group meetings

Data in this study consisted of both individual and shared views of the participants. Individual participants brought their views to the meetings which were then discussed, analysed and even contested in some cases, before agreeing on common themes for ECRR Room. Discussions mainly consisted of participants' diverse knowledge and experiences (Ponterotto, 2005) of early childhood; shared in the form of dialogues, negotiations and visual depictions of everyday objects and activities (Roberts, 1994), used in early years practice; generating rich data for development of ECRR Room. The unit of analysis, therefore, was not single but multiple entities. Considering the main aims of my study, the focus was on both processes and product. Processes were the use of participatory approaches in encouraging a co-constructed and critical understanding of the ECRR Room as a useful pedagogical space for ECS students; and product was the actual ideas that emerged from these discussions portraying students' preferences and choices for the ECRR Room; the product, in the end, was also the physical space in the form of an ECRR Room. The analysis in this thesis, therefore, is threefold; firstly, outlining '*what*' (product) was produced as a result of the participatory group meetings; secondly, '*how*' (processes) the methodological application of participatory research enabled the co-construction and critical analysis of the ECRR Room; and thirdly, '*why*' it is vital to include these processes in the pedagogical discourses of contemporary HE. Also of relevance is the value of these processes in supporting the personal (and professional) development of students in HE.

The '*what*' data is the primary focus of this chapter. The '*how*' (process) and '*why*' of research analyses is discussed further in Chapter Nine, where I reflect on the entire

process of facilitating a participatory project with students. The ‘what’ data constituted discussions in participatory group meetings about the resource and activity needs of ECRR Room, documented in flip charts and written summaries of working and research group meetings. The meetings were also video recorded for accuracy, reflection and provocation, to encourage critical thinking amongst participants (Haw and Hadfield, 2011). The documentation of discussion from these sources was later transferred and analysed in the form of written tables. Analyses were jointly drawn by the members of the working and research groups which consisted of students and staff, and were facilitated by me as lead researcher. The contribution from staff was no more than as one of the participants. My role as a facilitator was to develop and maintain the interactions and a democratic social order amongst the participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Below is a visual representation of *what* constituted the data for data analysis.



Figure 8.1: Data from working group and research group meetings

8.2 The three phased analyses process

The three part data analysis process took place during WGM 3 and the three research group meetings (see Chapter Six, section 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 for details on participatory group meetings). Each meeting lasted for approximately 1.5-2 hours and was facilitated

8.2.1 Phase 1 analysis

Phase 1 was a collaborative initial analysis by the working group members. It was more of an accurate recording of what the participants discussed in earlier meetings. The initial analysis took place in the third (out of three) working group meetings.

Prior to arriving at this initial stage of analysis in WGM 3; WGM 1 and 2 familiarised participants with the value and ethos of PR; facilitated the discussions to give the pedagogical space a name- Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room); along with a research focus for the project; an agreed list of research questions; and also a list of participatory methods which the members of the working group could use to answer the agreed research questions (see Chapter Six, section 6.1 and 6.2 for details).

At the start of the WGM 3, the students decided to look back at the note cards responses, to remind them of participants' initial ideas on the ECRR Room. Below are some example comments from note card activity 1 (table 8.1), which asked the participants to write *“how they would like to see the ECRR Room in two years' time”*

“I would want the Early Years Resource Room to be highly successful”.

“I would like the Early Years Resource Room to be a space for group work, where students can bring their laptops and tablets and some of the resources are made loanable to take away to settings. I would also like the room to have materials representing department research”.

“Exciting space for dialogue about early childhood and beyond”.

“A place to bring and try out ideas, both, practical and intellectual”.

“A place where there is respect and equality amongst students”.

“Vast amount of resources where different cultures and contexts are represented through books, videos and research; to bounce ideas with each other”.

“Space that can help students and staff and the wider community to explore ideas around early childhood”.

“To be able to learn about but also critique on the dominant ideas of knowledge and practice, for example, EYFS, National Curriculum; and look critically at the underpinning theories and how the ideas are implemented and even distorted”.

Table 8.1: Example responses from initial note card activity 1

A summary of the data from initial note card activity was noted on a separate sheet of paper, to be included later in a flip chart summary.

After looking at the note cards, the group then looked at the results of the online survey where other ECS students, who, for various reasons, were not able to get involved in the participatory project, had shared their views on the ECRR Room. The data from the survey was not part of my doctoral work but certainly gave food for thought to the WG members. The findings from the online survey are shown in Appendix Three.

With regards to the recording method to document participants' views on the ECRR Room, the participants primarily chose the written method, with either typed, hand written or brain-stormed examples. Below is an example response that a student participant (Participant A) brought with her. It was a typed response to the agreed questions (table 6.3 in Chapter Six), shown below in table 8.2:

QUESTIONS
<p>1. How do you see the ECRRR useful for your course (rephrased from my initial question 'What course are you registered into?')</p> <p><i>As part of the Early Childhood Studies course I believe that the ECRRR will be useful to provide additional resources. This may be additional journal subscriptions this may be for more international studies. As an example, last year, a module was and the library had limited resources regarding(country's name).... which was a key country to the module.</i></p> <p><i>Another aspect may be to allow students to have access to practical materials that are used in schools to analyse and evaluate their effectiveness, use or purpose.</i></p>
<p>2. What do you see yourself, your friends and your tutors doing in the ECRRR? (Please make sure that everyone is doing something)?</p> <p><i>I see the ECRRR as an environment where students and staff can informally interact. I see myself being able to work amongst people of a similar mind-set with not only the digital material from university library but also with additional resources of the ECRRR to strengthen and support my studies.</i></p> <p><i>This would be the same scenario with my friends.</i></p> <p><i>Tutors I hope would feel able to use environment effectively with students present.</i></p>
<p>3. How would you like the ECRRR develop the following themed areas?</p> <p>a. Knowledge</p> <p>How can we display the key concepts of Early Childhood pioneers?</p> <p>How can we display the key theorists and their ideas on Childhood and Early Education and Care?</p>

Table 8.2: An example excerpt from an individual student's response (Participant A) to the agreed research questions (the table only shows a section of the participant's response)

After bringing their individual responses (similar to the one shown in table 8.2, above), the participants mixed their responses and read aloud each other's ideas randomly. All ideas were then noted down on flip charts and also recorded via video camera. At the end of the WGM 3, participants were further asked to take one response each and come back with any additional ideas and views, to the RGMs. Below is an example flip chart (figure 8.3) that the group produced as a result of the discussions that they had in WGM2:

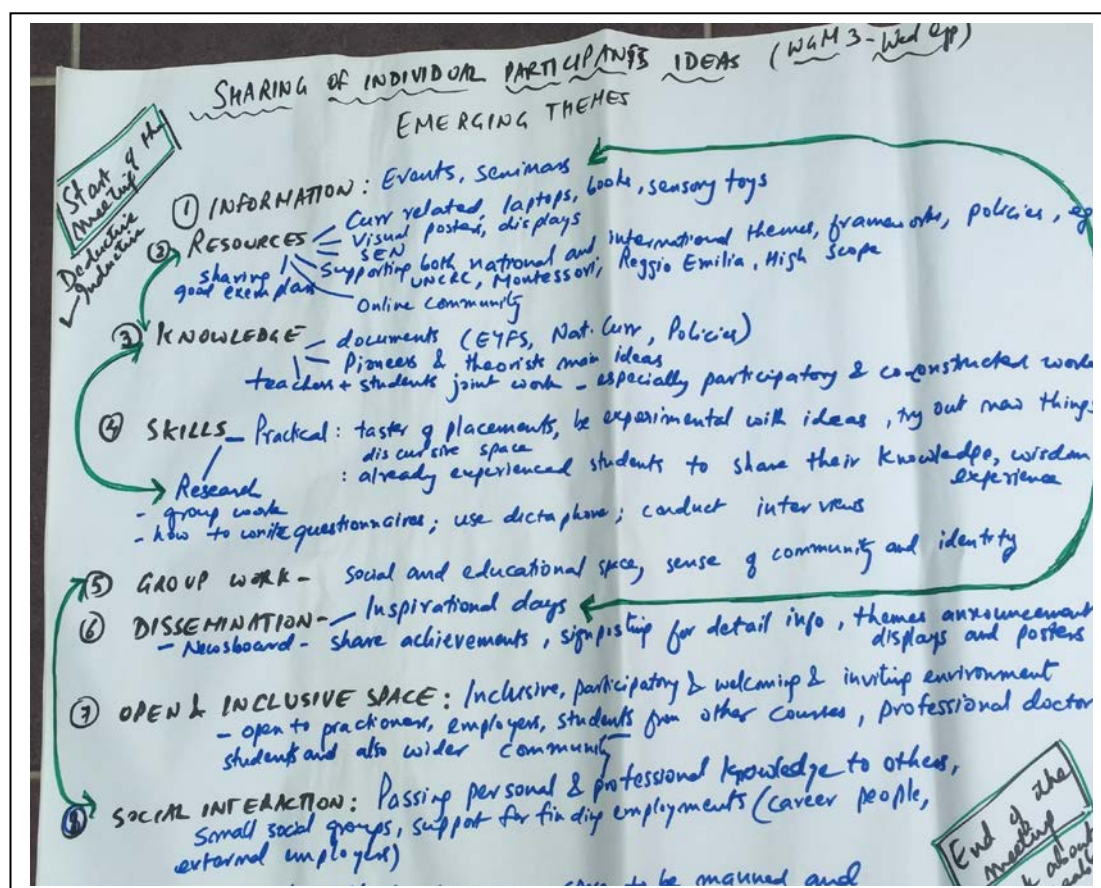


Figure 8.3: An example flip chart that the participants in WGM 2 produced as a result of sharing each other's views on the ECRR Room

Using these ideas on flip charts, video recorded meetings (not transcribed verbatim) and meeting summaries as notes, WGM 3 drew an initial list of resources and activities that they believed would be useful within an ECRR Room (appendix 5). This was the initial analysis, where working group members generated themes of resources and activities for ECRR Room, for further analysis by the research group members. All similar ideas were

grouped into separate themes that were then discussed for their relevance within an ECRR Room.

The initial analysis, therefore, summarised the key components and themes, as discussed in the WGMs, and documented in flip charts and meeting report summaries. These ideas were then transferred into tables (Tuesday and Wednesday group). A final version (appendix 5) was produced after merging Tuesday and Wednesday groups' ideas. Appendix Five was then shared amongst all members for consensus and then agreed as a final outcome of WGMs. The format of recording participants' ideas into a tabular form was also agreed by the WG members as they believed that a table would help in establishing clarity and accessibility of ideas. The table, thus produced, was a result of co-construction of ideas between the WG members.

Co-construction emerged from the dialogues that took various forms and documentation, playing a vital role in mediating participants' knowledge and experiences about the ECRR Room with that of the ECS needs and pedagogy. This co-construction helped to extend and shape participants' thoughts (St Pierre Hirtle, 1996), within a professional context. My role, on the other hand, was to make links between participants' knowledge and experiences and use them to inform further discussion in the group, thereby establishing an environment of mutual communication (Dewey, 1925/1981) between students and staff and also between students from different course levels.

8.2.2 Phase 2 analysis

Phase 2 was the collaborative critical analysis by the research group members. All participants in the group, already trained in the use of PR (see Chapter Six, section 6.3) were further invited to join the analysis stage of research. Continuing with a similar trend of briefing, phase two started with data analysis induction and training. Further, keeping-in with the interactive and participative nature of the project, training too was kept informal to encourage discussion, reflection and critical analysis. See Chapter Six, section 6.3 for details of research analysis training. The main aim was to develop and use methods of analysis that would give high quality analysis and be in synergy with

students' academic and practice experiences that drew extensively from the discursive methods of pedagogy in early childhood.

The training and analysis of data was spread across three different research group meetings; the first two focused upon critical interpretation of data and the third used as a debriefing event and also as an opportunity to collect students' feedback on their participation in the project.

Phase two analysis, therefore, constituted of the following:

RGM stage 1. Theme generation and regeneration session - expanding and collapsing of WGM outcomes into final themes

RGM stage 2. Critical analysis - agreement and disagreement on an order of priority

RGM stage 3. Debriefing session - looking back and reflecting. Students' evaluation of their participation in the project

8.2.2.1 RGM stage 1: Theme generation and regeneration session- expanding and collapsing WGMs outcomes into final themes

The first RGM aimed at reviewing the themes that were produced by the working group members. The focus was upon further theme generation or regeneration. The group reviewed all five themes that were already produced by the WG members (appendix 5) to see whether they needed to be expanded or collapsed, without losing any key aspect of the WG participants' accounts. The content of the table was therefore discussed further, and, in some instances, questioned for validation and consensus (Cotterell, 2008). The group was able to agree on themes that could be incorporated into other themes. The data was, therefore, re-organised according to the recurring themes of resources and activities, mentioned in the WGMs, and were further made succinct for clarity and thematic understanding. A final version of the table was produced in RGM 1, is shown below in table 8.3.

	Themes	Examples	Form
1.	Knowledge	National- EYFS and National Curriculum; Policy documents (SEN related, Safeguarding, Children's Acts, etc)	Documentation; CDs, Videos, flashcards
		International- International Early Years curricula United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD); Multiple childhoods- socio-cultural awareness; International students; Visiting academics	Documentation, Online resources; Open Door policy for international students and visiting academics
		Key ideas- pioneers and theorists in Early Childhood/ Childhood	Displays to be changed on a regular basis- themed periods to enable representation of ideas from a range of fields
		Technology- White board, important websites (Early Years resources and information) and online journals and books	Favourites saved in 'named' folders on the computer(s) accessible to all students
2.	Skills and Practice	Learning by doing- using various resources	Timetabled sessions
		Experimental space- try before doing- form and bring ideas from settings and vice versa	Workshops/ small groups bookings
		Skills building- toy making, etc	Workshops
		Mentoring and supporting each other by sharing ideas	Workshops/ small group work
3.	Resources	Creative and art resources- paint, poster, etc	Consumable resources
		Resources to help understand different areas of child development, for example, socio-emotional, language.	Consumable, flexible and recyclable resources
		Resources to help understand National Curriculum subjects, for example, literacy, numeracy.	Consumable, flexible and recyclable resources
		Sustainable resources to further develop resources for EYFS and National Curriculum, for example, sensory resources.	Consumable, flexible and recyclable resources
		Computers/ laptops	Computers/ laptops

		Books and journals for reference	Popular books and journals for reference
		ARU publications	Books/ articles for reference
4.	Research	Information on ARU projects (with practitioners/ local providers)	Notice board
		Signposting- topical research	Notice board
		Ethics workshops	Workshops
		Guest speakers/ visiting academics	Seminars/ workshops
		Themed research workshops	Workshops
		Webinars	Notice board- information on online access
		Individual/ group research work	Study space
5.	Communication and Dissemination	ARU research updates	Notice board, updates on Twitter and Facebook
		ARU publications	Notice board, updates on Twitter and Facebook
		Communication alerts	Mobile texts
		Research seminars updates	Notice/ news board
		Reminders of themed sessions/ workshops	Notice/ news board
		Students' participation in dissemination of university based EY/ Education work to local community	Seminars/ workshops
6.	Relationship and engagement	Socialising space	Comfy seating areas
		Social events	Small social gatherings
		Fund raising	Support for events
		Independent/ group study	Study space
		Engagement with local community- settings and schools	Research projects, case study, joint/ partnership work, consultation work
		Students' participation in developing links and relationship with the local community and/ or EY providers	Meetings, visits, participation in seminars/ workshops
		Building relationship with guest speakers and visiting academics	Seminars/ workshops/ meetings

Table 8.3: RGM 1 regeneration (expanding and collapsing) of ECRR Room themes

After the collapsing and extending of themes in the form of a table, the group realised that the list was still quite extensive. I advised them to open it up for further discussion, analysis and critical reflection, especially to discuss the relevance of listed resources and activities on students' pedagogic experiences within ECS degree courses. This was believed to extend participants' interest in critical analysis and finding ways of reflecting on their own work to develop a more comprehensive, collective and critical view of the ECRR Room, instead of producing descriptive lists (Pant, 2008).

The first RGM was therefore used as an opportunity to foster interest and skills around critical engagement, especially on the pedagogic usefulness of the agreed resources and activities. Personal learning, which participants had socially co-constructed by sharing their views within the WGMs, had the potential to be further facilitated into a collective (Veale, 2005) yet critical analysis. This was also believed to overcome the criticism of participatory work that, according to some (for example, Bovill, et al., 2011), can put unquestioning reliance on the views of the less experienced, making uncritical participation appear valuable. As a researcher, I also believed that a further analysis that included more questioning and reasoning could only help to mediate socially co-constructed knowledge into critical knowledge, thereby developing and sustaining a culture of enquiry that is critically co-constructive and negotiable (Wegerif, 2015, 2016). The aim was to push the boundary of meaning making beyond the salient reliance on participants' descriptive views (Pant, 2008) and consider wider criticality for knowledge construction (Freire, 1973).

An additional layer of critical analysis and reflection was also in alignment with the ideals of PR that recommends the sharing of research control, agenda, process and analysis with participants (Baum, et al., 2006); to empower them through capacity building, for example, by learning more research skills and techniques (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, 2008; Seale, 2010; Seale et al., 2014). Critiquing, theoretically, was also anticipated to providing students with an opportunity of making themselves aware of the surrounding pedagogical and institutional contexts, which may or may not have been in complete alignment with the socially co-constructed understandings and desires that they had shared about the ECRR Room, in WGMs. Their initial views and analysis may have

been primarily influenced and conditioned by a restrictive and limited view of 'learning' within a consumerist education system. A process of critical reflection and action, therefore, was anticipated to challenge some of the presumptions and unchallenged questions that may have made participants view ECRR Room resources and activities through a different lens of priority and pedagogy.

The whole process of critical reflection and action can be associated with Freire's concept of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1973), often referred to as conscientisation. The exchange of critical questions was anticipated to help participants become aware of the surrounding issues, especially the institutional context, and use it to identify the ways through which they can develop the space to reflect the pedagogical and philosophical identity of ECS. The benefit of being able to take action and change the circumstances themselves (debating and changing the order of priority) to influence their (and subsequent students') pedagogical experiences within an HEI, had the potential of becoming an empowering process for the students. The questions and answers in the form of dialogues were believed to lead to self-reflection and critical consciousness, which arguably, can be seen as a pre-requisite for freedom from more prescribed and descriptive forms of knowledge. The counter questioning can be seen to have provided a choice from which to move away from the more compliant, unquestioning and dominant ways of meaning making into more critical and collective forms of knowledge construction.

Being a participatory project, conscientisation was central not only to the role of student participants but also to my role as a researcher. I was also going through an ongoing process of conscientisation whereby I was becoming epistemologically more aware of participants' collective meaning making processes (Kidd and Kral, 2005), challenging my knowledge and understanding of more traditional pedagogical approaches, in which I had been initially trained. RGMs, therefore, also gave me the opportunity to critically reflect upon my personal epistemological beliefs in learning and teaching in HE (O'Siochru and Norton, 2014).

The critical questioning and debating was facilitated through the use of matrix activity, which focused upon reflection on the data, already produced in WGMs. The questioning was guided by the notions of reflective interpretive framework (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001; Cotterell, 2008), discussed in detail in Chapter Six, section 6.3. The analysis involved a critical analysing of the resources and activity themes, as listed in table 8.3, using the criteria of cost effectiveness, time effectiveness, pedagogical impact, ecological impact, collaboration impact and responsibility (see appendix 6), whilst bearing in mind the innovative thinking question (adapted from Hart, 1996), to protect the emotions of the group members and also to enable participants to challenge their own assumptions and personal preferences. For details of research analysis training, see Chapter Six, section 6.3.

Any agreements and disagreements whilst working on the matrix helped towards agreeing a ‘common score’ for each category of themes. The reasoning behind individuals’ scores and the discussion within the group was thought to encourage exchange of critical questions and reasoning with each other. The discussion, whilst scoring, was also anticipated to make findings applicable in the local context (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009) as the language and ideas that the students used reflected the pedagogical and professional context of early childhood, to which all students belonged.

8.2.2.2 RGM stage 2: Critical analysis- agreement on an order of priority

Research group meeting 2 started by revisiting the matrix criteria and discussing participants’ thoughts on it. The group decided to rename one of the criteria and changed the ‘social impact’ into ‘collaboration’ (for a description of the change, see Chapter Six, section 6.3.2).

The meeting then focused upon giving each theme a score of either 1, 2 or 3, against the matrix criteria. Each individual had to first give a score to each theme personally, which was then opened up for discussion. The sharing of their score and the reasons behind their scoring enabled a critical discussion amongst the group members, where they probed the order of priority for each theme, considering the wider pedagogical context

of the ECS courses, and also of the institution, for example, other facilities and opportunities within the university. The matrix scoring also allowed the quantitative analysis of the qualitative data, giving participants a snap shot view of the vast amount of data and discussions that they had produced in previous participatory group meetings.

Towards the end of the RGM 2, the scores were further grouped for clarity and encapsulation of the overall ideas for the ECRR Room. The matrix was further refined with more calculations. A high score included a score of 14-15; medium score included a score of 12.5- 13.5 and low score a score of 10.5- 12. These priorities were intended to inform departmental strategies for developing the ECRR Room as a pedagogical space. Following the high, moderate and low scoring pattern of the matrix, the importance of themes became more succinct and easily representable in an order of priority, as shown below, in table 8.4.

Theme	Examples	Average score	High/ medium/ low priority
Skills and practice	Learning by doing, experimental space	15	High
Research	individual/ group work	15	High
Skills and practice	Mentoring and supporting each other by sharing ideas	14.5	High
Knowledge:	Key ideas- pioneers and theorists in Early Childhood/ Childhood,;	14	High
Communication and dissemination:	ARU research updates including ARU publications;	14	High
Research	Ethics workshops and themed research workshops	14	High
Relationship and engagement	Engagement with local community- settings and schools; students' participation in developing links and relationship with the local community and/ or EY providers; building relationship with guest speakers and visiting academics;	13.5	Medium

Research	Information on ARU projects (with practitioners/ local providers); Signposting- topical research	13.5	Medium
Research	Guest speakers/ visiting academics	13	Medium
Knowledge	Important websites (Early Years resources and information) and online journals and books	12.5	Medium
Relationship and engagement:	Socialising space, Social events, Fund raising	12	Low
Resources	Creative and art resources- paint, poster; resources to help understand different areas of child development; e.g., socio-emotional, language; National Curriculum subjects, e.g., Literacy, Numeracy; sustainable resources to further develop resources for EYFS and National Curriculum	12	Low
Knowledge	International- International Early Years curriculums; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD); Multiple childhoods- socio-cultural awareness; International students; Visiting academics	12	Low
Research	Webinars and online access to lectures	11.5	Low
Knowledge	National- EYFS and National Curriculum; Policy documents (SEN related, Safeguarding, Children's Acts, etc)	11.5	Low
Communication and dissemination	Communication alerts- Research seminars updates, reminders of themed sessions/ workshops	11	Low
Resources	Computers/ laptops	10.5	Low

Table 8.4: An order of priorities for the ECRR Room, after the matrix scoring activity

As evident from table 8.4, the use of space for skills building, knowledge exchange, research, and communication and dissemination was regarded as highly appropriate by the participants. The use of the ECRR Room for building relationships with the local community, sharing information on university projects, visiting scholars and storing a list of online resources was regarded as a medium priority. All other themes, such as using ECRR Room as a socialising space, storing creative resources, international resources, access to online seminars, communication regarding research seminars and the addition of computers and laptops was regarded as low priority.

The activity itself encouraged critical reflection on the usefulness of the themes for the ECS courses and also how and where these resources sit within the wider university. As a result of critical reflection, several themes changed from being very important to least important, for example, the desire for the use of computers and laptops in the room, which was initially allocated a high position, was eventually regarded as a low priority, when analysed against the benefit for learning and facilities available elsewhere in the university.

The whole process of including students in analysis helped to open up an academic boundary by establishing an enquiry approach where prevailing or existing knowledge and presumptions were less likely to be accepted without questioning (St Pierre Hirtle, 1996). Enquiries being dialogic in nature, drew from students' everyday experiences and understandings, thereby giving students opportunities for active participation (Dewey 1938; Englund, 2000; Mishra, 2014). The deepening of analysis through critical questioning and reflection and the use of traditional and non-traditional methods of enquiry and analysis, for example, the open ended participatory group discussions and the generation of quantitative tables, helped the participants to understand reality, drawn from real life experiences and situations. A recommendation for future student voice work, therefore, will be to enable conditions whereby students can not only participate but also understand the processes of participation (Carey, 2013a).

Below is an example excerpt from a discussion, as recorded in video camera, which RGM2 members had whilst discussing the impact score of agreed resources. The example demonstrates how the deepening of analysis through critical questioning and

reflection enabled the development of a well-informed view of an ECRR Room. The discussion happened whilst debating the 'impact' matrix scoring for the EYFS documentation under the theme of 'knowledge' (see table 8.4, above):

Participant G: *"I have given it a score of 3. It will be a one-time investment, till they get updated, and therefore not that expensive to access it, but it will be very useful and the impact of having them in the room will be high."*

Participant N: *"Yes, I also think that the money spent on them will be very cost effective. I have also given a score of 3."*

Participant C: *"And the impact on our learning can be massive."*

Participant D: *"Me too, I have also given it a score of 3. I think these are essential documents to have in the room. It will be so useful to have them handy at all times."*

Participant E: *"A majority of the documents are free anyway or even if they aren't, we can get them printed or download them, as long as we are within our copyright limit. So I also agree, that it should be a score of 3."*

Participant B: *"Well, I have given it a score of 2. We know that the documents are essential for any curriculum related information. They are less likely to change, at least for 4-5 years due to government period. But we cannot deny the fact that these documents change, although there is some flexibility, but they are not to stay for ever. I have therefore given it a score of 2."*

Participant G: *"I don't necessarily agree with that. I think the impact is still quite high. It's key to most written work to have access to the documents. If you are writing about early years, you can include EYFS. So I would think, in terms of cost effectiveness, it's actually quite high. I think its high even for sustainability, I mean the ecological impact."*

I don't think that it's going to go away but I agree in terms of actually purchasing resources or the fact that they might go out when a new government comes in. I mean, we have had a new coalition and we only had a little change in the EYFS. But the change happened because of the fact that it was anyway going to happen, not because of the change in the government. I therefore still think that the impact is quite high, I will go with a 3."

Participant A: *"I agree because all previous documents will still be almost as relevant to us to see the changes. Like participant G, N, D and E, I also think it's a high impact, and therefore a score of 3."*

Participant I: *"I also agree, the impact is high. It's a score of 3 for me as well."*

Staff A: *"So, are we agreeing a score of 3 on this?"*

Participant B: *"Well, I think, you have convinced me. Probably a score of 3 is more relevant. I was however close."*

Everyone laughs...

The discussion above, especially between participant B, G and A, in the middle of the conversation, shows the reasoning that participants used to justify the score that they had given in the matrix activity. It demonstrates how participants' arguments were not limited to a narrow framework of institutional knowledge but they were able to draw inferences from wider political frameworks, for example, how despite the changes in politics and statutory curriculum frameworks (referred to as EYFS here, in table 8.4), they still wanted to value the all-time access to these curriculum documents. Fluidity in discussion could be attributed to the democratic ethos of RGMs where participants felt comfortable and safe in sharing and critiquing, in a respectful environment. The flexibility of mechanisms, with built opportunities for critical reflection, facilitated the

participants to reflect on their knowledge and also question any group member's uncritical views.

8.2.2.3 RGM stage 3: Debriefing and students' evaluation of their participation in the project

The third and final RGM focused upon debriefing and reviewing project's findings, with everyone involved. An invitation e mail was sent to all participants, whether they belonged to the working or research group, to come and attend the debriefing event. Seventeen students, out of twenty, came to attend the last session. One staff member, attended part of the debriefing. The ECRR Room administrator was unable to attend the event. The session lasted for about 1.5 hours. The debriefing consisted of sharing of the project findings with everyone, identification of any dissemination opportunities within and outside of the faculty, as well as the completion of a semi structured questionnaire by the students to evaluate their participation in the project. Students were given a choice to either return the completed questionnaire to me in a hard or soft copy or to leave their response at the department reception desk, in an already given envelope, within a period of five working days.

The questionnaire was anonymous, with eight semi-structured questions (see appendix 8). The questions focused upon students' initial reaction to invitation to join a participatory project; any added value that they thought students' involvement may have had on the project; impact on their learning and personal development; any special benefits that they thought they could take away from the project; their response to the participatory format of meetings; any changes that they would have liked to suggest for improvement; any further information that they would have wanted to include in the questionnaire and any other open comments that they would have liked to make about the project, overall.

8.2.2.3.1 Project debriefing

Debriefing started with a display of all the data, and included recruitment leaflet and poster, note cards, flip charts, meetings written summaries, the tables showing group's

agreed resources and activities for ECRR Room, and video recorded minutes of the meetings. The participants were free to revisit any of the data and documentation and ask any questions or make any comments. The participants showed interest and excitement in looking back at what they had produced and also played mini excerpts of video recordings. Figure 8.4 shows the documentation and data that was shown back to all participants at the debriefing event:

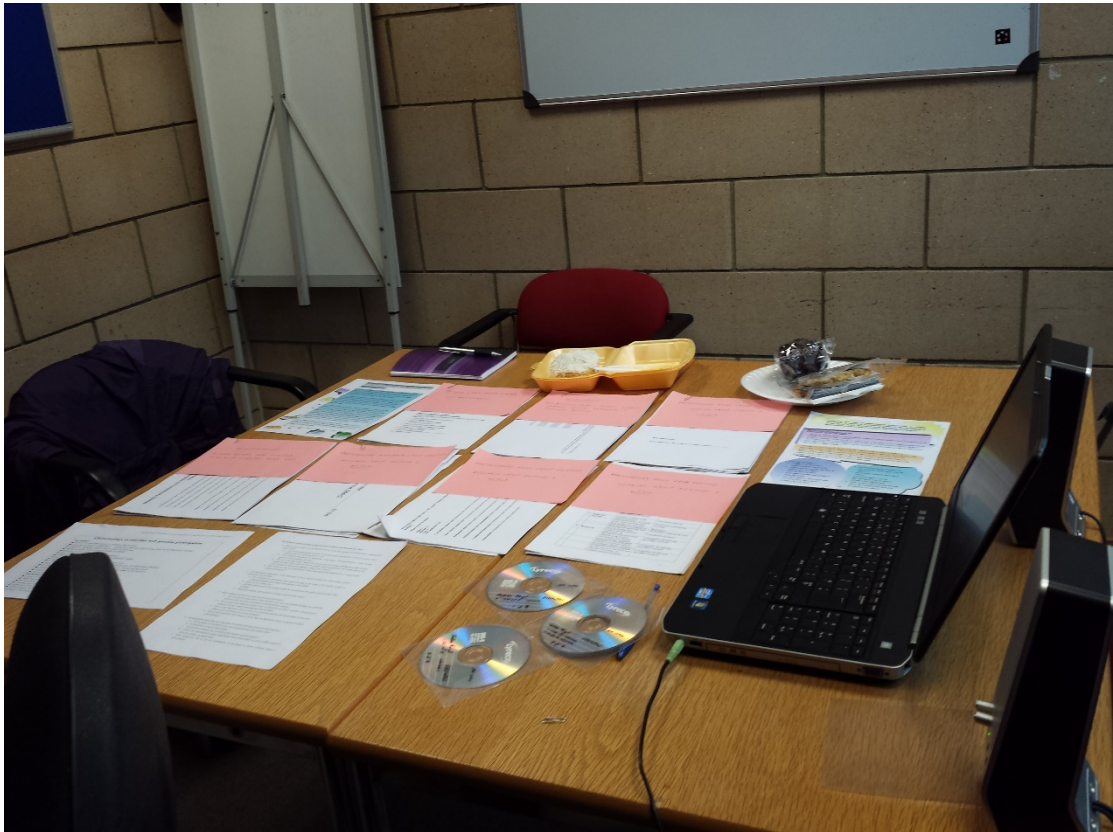


Figure 8.4: All data from the project brought to the debriefing event

Students had already taken a tour of the physical space and were happy to see the final agreed outcome of the project, table 8.4, which was blown to a bigger size for easy readability. The participants were advised that a display of the project findings will be included in the ECRR Room, especially at the initial stages of its opening, to remind everyone of the democratic and participatory ethos of the room.

While revisiting previous documentation, participants were asked to fill in a note card, similar to what they did at the beginning of the project (see Chapter Six, section 6.2.1). Unlike the note card activity 1, which was used as an ice breaker, the last one was used to close the loop of the project by asking them to express their interest (or not) in any further work for the ECRR Room. All 17 participants expressed their interest in some form of involvement in the running of the ECRR Room.

Name..... Course detail I would like to be involved in the following way(s) in the participatory project and/ or the running and organisation of the ECRRC I would not like to be further involved in the participatory project and/ or the running and organisation of the ECRRR

Table 8.5: Note card activity 2

Figure 8.5 shows example note cards, written by participants from different levels of ECS courses. The intention was not to analyse the note cards further but contact the students, if needed, in future, for their further engagement.

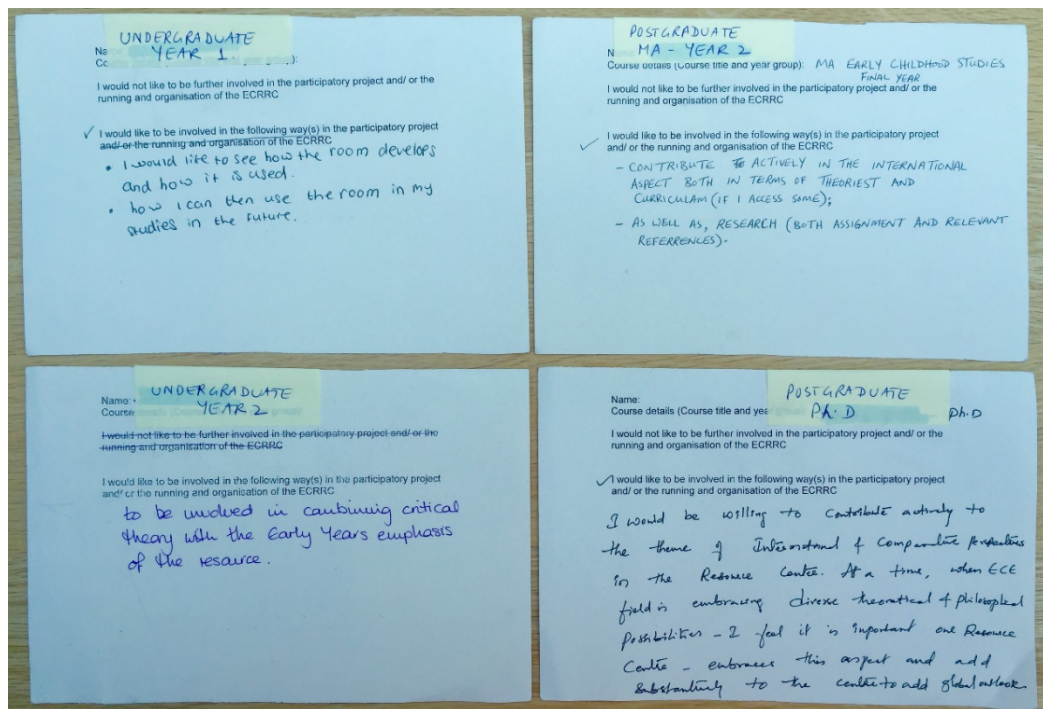


Figure 8.5: Example note cards to record participants' expression of interest in the future running of the ECRR Room

The content of the note cards was similar to what the students had said about the ECRR Room in previous meetings, for example, some participants said that they would like to actively contribute in the international aspect of the course, both, in terms of theorists and curriculum; to be involved in combining critical theory with early years; in the development of resources; and so on.

8.2.2.3.2 Dissemination opportunities

To facilitate a collaborative partnership in all phases of research, participants were invited to get involved in the dissemination of the project findings (Goins, et al., 2011). An opportunity to select what they wanted to present to an audience was anticipated to share the research control with participants (Baum, et al., 2006), recognising students as empowered active participants rather than passive recipients. Two postgraduate students presented the project findings with me, internally, in a research 'brown bag' seminar, which was attended by faculty members. The audience was a combination of academics, research assistants and postgraduate students. Two undergraduate students later

presented ‘the benefit of students’ participation in the project’, beside me, to an internal and external audience in an HEA funded research seminar, hosted by the Department of Education, in the university.

8.2.2.3.3 Students’ evaluation of their participation in the project

Towards the end of the RGM 3, we all had an informal discussion about students’ participation in the project, especially recapping the use of different participatory approaches, descriptive and critical analysis and also the benefits of students’ participatory work within an HE context. The discussion soon became a natural summative conversation that further led to the completion of an evaluation questionnaire by the students. The questionnaire gave an opportunity to the students to evaluate their participation, individually. The informal discussion that they had after revisiting the data, including some video recordings, allowed them to reflect on their activities, collectively.

The evaluation questionnaire consisted of key questions to provide participants with some prompts and reference points (Newton, 2010) and also guidance on what to discuss (Gill, et al., 2008), which many found helpful. The semi-structured nature of the questions allowed for the elaboration of any information that may have been important to students but may not have been previously discussed in the meetings (Gill, et al., 2008). The format of the questions was also anticipated to allow the participants frame answers in their own terms and in depth, if they wanted to, which was in alignment with the open and participatory context of the research. Leading or rigid questions, on the other hand, may have represented my preconceived ideas on students’ participation, influencing the validity of the tool (Newton, 2010). The questions were adapted from Campbell, et al., (2007) and students were given a choice to either complete the questionnaire within the RGM 3 or to do it at a later stage (see above).

Table 8.6 shows results from student evaluation questionnaire. Out of 17 participants who attended the debriefing event, all 17 completed the questionnaire and returned it to me, either in person, or as a scanned attachment; or through the reception help-desk.

Students were not involved in the analysis process of the questionnaires. The main analysis was drawn by me by writing key points at the margins of each questionnaire in the form of short phrases or ideas (Andrews, et al., 2012), which were added as example themes to the already existing evaluation categories or concepts of the questionnaire. All similar responses were grouped together, under each category, and descriptive statements were formed (Andrews, et al., 2012). Some students' responses fitted more than one category. A sum of the students' number may therefore be more or less than seventeen in some cases.

Total responses= 17 (out of 20)

S. No.	Students evaluation on	Themed comments	No of participants (out of 17)
1.	Reaction		
	<i>How did you feel when you were asked to participate in this project as a student?</i>	Opportunity to learn about PR.	6
		Excited and happy that students were being approached.	5
		Great idea to fill in my gap of learning about research.	4
		Couldn't believe that students were being given this opportunity to participate in institutional decision making.	2
2.	Added value		
	<i>Do you feel that students' involvement made the ECRR Room</i>	Meet precise needs of students.	10
			4

	<i>project more valuable? If yes, please give examples.</i>	Will make the students use the space more as it is stemming out of our interests and needs. Act as a motivational process to support the use and development of ECRR Room.	3
3.	Impact		
3.1	<i>Do you think your involvement in the project helped you learn about participatory approaches in research and education? If yes, please give examples.</i>	Liked the fact that I was learning about research by actually doing it and not just reading about it in books. Learnt so much about PR by being part of the project and can see its direct relevance in practice, especially while working with colleagues and/or children. Loved being an integral part of the research process.	11 5 3
3.2	<i>Do you feel the use of participatory approaches helped in understanding student voice and their perceptions of an ECRR Room?</i>	Everybody had a chance to express their views, using a medium of their choice, within a diverse group. Liked the fact that we were given multiple opportunities and time to form and even change our views. It was good to see how we were able to work in groups and using participatory techniques, form 'group' views. Ideas more readily accessed through this respectful process. The process gives ownership to students. The awareness of participating in group situation, especially respecting each other's views, helped to keep questioning and discussion a healthy and constructive process.	8 7 5 3 3 2
3.3	<i>Do you think your involvement in the study helped in your personal development as a Higher Education student?</i>	Experience of being a researcher. Research has always been an abstract concept, by being part of the project, I learnt so much about conducting research and analysis. Knowledge construction about this approach to research and also the ECRR Room. It helped me to think about my overall experiences within the university, and not just the course.	10 7 6 2

		It made me think about the ways of forming relationships, informed by democracy and interdependence. I am going to use it in my work.	2
4.	Benefit		
	<i>What is the best thing that you will take away from this experience?</i>	Co-construction of knowledge. Respect for participants views. Valuing others opinion and knowledge. Critical evaluation in a respectful environment. The whole experience of doing a participatory project. Creating something useful for students, from students. Motivational experience. To reflect upon what you say. I have seen group's ideas changing after critical reflection and peer questioning. Knowing that our views go further than module evaluations.	5 4 4 4 4 4 3 3 3 3
5.	Format		
	<i>If the student voice was presented in a different way (other than through participatory approaches), would it enhance the effectiveness of this project? If yes, please give examples.</i>	No	
6.	Changes		
	<i>Could changes be made to the methods used in this project to make the study more effective?</i>	No	
7.	Further information		
	<i>Is there anything else that you would</i>	Thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience.	15 10

	<i>like to state? Please feel free to use the space below.</i>	Thank you for asking the students to be part of this process.	4
		Loved being part of the project.	4
		Sad that we will be gone by the time the room gets set up.	
		See quotes in Appendix Nine	

Table 8.6: Findings from students' evaluation questionnaires

As evident from table 8.6, students were happy and excited to have been invited to take part in the participatory project (section 1 in table 8.6). They saw students' involvement as motivational and also a good way to create something that would meet the needs of students (section 2). Most participants (see section 3.1) appreciated the opportunity to learn research skills. They appreciated the use of participatory approaches (section 3.2) in enabling them to express and co-construct collective views for the ECRR Room. Students (section 3.3) saw the whole experience as helping with their personal development as an HE student, especially with regards to the development and understanding of the research process. They saw the benefit with their increased understanding of co-construction and critical analysis (section 4). They were happy with the way participatory approaches were used in the project and did not suggest any alternative methods of doing the project differently (section 5 and 6). Their response to this question, however, may have been influenced by my 'in-between' position in the project (see Chapter Seven, section 7.3 and 7.4). A small minority were sad they will not be able to use the room due to graduating from the course.

A last open question in the questionnaire asked the students to make any further comments in the space provided. Appendix Nine shows all the quotes showing what the students said about their participation experience in the project.

Overall, there was consensus amongst the students on the benefit of participation on their learning of research skills and also the value of listening to student voice in pedagogical processes. The benefits could clearly be seen at three levels, personal, relational and

collective (Pant, 2008). Personally, the process of contributing and listening gave them a sense of self and individual confidence to be a valuable part of the group, *“I never knew that I can contribute something valuable to the course I study in. It helped me change my perception about myself”*. Relationally, it helped them to develop capacity to participate in group situations, *“when we all started questioning each other, I could see a pattern of learning from peers. I could see how the freedom and flexibility given to us made us more aware of our group potential and also how we can influence the working of ECRR Room”*. Collectively, all participants were able to see the level of impact their combined views can have, *“I am so proud that we managed to produce something that will be of value to the current and future students”*.

The participants found both the process and product important but it was the process of engagement and opportunity to participate in a research project that they found more appealing, *“Interesting being a research participant and feeling that I was an integral part of the process rather than observing others and reading about participation and research from books”*. The process was the actual role of a co- researcher that they played in carrying out the project and the product was the expression of views getting built into the different ways of running an ECRR Room.

The responses from students also implied that the benefit may not have been immediate but they were willing to take these experiences with them into their social and professional worlds. *“This was the best experience of my university life. I enjoyed it so much and I learnt so much from it. I do not mind whether or not my views get built into the ECRR Room, the experience of working in a participatory project was a fantastic thing in itself. I am going to use these ideas further in my work. Thank you very much”*. This extension has the potential to build future practitioners, educators and researchers who have the capability of producing and contributing new forms of knowledge (Jaitli, 2010) that are more democratic and less linear in nature. *“I was surprised to see how we changed our views after the matrix activity. Critical questioning and reflection helped to refine our ideas and made us think more about the priorities”*. The participatory and emancipatory form of education, arguably, can help to liberate its participants from rigid forms of knowing and meaning making that lack criticality (Barnett, 1990); and can

eventually benefit not only the students but the HE sector, as a whole. *“When we all started questioning each other, I could see a pattern of learning from peers. I could see how the freedom and flexibility given to us made us more aware of our group potential and also how we can influence the working of ECRR Room”.*

8.2.2.3.4 Managing differences in the project

Although the benefits of adopting a participatory approach to developing a shared pedagogical space are evident from the discussion above, difficulties can arise in the relationships between the participatory group members, particularly where there are differences of opinion between participants that are not easily reconciled. There may be instances where the participants’ decisions may not be in alignment with the researcher’s views. The collective actions or decisions taken can be fundamentally different from those of the researcher. The motivation and willingness to continue to facilitate the project may therefore wane with time, especially during the facilitation of processes with which the researcher feels in opposition (Kidd and Kral, 2005). Similarly, there may be disagreements between the group members and the researcher may be unable to facilitate group consensus and understanding (Kidd and Kral, 2005). An example of managing different opinions within the ECRR Room project was during the naming of the pedagogical space. During WGM 2, it was decided that the room would be called an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room), but this was one of the suggestions from a long list of names. The other options were Early Years Resource Room, Education Resource and Research Room, Childhood Centre and various other names, as described in Chapter Six (section 6.2.1). Although, having ‘Early Childhood’ within the room title was a majority choice, there were some student participants who wanted to keep it more open and preferred to keep ‘Education’ in the title, instead of ‘Early Childhood’. ‘Education’, to them, demonstrated an explicit willingness and inclusivity to welcome students from other education courses.

In my dual role as a researcher and an academic in the field of Early Childhood, my natural inclination was to protect the space for Early Childhood courses, as there were other similar rooms within the department, aimed for use by students from other

education courses. The staff participants and the administrator, similarly, wanted to keep 'Early Childhood' within the title of the room. Staff participants and I, in my dual role, were keen to challenge the title of 'Education' over 'Early Childhood', but at the same time tried to maintain our facilitative position. Whilst we did not assert our authority over WGM discussions in an overt manner, there is evidence in the discussions that follow of tension between the Early Childhood staff participants and some members of the student group. Although a consensus is reached, there is a subtle imposing of influence by myself, as Researcher, and by Staff Participant A, and in the end it is our preferred view that prevails.

Participant A- I have come to this course not actually wanting to go into teaching. I am more interested in policy and theory and it seems that what goes around in the department gets cut off at early years practice. I am therefore keen to open the space beyond early years practice and have more theoretical and policy ideas included in it. I think calling it something 'Education' will be more appropriate.

Researcher- The room and its original idea comes from an early childhood work that was started by a colleague around ten year ago. There is therefore a legacy of early childhood in the project and it would be nice to capture that within the name of the room. The initial funding for buying resources is also coming from the money allocated to an early childhood colleague from university teaching fellowship. Does that make a case to keep early childhood within the title?

Participant A- I am still not sure if it should only be called early childhood. We can broaden its use and maybe call it a Childhood or Education centre or something similar. That would be more inclusive for students studying on other education courses.

Participant K- Childhood centre sounds good but we must be careful of other similar spaces that already exist in the university. We already have a Childhood and Youth Research Institute and you wouldn't want people to get confused with it.

Participant J- *Also, the project invitation letter did mention the word early years in it, so I am inclined to keep to the words early years, or early childhood, as that was the original idea.*

Researcher- *I think it's important to open up these questions and discuss them within the group. Having listened to your comments about broadening the early years field, do you think we are restricting the room to early years students? What else can we call it?*

Participant H- *Maybe we can call it an Education Centre? Or maybe Childhood Resource and Research Centre? I think having 'research' in the title is as important as having 'resources'. They are both important. How can we do research without having resources? And the other way round.*

Participant E- *This project is very innovative. Early Childhood, as a field, is going through rapid changes. There are both methodological and theoretical changes and it will be nice to somehow embrace these methodological and theoretical shifts within the room. People who come to university come from different backgrounds and they bring different worldviews and assumptions with them. The resources and research ideas can be representative of these shifts and differing views.*

Participant K- *And these shifts will get reflected in the resources? That brings the focus back to early years as the resources and research ideas will be representative of the early years field.*

Staff A- *I have been with the project ever since it first came with(ex- staff member's name) (about ten years ago). To me, it's about childhood, and even early childhood. I think it's important to have early childhood. There is a risk if you just say education or even educational then everything becomes diluted. Whole university is to do with education. I think the original vision was that it's something about early childhood and that has relevance to all other stages of education, like, for students studying educational studies. It is important to see where things start off from. If you are a secondary PGCE*

student or an MA secondary student, come and see where it all starts from, where's the origin of education. So I think that the questions about world views and assumptions are important for all students of education but I think that it's important that we put them in an early years context.

Participant A- But are we putting people off from using the space who are not early childhood?

Staff A- Maybe there's an argument for having another space for them. We are still being inclusive. We are saying, come and share our interest in early childhood.

Participant E- Like I said before, early childhood is going through so many changes. If we keep the focus on early childhood, we can present a kaleidoscope of the world views. There is a recent article by (ex- staff member) on the worldviews of childhood, and that can be a nice starting point.

Participant K- And I believe childhood is a sociological concept. Early Years is more developmental. Do we call it EYRRR or ECRRR?

Researcher- If we are thinking of widening the scope of the room then maybe 'Early Childhood' is a better word than 'Early Years'. We can always include practice within it through the use of early years resources. Like Participant A said, Early Childhood would open the space to include more theoretical and policy related ideas and this may be a way forward to keep the focus to early childhood, and at the same time, open it up to include different perspective and worldviews into the room.

Participant A- Early childhood seems better than early years. And the inclusion of the word 'research' in the title may help to widen its scope as research can range from something that's done with very little children to the work that includes older children. Research can be about anything, practice, theory, policy or anything else.

The excerpt above shows the clear difference of opinions and power differentials amongst the participants and how different stakeholders, for example, staff and students can bring different perspectives to a discussion. On analysis, my first comment (above), where I state “*Does that make a case to keep early childhood within the title?*” can be seen as a leading question where I assume that the student participants’ responses would be in agreement to that of mine. Participant A, however, held her/ his position quite strongly, despite my prompting and Staff A’s intervention. Participants K and J seem to be aligned more with my viewpoints, which might be because of the power that I held as a lead researcher. In my second comment where I suggest to open the conflicting questions for discussion, I can be seen to being more open and participatory, hence switching between my assertive and democratic positions. Staff A can be seen to be holding her/ his view back to let the discussion proceed but when she/ he joins in, she/ he puts forward firm arguments for retaining early childhood in the room title. Further in her/ his comment when she/ he states, “*Maybe there’s an argument for having another space for them. We are still being inclusive. We are saying, come and share our interest in early childhood*”, Staff A makes a statement about the space being inclusive that could be seen as closing down inclusion. Participants E and K kept the discussion on an intellectual level whilst the arguments of Staff A can be seen as less intellectual and more possessive of the space. In my third comment, where I show my preference for the terms ‘early childhood’ over ‘early years’, I can be seen to be giving a small concession to Participant A’s views. However, I associate Participant A’s name with the idea of ‘early childhood’. I was perhaps attributing to Participant A something that she/ he did not even mention (she/ he did not mention early childhood – other student participants did) in order to seem to be listening to her/ him but to move the discussion in my preferred direction. Participant A, finally, can be seen to be conceding to the power of the researcher, Staff A and the power of the group.

On reflection, staff, including myself as the lead researcher, were aware of the background and the legacy of early childhood that was attached with the project. As early childhood academics we wanted the room to remain the preserve of early childhood and not be subsumed within the wider department and lose its

distinctiveness. Students, on the other hand, were drawing upon their educational and professional aspirations to contribute to the discussion. There is some evidence, in the dialogue above, of the researcher and the (more powerful) staff succumbing to the temptation to switch to their authority position to influence decision making. On a different end of the participation spectrum, the researcher and the staff may choose to fall back on a power imbalance to keep the students motivated and their interests sustained, as research involves a substantial commitment of time and energy from which the researcher may be reluctant to withdraw (Kidd and Kral, 2005). The example above shows a settlement being achieved by adding the word 'research' to the early childhood space. A majority of the participants were in favour of calling the room an early childhood room, but some participants' notion of inclusivity and broadening of the field led to their competing demand to call it either an education or childhood room. A consensus, however, was reached by including the words 'resources and research' into the title, but this was only a partial consensus.

Had we elaborated the discussion further, there were chances of more differences of opinions arising amongst the participants. This raises the question of whose voices are heard and whose voices are silenced? Implementing a participatory approach can be a labour-intensive activity that requires considerable time, effort and resources on the part of the researcher and all its participants (Horowitz et al., 2009). The discussion here was about a pedagogical space and the participants were students and staff from the same academic discipline, making the character of the project less confrontational and relatively homogeneous. Even in a relatively homogeneous project like mine the way the consensus was reached and its ability to represent all participants' views can be challenged. On reflection, as seen in the example above, it appears that there was not a pervasive homogeneity (Cramb, 2005) within the group that I had initially assumed. In a participatory project where the participants are more diverse and heterogeneous, reaching an agreement can sometimes be difficult. In such cases, participants are advised to work together to reach mutually acceptable solutions that promote important community values (Minkler, 2004). When a consensus cannot be reached, a review by an independent party, for example, a review committee, can help to mediate the dissent (Resnik and Kennedy, 2010). In case of any dispute, Resnik and Kennedy (2010) suggest to include both the majority view's interpretation of the data

as well as an addendum that reports the minority position, or a separate commentary that presents an alternative view of the data.

Reflecting upon the above conversation, a better way to introduce the project to students could have been by sharing its early childhood legacy in the introductory meeting. This is something that I (and other staff participants) made the students aware during the conversation that we had about the naming of the room (above). Any structural and topical discourses within which the project is situated should be opened to the participants from the beginning (Blackstock et al., 2015). The co-production between students and staff, and even between students, as seen above, can pose its own challenges. Any assertion by staff or more qualified and confident participants can have a power effect. There may be instances when the student and staff group take a binary opposition due to the influence of “*socialisation, peer expectations, organisational culture, statutory requirements and personal biographies*” (Blackstock et al., 2015: 259). In the example above, there was not such a binary opposition between staff on the one hand and students on the other, but a subtle disagreement is obvious, whilst the postgraduate student participants held a middle position, offering more intellectual arguments.

Another challenge linked with the power effects is the role and position that the participants take within a participatory project. In my study, the staff participants and the administrator generally took a similar role to that of mine, which was more at a facilitative level. Due to the fact that, on the whole, staff maintained a passive and supportive position, there were perhaps missed opportunities in participatory group meetings where the discussions could have been richer and more critical. Further, staff conditioning to the institutional relationship, for example, retaining the institutional emphasis upon corporate customer- care relationships (Carey, 2013b, as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.2), was hard to break. There were instances where the staff were able to recognise problems, such as students’ inclination towards a materialistic space rather than a pedagogical space (for example, students asking for additional computers in the room), but were reluctant to intervene or oppose actively at the point of discussion. The institutional push towards customer- care relationships (Carey, 2013b), due to the neo-liberal thrust in education (Tandon, 2007; Buchanan, 2014), leads to constant pressure amongst the tutors to please the students and not confront

them (to protect the position of the institution in HE league tables). This may have restricted the staff from engaging in open and more critical discussions and disputes with the student participants.

With these challenges in mind, it is important to recognise both the benefits and challenges of engaging in a participatory project. The benefits of harmonious decision making and consensus building are worth considering but it can be recognised that points of conflict may also contain the potential for new knowledge generation that could better inform future actions (Kidd and Kral, 2005). Also important is for the researcher to acknowledge a duty of care towards the participants, as their degree and level of involvement may be dependent on the relationship, trust and negotiated power that the researcher is able to build with them (Banks, et al., 2013). The researcher may also have a duty of care to initiate and provide for the action that generates from the project. There may be challenges at the time of dissent and there are no easy answers that provide a clear answer or solution to the conflicts, but an awareness and acknowledgement of the potential complexities and the willingness of the researcher and participants to discuss and reflect together are important (Banks, et al., 2013).

To initiate the action from the ECRR Room project, the space was designed according to the views of the research participants, with help from student and staff volunteers. A project summary was displayed in the ECRR Room to make all the users of the room aware of the underpinning principles of participation in the running of the space. An inclusion of the suggestion box for students (and other users) to put their feedback and any suggestions for improvement or changes was left in the room, which was checked by the ECRR Room administrator on a weekly basis. The ECRR Room administrator used to follow this up and discuss the suggestions with me and the students, and take any further action by either making the changes or discussing it further with the students. Different events, upon students' suggestions, in addition to regular practical activities and students project works, for example, external employability talks by local providers, charity events, students practical presentations and research training and workshops, too, are held in the room, reflecting the ideals that the research participants co- constructed during their participation in the project. All new students on the ECS courses are made aware of the participatory project and the ethos behind

the design of the space during their course induction and via their research module, and their input and suggestions are welcomed. Sustaining the democratic ethos and a critical dialogue for longer periods of time, however, can be challenging. The issues around the sustainability of a participatory methodological approach within the current HE climate and the concerns with the longevity of co-constructed pedagogical spaces, like the ECRR Room, are discussed further in Chapter Nine (section 9.2.4).

8.3 Knowledge co-construction in working and research group meetings

The status of students as co-researchers in working and research group meetings helped to co-construct knowledge that was relevant and meaningful to all participants (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009), within an ECS course context, for the development of an ECRR Room. The sharing of ideas and consensus drawn in WG and RG meetings was built upon the epistemological principles of social constructivism where participants were engaged in an ongoing contextualised interaction (Stetsenko and Arievidt, 1997), discussing the resource and research needs of an ECRR Room. Discussions were built upon more process based and participatory approaches, mediated by various dialogic methods of meaning making (Englund, 2000; Riet, 2008; Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016; Mishra, 2014) within a facilitative (Kidd and Kral, 2005) and democratic environment (Dewey, 1897, 1903; Fielding, 2011).

The responses from student participants from their evaluation questionnaire also acknowledged their personal and collective knowledge gains and also the intention of using similar participatory approaches within their professional contexts (Dewey, 1903; Weimer, 2002). The discussions within WG and RG meetings were grounded in students' early childhood academic and professional experiences, making students' participation within the project an activity based pedagogical experience (Dewey, 1938). My role, as a lead researcher and facilitator, allowed me to initiate and give a loose structure to the meetings (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012), for "*maximum benefit*" (Kirschner, et al., 2004: 8). The inclusion of socially co-constructive pedagogy, as evidenced in WG and RG meetings, was also anticipated to re-emphasise the democratic and participatory conceptualisations of early childhood epistemology, to inform future (and current) practitioners, who, according to Winterbottom and Mazzocco

(2016) are increasingly under pressure to implement more standardised tests, driven by educational policies and reforms that are primarily top-down and positivist in nature. It was, however, deemed necessary to implement these ideals by applying them more explicitly into my own practice first (Barceló et al., 2013).

Knowledge co-construction did not stop at the production of an initial list of resources and activities for ECRR Room but included further critiquing and reasoning, where questions originated mainly from participants' course and practice experiences (Dewey, 1938). This subsequent questioning helped to develop critical awareness about the surrounding issues (Freire, 1973), such as what resources were really needed (or not) and what activities would actually help with early childhood pedagogy and practice. Critical reflection, emanating from critical analysis of data in RGMs, empowered the participants, enabling them to take collective action in changing their own decisions that they had taken whilst planning the resources and activities for ECRR Room. They co-constructed knowledge by reflecting upon their academic and practice experiences; and also as a result of their developing expertise as ECS students, practitioners and participatory researchers.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the 'what' data from the project and shared findings from the working and research group meetings. The chapter shows that students were able to provide and co-construct significant data for a study about their pedagogical environment and experiences within HE. Thus, it is crucial that the researchers and educators find creative and participatory ways of enabling student to express and construct their perceptions and judgements about learning environments. The students were able to analyse data by using both descriptive and critical forms of analysis. Listening to students, therefore, implies engaging with them in sustained dialogues, as well as participating with them in different activities. The findings of the project, as discussed in this chapter, have the potential to open up discussion about how a participatory pedagogical vision might be realised in practice, especially by offering opportunities for active involvement. The '*how*' (*process*) and '*why*' of research analyses

is discussed further in Chapter Nine, where I illustrate and argue for a conceptual understanding of students' participation work using a combined theoretical perspective; and argue for the inclusion of participatory approaches in pedagogical discourses in HE.

Chapter 9: My critical reflections as a participatory researcher and an HE practitioner

The main purpose of the project was to develop a shared pedagogical space by listening to the views of the stakeholders, especially students, as a piece of professional doctoral research; but it was also an opportunity for me to reflect upon my learning as a critical researcher and a reflective practitioner, in higher education. The chapter discusses the value and challenges inherent in using participatory approaches in HE. To present the arguments, I revisit the theoretical perspectives, in the light of project's findings, to analyse pedagogical implications of combined theoretical perspective for HE practice. The different sections of the chapter vary in length, depending upon the nature of discussion, but all sections are equally weighted in terms of contribution to the argument.

In the previous chapter, I presented the 'what' findings from the project, illustrated as phases 1 and 2 of analysis. This chapter focuses more on the '*how*' and '*why*' of research, summarised as phase 3 of research analysis (see figure 8.2 in Chapter Eight). The aim is

to illustrate and argue for a clearer conceptual understanding of students' participation work in HE, using a combined theoretical perspective. Unlike the previous chapter, the analysis and discussion here is drawn by me, without any students' input. Discussion is framed by theoretical ideas from social constructivism and critical theory, showing how these can intersect seamlessly, in a participatory project like mine, resulting in critically co-constructed knowledge and understanding about the ECRR Room as a shared pedagogical space.

The chapter, therefore, presents phase 3 of the analysis, which consisted of my reflexive analysis as a critical researcher and an HE professional. Here I reflect back on the entire process of participatory project, considering my in-between position as a researcher and also as an academic within an HEI. The chapter fulfils the third and final objective of the study, which was:

Objective 3: To critically reflect on my own experiences of facilitating a participatory project as an academic and a participatory researcher.

To meet the above objective, I revisited all data that were documented as part of WG and RG meetings (as shown in Chapter Eight), including the video recordings and my reflective journal. The data and data analyses are therefore revisited in this chapter, alongside my reflective journal, using the lenses of, a) critical researcher and, b) reflective practitioner.

As a critical researcher, I look back at the intricacies of using a PR methodology within a contemporary HEI; and the impact that my 'in-between' (Milligan, 2016; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) position may have had on students' learning and my own professional development as a researcher. As a reflective practitioner, I analyse the extent to which the project can make a contribution to applying participatory methodologies within HE pedagogies and practices. The chapter, therefore, is an opportunity for me to reflect on the use of a combined theoretical perspective and how it can be used as a tool to analyse the power effects of collective discourses as compared to the individual ones. The aim, overall, is to take a step beyond representational student voice work, and consider

different theoretical frames that can influence HE pedagogy, thereby informing professional practice.

9.1 Why critical reflection?

The aim of this study was to develop ways of working democratically with HE students, using various participatory approaches. In addition to working democratically, the project was also taken as an opportunity to encourage criticality amongst students, who are current and prospective early years professionals; for them to be able to see early years knowledge and practice through multiple lenses, using combined theoretical perspectives. The aim was to use critical theory and social constructivism to identify any blind spots in our practice and gaps in our thinking that we may have not been aware of (Brookfield, 2015), and enable the development of sense of individual and collective agency (ibid).

Student participants' critical reflection was evidenced in various communications that they had with each other and with staff in WG and RG meetings. Reflections at a doctoral level, however, also involve an active attempt, on the part of the researcher, to "*disrupt any traditional asymmetries of power that exist in the system*" (Brookfield, 2015: 19), especially to create a democratically inclusive environment where everyone could be heard, which was completely in alignment with the ethical aims of this research. The absence of critical reflection, as Cook-Sather (2014) argues, may lead to the continuation of routine teaching and learning, limiting the opportunities for staff to develop as tutors and people. Opportunities for critical reflection are not generally built into the structure of teaching, so any available opening to reflect on one's own practice, can offer impetus for change and professional development (ibid).

Brookfield (2009) argues that reflection, by definition, is not critical. It is possible to be reflective and focus only on the process, without questioning the power dynamics and wider structures that frame a field of practice, which in this case was practice within an HEI. He refers to critical reflection as a critique of ideology that helps the common people to become aware of the dominant mechanisms, partly responsible for perpetuating

inequality or a particular way of seeing the world (Brookfield, 2009); for example, the dominant grip of consumerism in education and how it seems to manipulate our knowledge and understanding about the current education system to not only justify but also maintain economic and political inequity. Applying this to my study, the assumptions that student participants and I accepted unquestioningly in WG and RG meetings may have been the ones that were constructed due to the influence of institutional dominant meaning making processes, prevalent in the places where we grew, live(d) and work(ed) (Norton, 2009). Taking this non-critical stance would make it harder for me to scrutinise my own practice, intentionally. It may make the findings of my project look appealing, but uncritical, contradicting the basic aims and objective of higher education. HEIs have always been regarded as agents of development (Taylor and Fransman, 2004) which empower the people to think more critically (Barnett, 1990), through the knowledge and skills that they provide to their members (Nussbaum, 2010).

As an HE educator, I was, therefore, keen to look at my position of power, especially as an insider and how I used it within the project to develop ethical research agendas. In reality, my research role evolved more within an 'in-between' space (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016) instead of a pure insider, as explained in Chapter Seven (section 7.3). My insider role bound me to employer loyalty where the institution had spent money and resources for me to undertake the doctoral study. The aim was not to criticise its processes and procedures, but at the same time there were a number of questions that arose in my mind as I progressed through the project. Some of these questions were more relevant to my personal knowledge and understanding of participatory approaches, and others more general, at a broader institutional level that made me question the position of participatory work and its sustainability within bureaucratically driven systemic hierarchies.

I, therefore, take this chapter as an opportunity to reflect critically on my practice of facilitating a participatory project and its conceptualisation in HE, whilst at the same time, questioning the position of participatory democracy within a neo liberal policy driven HE (see Chapter Two, section 2.1, the context of my study, for details)

9.2 Reflections as a critical researcher

As a critical researcher I wanted to analyse whether participatory approaches can actually help to encourage participation from everyone, or if this was more rhetoric than a reality. I wanted to understand the complexities of students' participation; paying attention to the students who actively participated and also to those whom I expected to participate but remained silent. The use of the term 'voice', therefore, referred not only to speech but all other forms of non-verbal communication, such as writing and other forms of text. As a critical researcher, I wanted to see beyond physical participation to subtle power relations and hierarchies that may have existed in the informal group meetings. Using a critical researcher's lens, I wanted to critically reflect upon and analyse whose interests the project eventually served.

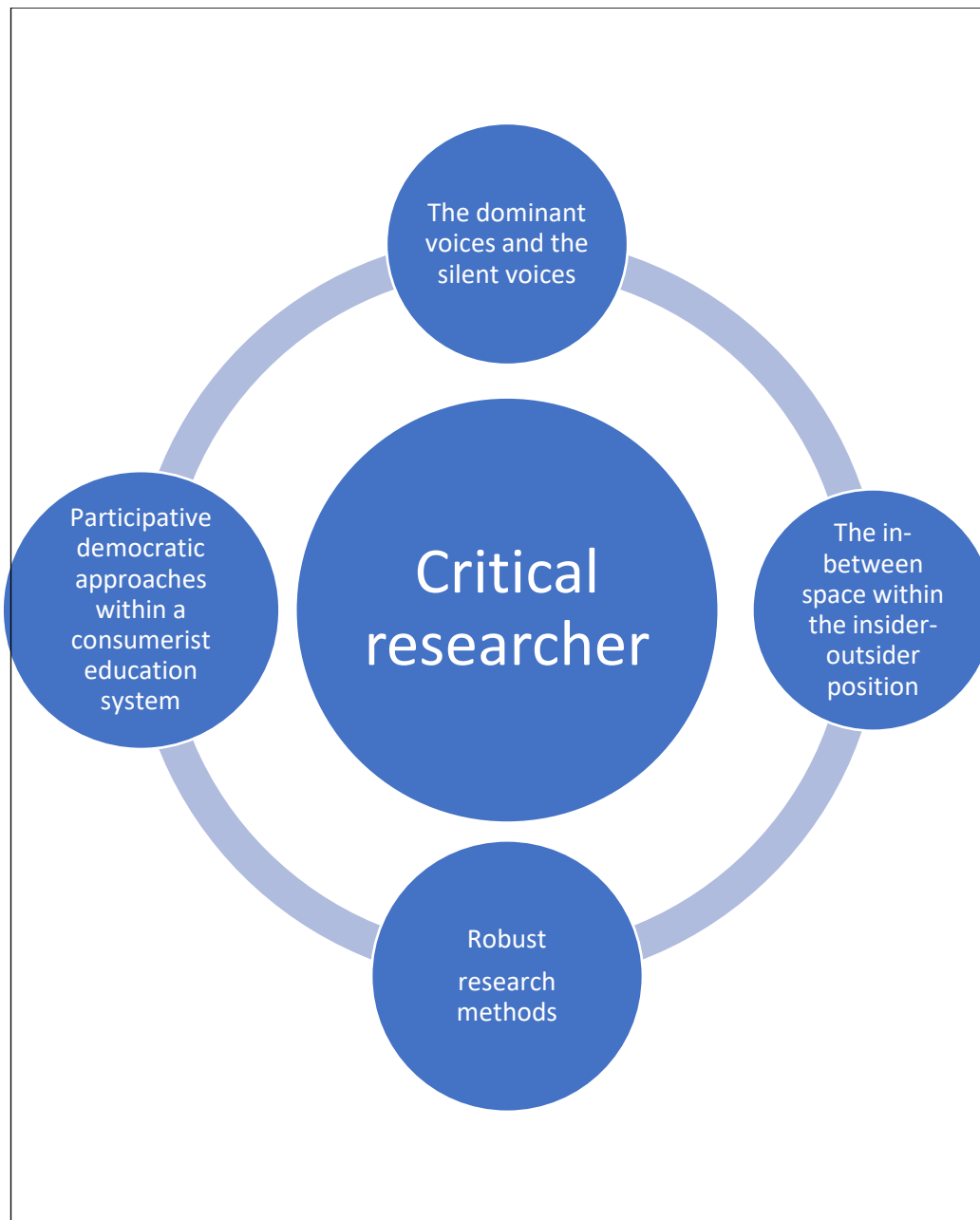


Figure 9.1: The dimensions of my analysis as a critical researcher

Figure 9.1 shows various dimensions that I considered whilst critically analysing my role as a researcher. These dimensions were not always exclusive to each other and overlapped in various phases of research, as represented by the interconnected circles. Each of the four elements of figure 9.1 are discussed further in the following subsections.

9.2.1 The dominant voices and the silent voices

The participants were students from different levels of ECS courses, ranging from undergraduate, level 4 students, to doctoral researchers (see table 5.1). The membership of the group, therefore, was not homogeneous, despite all participants belonging to the common academic discipline of ECS. Being aware of group dynamics, I was a little anxious at the beginning that the more powerful and dominant voices may silence the less powerful. There was a risk of manipulating the ideals of participatory democracy (Fielding, 2011) by choosing mechanisms that could have left the less confident and less vocal students unable to contribute their ideas (Robinson, 2012; Carey, 2013a), which, ironically, would have perpetuated and reflected social inequalities (Harper and Quaye, 2009). It was, therefore, necessary to select research processes that would empower not only a minority, whose values and forms of voice expressions fitted with the dominant structures of the institution (Freeman, 2014), but use tools that were all inclusive (Bragg, 2007) and reflected participants' everyday cultural and educational life and experiences (Dewey, 1938; Krishnaswamy, 2004).

At the time of data collection, participants were, therefore, given a choice to make a list of different research methods that they could use within the project to record their initial views on the ECRR Room. The building of thinking and reflection time in between meetings (Campbell, et al., 2007) was also believed to help participants who needed more time to think, develop or even change their views. These built- in mechanisms helped to promote listening to the views of all (Kidd and Kral, 2005), thereby reducing the chances of bias towards more vocal and confident speakers. To break any implicit hierarchy amongst participants, the meetings were convened in an informal environment, with refreshments. The use of the 'Radical-traditional analysis of levels of participation' (Lancaster University, n.d.) (see table 5.2 in Chapter Five), also helped to apply the equitable mode and relationship amongst participants, constantly reminding me of my facilitative, and students' cooperative and co- learning roles.

Participants' views on the inclusion of all student voice could be evidenced from the discussion we had at the debriefing event (RGM 3), after viewing the video recorded minutes; and the views that participants had expressed in their evaluation forms.

Participants are symbolised by a letter, where the evidence has come from video minutes, but remain unidentified where the evidence has come from their anonymous evaluation questionnaire. Participant N, as evidenced from the video minutes, for example, commented in the debriefing event saying that:

“The whole project went very well and everyone contributed”.

Further, participant E commented:

“Where would we get this opportunity to actively participate in research? I mean it is brilliant. Students normally have to wait to be a PhD researcher to taste all these things. You do not normally get it at a Bachelor’s level”.

Another participant, participant J, said that:

“I appreciate we have other methods of telling what we like or want, but I can see the difference that talking to peers and staff can make. It makes you appreciate other people’s perspective”.

The responses from participants N, E and J clearly show that the students did not feel that the research mechanisms favoured the culture of an elite minority (Carey, 2013a; Freeman, 2014) but appreciated the choice given to them to respond in their preferred ways. The variety given to participants, to express their views, be it in writing, spider diagram, room layout, typed text or any other form of communication, enabled everyone to participate, whether little or more fully, depending upon their level of interest. Similar views were reinforced by students in their (anonymous) evaluation forms, where, for example, one participant stated that:

“It is OK if people prefer not to talk- there are other alternative ways”.

Another participant, in her or his evaluation form reported,

“When we all started questioning each other, I could see a pattern of learning from peers. I could see how the freedom and flexibility given to us made us more aware of our group potential and also how we can influence the working of ECRR Room”.

The responses from participants again show a pattern of appreciating the choice of different methods to express their voices, without being dependent on a dominant institutional mechanism.

The positive responses from the participants gave me encouragement to continue using participatory methods that reflect students’ everyday culture, life and experiences (Dewey, 1938; Krishnaswamy, 2004) but, being a researcher, it did not come entirely naturally to me. The initial entries in my reflective journal tell a different story. My journal entry for February 20, 2013 (during the time of WGMs), for example, refers to the questions and dilemmas that I faced at that time.

“Today I went to a seminar in the university, organised by Participatory Enquiry Forum (PIF), Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education. Various speakers presented the philosophy of participatory research, as applied in health sciences. It was an interesting event where I got to network and hear about participatory approaches from a health perspective. It made think about the practical and policy aspect of participatory research.”

The questions I came out with included:

Q1. Should we expect a similar level of participation from all members? Does it really matter? If participation cannot be coerced then it should be alright to stay quiet. Silence too may be a form of participation. If that is how a member decides to participate, then we must respect that decision.

Q2. Wearing the insider-outsider hat, do I need to stay quiet to encourage others to talk? How do I know where to draw the line? Can taking a facilitator’s role restrict the researcher to express her/ his views on the subject matter?

Q3. How can we sustain participation of members? Sustaining dialogic participation can be challenging.

The questions listed above were based on my learning from discussions we had in the PIF and also from my reflection on video recorded minutes of the meetings. When I started viewing the videos to summarise discussions I realised that, in the initial meetings, it was me who was taking a majority of the discussion time. I also noticed that, although I kept on saying that all forms of participation (ranging from silence to full participation) are good, to consciously avoid any hierarchical assumption in the quality of participation (Barber, 2009; Kellett, 2010), I found myself prompting the less vocal students and referring to them with their names, to encourage them to share their views. In WGM 2, for example, I referred to participant I, an undergraduate level 4 student, by her name, twice, asking her if she wanted to share her ideas. I realised that there were moments in those initial meetings where I naturally switched to my tutor role and in an attempt to be inclusive, probed the participants to share their ideas verbally, which may have been contrary to their preferred style of sharing and participating. Nevertheless, without asking individuals, it may not be clear whether or not they welcome being brought into the conversation, but a personal realisation about feeling comfortable with silence, was an important learning for me. There were also examples, where I took charge of writing on flip charts to summarise participants' views, rather than equally sharing the summative task with everyone. In the first two meetings, the flip chart writing was either completed by myself, or by another member of staff or the doctoral researchers. This implicit assumption, of the staff or more qualified students being more able to record a quality summary of the meetings, challenged my position as a participatory researcher.

The more time I spent on the project, the more relaxed an attitude I developed as a researcher. A further reviewing of the video recorded meetings showed my move from a relatively dominating to a more democratic facilitator. The amount of talking that I did, for example, changed from speaking 48% of the time in WGM 2 to 32% in RGM 2. This shows how vital critical reflection can be in the development of a professional. A critical review of my own practice provided me with an opportunity to develop a more democratic attitude towards facilitating participatory projects.

9.2.2 The insider-outsider role and the in-between space

Another dilemma that I faced as a lead researcher was about my own voice in the project, as stated in the journal entry for February 20, 2013 (above). I had moments thinking that some of the ideas that students suggested as their views and desires for the ECRR Room could be hard to achieve, given the institutional budgetary constraints (for example, buying lots of laptops and computers). I, however, was not sure where and how to draw the line, especially in the first two WGMs, and, therefore, struggled to stick within a facilitative role at all times.

There was a possibility that the dominant institutional discourse, that I was familiar with, may have influenced the methods and decisions made in the participatory group meetings. Being an insider, there was a risk of seeing the institutional way as the normal mode of operating in HE and the only economical way of being productive and institutionally confirming (Zemblyas, 2006), to represent a good pedagogical environment.

It was only through critical reflection that I was able to grow into a participatory researcher's role. Despite doing participatory research with young children in early years settings and primary schools, prior to my doctoral work (e.g. Kanyal, 2010, 2012, 2014a), the dual identity of an employee and an insider researcher did sometimes put me into ethical dilemmas when facilitating honest and open participatory work.

It was after WGM 2 that I was able to relate more comfortably to the paradox of participation, believing, that 'more' participation, that I was trying to get from level 4 students, was not necessarily good participation. I gradually learnt how to negotiate participation and accepted different levels of students' participation within participatory group meetings. I was mentally more able to negotiate a participatory relationship with student participants, where I accepted the fact that if full participation cannot be achieved then opportunities needed to be given to enable the members to negotiate their own extent of participation. The choice of participating in WG and RG meetings, therefore,

was an effective move in allowing students to participate according to their levels of interest and motivation.

The difference in the level of students' views, for example, where some came with elaborate ideas of an ECRR Room, whereas others only scribbled a few notes, pointed towards the issues of varying motivation. A participatory researcher can sometimes expect a high level of participation from group members but it should be remembered that not everyone is consistently motivated. An opportunity for democratic decision making may not always be enough. The participants need to be passionate to enter into the spirit of the project. The design of the project can play a vital role, for example, a project may have processes that are predetermined; or may allow room for flexibility, which in turn, can affect the motivation and curiosity of the participating members. My insider-outsider, or the in-between position (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016), allowed me to go to the meetings with a rough structure and plan (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012), but then the openness of the meetings and co-construction within it, allowed for the processes to emerge and change. For example, see the changes that participants suggested to the research questions, as shown in Table 6.2 and 6.3, in Chapter Six.

There is evidence in the debriefing event (RGM 3), when I became comfortable in sharing my anxieties as a researcher with the students group, demonstrating my 'in-between' space. I was able to assert my worries to the student participants, without being anxious in my facilitative role. For example, at the start of the debriefing event, I said:

“At the beginning of the project, I was a little nervous if anyone would be willing to participate in my study. I was also nervous about how exactly it was going to pan out. Would it add any value to students' experiences”?

The responses from students, about their involvement in the project, show the knowledge and understanding they gained about the ECRR Room and also about the wider institutional context, which was only possible due to my insider position and participation from other staff. Participant I, for example, said in the debriefing event:

“I understand a lot more about the costs involved in our courses. I kind of thought that the fees we pay is for one-to-one tutor contact time but never thought that I will get so much out of a participatory project like this”.

Also, as evident in the conversation below, in the RGM 2 matrix scoring activity, about the use of technology, particularly the purchase of computers and laptops; the contributions from staff (as insiders and also as one of the participants in the meeting) show the practical benefits of including different stakeholders in projects:

Participant E: *“I’m not sure if they (computers and laptops) are the most important thing to have, therefore I have given a score of 1. I think that their cost effective and social impact will be low in a space like this”.*

Participant A: *“The actual pedagogical impact is quite low. I have put a score of 1”.*

Participant C: *“I completely agree with what you say. These things are expensive to buy and install. But I am also conscious of the fact that in previous meetings we said that we would want to have these in the room”.*

Participant E: *“I know, we said that, but if you look at their impact across all these criteria, I don’t think they score very high. There is so much more to do in the room and if someone really wants to use the computers, they can go to the library. It’s hardly 1 minute away”.*

Staff B: *“And don’t forget, some students now have their own iPads and tablets, they can always bring their own gadgets and use them instead”.*

Staff A: *“The department is also thinking of buying some loanable tablets, so that might help as well”.*

Participant C: *“I think that’s a jolly good idea. Everyone has got a smart phone anyway. Computers and laptops can be a little extravagant. The impact isn’t going to be that high either. I think we better stick with I”.*

The participation and influence of insider(s) in co-constructing knowledge and understating about the needs and resources of an ECRR Room is evident from this discussion, within a RGM. There was a need, for myself, the researcher, and other insider participants (like staff), to be critically subjective about the choices and decisions made in the meetings, for example, to recognise the moments when staff participants became an insider with outsiders; or when they took the role of an outsider with insiders. An ‘in-between’ space (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Milligan, 2016) was therefore a useful analogy to use in this participatory project. The ‘in-between’ space allowed the staff (including myself as a researcher) to take both a facilitative and a contributory role, adding wisdom and practicalities to the project (Kirschner, et al., 2004).

One of the students summed up my in-between space in her or his response to the evaluation questionnaire.

“Mallika never said ‘no’ to requirements but asked questions and encouraged to consider alternatives - no despondency”.

9.2.3 Use of robust research methods

Robustness of research methods is necessary to support the validity of research. Within my study, the robustness can be assessed by analysing the participatory and democratic capacity of research methods used; and also by looking at their sustainability to survive within pedagogic environments.

To make the research methods coherent with the aims of the study, which focused upon establishing a culture of participatory democracy (Dewey, 1908; Englund, 2000; Fielding, 2011); a dialogic approach (Freire, 1970, 1973; Fielding, 2011; Wegerif, 2013b, 2015, 2016,) within working and research group meetings, was established. The choice of participatory group meetings allowed respect of students’ (local participants)

previous and current knowledge and experiences (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, 2008), allowing for rich insights to be exchanged between all participants into understanding diverse views and meaning making processes (Bryman, 2012). The choice given to participants to respond in their preferred ways helped to make research methods authentic to students' knowledge and experiences (Rodríguez and Brown, 2009) and increased the likelihood of applying the findings into their local context, as the language and ideas that students used reflected the educational and professional context to which they all belonged. It was vital to regard students as important stakeholders in the planning (Mann, 2001) of the room as it was being developed to be used by them and would affect their experiences within the university. Attention to these details in the running of working and research group meetings (see Chapter Six for details) therefore helped to support the validity in research.

At a broader level, for research and its methodological approaches to be applied and sustained in educational environments, it is essential to consider the contextual validity of research. Triangulation, as stated by Cahill (2010), is intrinsic to the engagement of difference and multiplicity within participatory projects to enable robust analysis. Validity, however, should not be restricted to the convergence of perspectives, for example, within the narrow limits of a small ECS group, but must also regard the use of measures that situate data collection and analyses in a wider global, political, social and economic context (Cahill, 2010). In other words, how does analysis from the use of robust research methods help to triangulate both micro and macro interpretations and also capture the integration of the two (Pratt and Rosner, 2006). "*Jumping scales*" (Cahill, 2010: 186), between micro and macro environments, therefore, is permitted in participatory analysis as it allows the movement from personal experience to social theorising (ibid), determining the contextual validity of research. The knowledge and research skills gained by the participants, therefore, demonstrated a gain in understanding not only at a personal but also wider ECS social and professional levels. One of the research participants in her or his evaluation form commented that:

“This was the best experience of my university life. I enjoyed it so much and I learnt so much from it. I do not mind whether or not my views get built into the ECRR Room, the experience of working in a participatory project was a fantastic thing in itself. I am going to use these ideas further in my work. Thank you very much.”

This shows the “*jumping of scales*” (Cahill, 2010: 186) between micro and macro environments and the usefulness of participatory approaches in creating a culture of participation, which crosses a boundary from personal learning to include wider social application.

Two further examples, from students’ evaluation forms, show the evidence of personal learning and also a co-constructed pattern of learning and knowledge construction:

“I really enjoyed the matrix activity as it made me think about my views, within a group, and from there, what we took further was the best possible ideas for the ECRR Room”.

“When we all started questioning each other, I could see a pattern of learning from peers. I could see how the freedom and flexibility given to us made us more aware of our group potential and also how we can influence the working of ECRR Room”.

In addition to contextual validity, another aspect to consider to sustain the coherence of research is regarding its epistemological position, particularly the epistemological coherence with the aims of the study. Generally, the traditional analysis views the different worldviews, for example, the positivist and the interpretivist view as competing and opposite ways of knowing. Evans et al. (2011), however, suggest, that there are “*additional models that bind these beliefs in coherent explanatory frameworks*” (pg: 112). One such approach, as argued earlier in Chapter Five (see section 5.1), is PR, as the nature and selection of methods originate from the contextual and collaborative discussions and decisions made by the participants during the research process itself (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008). Although there is a close fit between qualitative research and PR, quantitative methods are not ruled out (Riet,

2008). There are various conceptual processes that can support the combining of seemingly mutually inconsistent epistemologies, for example, the use of a quantitative prioritisation tool for data analysis within a predominantly qualitative research project, such as mine. Within my study, the use of matrix activity in RGM 2, for example, can arguably be seen as a reductionist approach to quantify the priorities for the ECRR Room. However, as Krishnaswamy (2004) argues, the use of matrices and ranking can be valuable activities in PR, as long as they enable the representation of participants' views (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008; Crivello, et al., 2009).

Within the WGMs, various categories of resources and activities were produced by the participants by combining their prospective ECRR Room ideas into different themes. After an extensive theme generation and regeneration process (as shown in appendix 5 and table 8.3), it became vital to find an efficient means to summarise and manage this voluminous qualitative data. The use of matrix, in this context, proved helpful as it assisted in summarising the categories of resources and activities for the ECRR Room. Following the pattern from previous participatory group meetings, I took a rough outline of the matrix to the RGM, and the matrix was then open to the participants for discussion and amendment. This moderate amount of advance preparation, by me, helped with time management and also gave a rough structure for everyone to start the discussion (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; MacDonald, 2012). The opening of categorisation to the participants was important to allow them to bring their local classification and scoring processes, and to make it more relevant to their educational and professional contexts, rather than completely basing it on my (the researcher's) categorisations (Riet, 2008). The participants did choose to make changes to the matrix activity and amended the categories and their definitions to make it more relevant to the ECS context (discussed above in Chapter Six, see section 6.3.1, section 6.3.2 and appendix six).

At a quick glance, the matrix analysis may display a solely quantitative approach to data analysis, inspired by positivism (for example, see table 8.4 and appendix seven), but the process, prior to arriving to an agreed score for each category, included comprehensive discussion. The participants asked a series of questions to each other to critically engage with each other's views (Winter and Munn-Giddings, 2001), before arriving to an agreed score (as discussed in Chapter Six, section 6.3.1). This

was regarded as an important part of participatory analysis as it allowed maintenance of a balance between the condensing of data into a priority list, to retaining the original meaning and “*feel*” (Gale, et al., 2013: 5) of the participants’ views.

The matrix activity, therefore, was not limited to reducing the previous data into quantifiable numbers, but was also used to encourage participants to share and question each other’s views (for detail, please see section 6.3.1). The social situation in RGMs, therefore, allowed the participants to move beyond their individual preferences of themes and collectively and critically consider the social, structural and procedural issues that would impact upon ECS students’ pedagogical experiences, through the ECRR Room. The discussions, within the matrix activity, therefore, helped to sustain an epistemological curiosity, with respect to the ECS courses, and opportunities for critical reflection (Brookfield, 2009), thereby making the dialogues within RGM 2 engaging and critically pedagogical (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Mercer, 2008; Wegerif, 2013b, 2016).

The matrix activity and the sharing and consensus drawing within the RGM 2 was therefore built upon the epistemological principles of social constructivism and critical theory. The discussions started from a qualitative method of dialogic communication (Mercer, 2008; Wegerif, 2013b); and eventually led to the formation of a more structured quantitative matrix (Kidd and Kral, 2005; Riet, 2008) that included questioning and reflection (Freire, 1970; Brookfield, 2009). Epistemologically, the matrix represented multiple realities, based upon participants’ subjective experiences and circumstances (Dewey, 1938), influenced by their educational and professional experiences (Dewey, 1938; MacDonald, 2012). The use of traditional and non-traditional methods of enquiry and analysis, therefore, helped to deepen the analysis (Kidd and Kral, 2005). PR, in my study, was neither against any particular method, nor was it anti-positivist, instead, it was “*a continuing conversation*” (Kidd and Kral, 2005: 190) amongst the participants. The study made use of some quantitative analysis only after combining it with a dialogic communication, hence not “*cloning quantification*” (Gray, 1998: 362), as is often done in pure positivists studies.

On reflection, the reasoning behind using a more dialogic methodology with the matrix activity can be linked to the discursive turn in social psychology which regards the social world as a discursive construction and promotes consultation to improve data quality (Corson, 1996). Discursive social psychology regards mental activity as a range of moves in human activity, governed by informal conversation rules, instead of some internal set of processes (Corson, 1995; Gibson, 2009). It emphasises the role of interpersonal interaction in knowledge co-construction and research analysis (Parker, 2012). This is similar to the principles of a dialogic approach to knowledge construction as pioneered by Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978) and extended by Mercer (2004, 2008) and Wegerif (2013b, 2016) who advocate learning to be an active, social process (Vygotsky, 1978, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wegerif, 2013b, 2016), where the learners construct new ideas and concepts based upon their current and pre-existing knowledge and experiences (Dewey 1938), in constant contact with another person (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010), who is generally a more knowledgeable peer or tutor, or both (Vygotsky, 1978) (for details, please see Chapter Four, section 4.2). This is in contrast with the positivist approach of knowledge construction where the truth that is sought is of a causal nature (Fairbrother et al., 2015). The analysis, within positivism, includes an active employment of deductive reasoning, thereby building knowledge iteratively (and not discursively), as the series and sequences of theory- tests under investigation unfold (Fairbrother et al., 2015).

The informal conversational methods used within the matrix activity resonate closely with the discursive social psychology and dialogic pedagogy as the inquiry methods and questioning, guided by the ECRR Room resources and research needs, remained largely un-cemented and altered with the building of spiral of reflection amongst the participants (Fairbrother et al., 2015) (for example, see section 8.2.2.2- the students' discussion). This informal knowledge construction methodology can also be linked with the empowerment of participants, one of the prime aims of my study, as it favoured the discursive consensus drawing processes over other ways of decision making, for example, coercive authority and the authority of traditional identities (Warren, 1993). Decision making through everyday conversation is less artificial than written text or rehearsed speech which the participants may otherwise design to meet

the expectations of a researcher or other authority figures in the process, thereby weakening the spirit of genuine participation (Parker, 2012).

As a critical researcher, I was happy with the use of democratically designed research methods and also the level of participation by the stakeholders. Students, however, were only one of the stakeholders in the development of ECRR Room. Staff, both academic and administrative, were also important stakeholders and were therefore represented in participatory group meetings. Their inclusion in the project provided opportunities for listening to the experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders (Ainscow, n.d.; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Richards, 2011). There were moments, however, at RGMs, whilst discussing priority order for resources and activities for ECRR Room, that I questioned my decision to including only academic and administrative staff and not inviting members of department management team to join the meetings.

Below is an excerpt from my journal entry, dated, February 24, 2013, where I was going through a dilemma of widening participation to including management in the process:

“Today we have had a very successful meeting where all participants were fully engaged in questioning each other’s decisions about the resources and activities that they wanted to see in the room. There was clear evidence of both co-construction and critical analysis. There were, however, times when I felt that a representative from management was also needed to embed the design and agreed usage of ECRR Room at a more systemic level in the department. Can the presence and participation from management make a big difference”?

The project aspired to inclusive decision making to share the research agenda, process and analysis, to establish participants as powerful agents (Baum, et al., 2006), but on reflection, I was torn between the inclusion or exclusion of management as one of the stakeholders in WG and RG meetings. On a practical note, management may have struggled to keep with the time and commitment, but their views could have provided a much clearer institutional context. It could have been one of the ways of getting the institution to work on the findings and recommendations (Cameron, et al., 2010). On the other hand, I also thought that including management, from an institution that is

dominated by strict hierarchies, might not have worked in favour of the project. Sharing the control of research agenda, process and analysis was an empowering feature of the project (Baum, et al., 2006) which could have been weakened by the presence of more prominent and dominant hierarchies of management (Baldock et al., 2009). It may have contributed in creating visible and invisible hierarchies within the groups, affecting the reliability of responses by the participants. It may have also created awkward and intimidating moments for me, as a lead researcher, as I was an insider researcher from the same institution, leading to an implicit dominance of research agenda by the management.

The inclusion of management, however, could have provided more security to the participants to be assured of the consequent actions (Fielding, 2001; Holdsworth 2005; Manefield, et al., 2007). The inclusion of stakeholders, therefore, is an important decision to be made, prior to the starting of a project. On reflection, an open approach to selecting stakeholders could have itself become an inclusive part of the project where the WG members could have decided on stakeholders' membership. Also the securing of a formal opportunity to report the findings to managers would have also helped to protect the participatory and democratic ethos of the room.

9.2.4 The place of participative democratic approaches within a consumerist education system

The purpose of HE and the aims of participatory research can be seen in synergy with each other, converging upon the liberation of people from a narrow mind frame towards thinking more critically (Barnett, 1990; Cornwall and Jewekes, 1995; Pant, 2008); thereby deepening human understanding (Collini, 2011). The main focus of my study was to co-create a pedagogical space, which was achieved with the opening of an ECRR Room in the summer of 2013, by the department, to its students. The space has since been used by the students and staff, alike, but a question that remains unanswered is the sustainability of similar co-constructed environments in the current HE system. The use of participatory approaches in designing the space gave its students an ownership of learning but the extension of ownership to other (future) students may imply the need for redesigning the environment by the next cohort (Bovill, et al., 2011). This raises

questions about time and resource management. The way I have been dealing with this issue is by sharing the research findings with new groups of ECS students in their level four research module, so that they are aware of the democratic and participatory spirit of the ECRR Room and can get a similar (if not the same) ownership of the space by putting their suggestions in a suggestion box, that is kept in the room itself. The new students on the ECS courses are also shown the space during their course induction so that they, too, are aware of the underpinning ideas behind the working of the pedagogical space.

The overall environment of the HE sector, however, as argued in Chapters Two and Three, is changing; steered primarily by market driven initiatives, with implications on pedagogical practices (Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Cochrane and Williams, 2013). There is nothing wrong in governments' taking actions to ensure nation's economic priorities, but as Nussbaum (2010) argues, these policies and goods should not be regarded as ends in themselves. The neo- liberal policy influence on HE, as argued in Chapter Two, has pushed the dominant perception of university as "*sources of highly specific, marketable commodities*" (Boulton and Lucas, 2008: 5), which, in turn, reconceptualises the role of students as consumers within a marketised HE (Carey, 2013b; Bovill, et al., 2016). This perception of universities shifts the pedagogical discourse towards improving students' choices and satisfaction, rather than understanding HE as a co-operative and co- productive enterprise (Bovill, et al., 2016). Tutors feel the pressure of producing highly skilled labour to meet the economic needs of society (Brennan, et al., 2004; Jaitli, 2010), within strict and rigid time frames. This idea of producing quick adaptable employees for economic growth conflicts with the methodology of participatory work. Participatory practices develop over extended timeframes to embed trust amongst participants. The current system of HE does not always allow that extended timeframe due to its pre-established aims and targets. The acceptance of participatory work as a legitimate routine activity within HE, therefore, can be a contested concept, elevating uncertainty amongst HE practitioners. A pedagogy of listening, questioning and reasoning, which requires investment of time, can hence be difficult to sustain in HE.

Sustaining this pedagogical approach also requires opportunities for critical reflection, which may lead to critiquing one's own and institutional practices and, therefore, may

not sit comfortably with institutional strategic growth agendas, both at micro and macro levels. The implicit negation to acceptance of participatory practices may also result from becoming habitual to the existing system of regarding students as consumers; and therefore becoming anxious over the perceived risks associated with pedagogical changes (Sheth and Stellner, 1979). Staff concerns may also revolve around finding 'time' for co-creation work, on top of already heavy workloads (Bovill, et al., 2016). The changed landscape of HE, especially with regards to academics' new roles, stipulates increased work expectations in relation to research, management, administration and student diversity within a constantly resource constrained environment (Nagy, 2011). The continual demand of increased workload often leads tutors to regard such approaches to knowledge construction as time consuming, and they may therefore resist applying these ideas into practice (Bovill, et al., 2011). Students, too, may resist stepping out of their (comfortable) traditional passive role to engage in co-creation (Bovill, et al., 2016). These processes, as Bovill, et al., (2011) argue, may appear time consuming initially, but have the potential to repay later as students eventually take a more active role in their learning process. The resistance to co-creation can also be eased by comparing the significant benefits of the risks that students and staff take to co-create learning, over more routine learning and teaching approaches (Bovill, et al., 2016).

Another implicit question that remains with the application of participatory ideals within pedagogical contexts, is the question of trust. Students who participated in the ECRR Room project trusted me, as a lead researcher, to provide them and the subsequent students with the experiences that were agreed in working and research group meetings. In a contemporary HE system, academics are positioned somewhere in the middle rung of the institutional hierarchy, giving us some powers but, at the same time, restricting others. The vertical hierarchies of power in neo-liberal education institutions are complex due to their visibility as well as invisibility, at the same time. The ECRR Room, since it was opened in 2013, has already seen many changes. The space itself has been moved thrice, from a bigger room to a much smaller space, and the member of staff who used to look after the ECRR Room (the administrator who also participated in WG and RG meetings) has been made redundant. The original room has been offered a course within another discipline that attracts current policy attention and also manages to bring more business for the institution. This makes me think about accountability and how it

may intersect with trust. Does participatory research make the position of a researcher vulnerable, with regards to trust? Would the participants trust to get involved in future participatory work despite the clarity and management of expectations that I made explicit at the initial stages of the project?

My position as an academic restricts a lot of physical functions that I can take to bring about change. With the embedding of neo-liberal attitudes within institutions comes a culture of fear where people are often afraid to confront the system. The change of room, from example, from a bigger space to a smaller room, has been confronted by the ECS staff, including myself, but the decision has remained. The project itself ran well and provided a democratic space to students who were involved as participants; but the changes in the ECRR Room, thereafter, raise questions about the sustainability of such processes within a consumerist education system. The participants at that time were happy with what they had achieved. They were however hopeful that the legacy would continue in future. The comments made by some participants in their evaluation form demonstrate that:

“It is lovely to see that the space is being developed in collaboration with students. The ECRR Room will be more inviting and appealing to students as it reflects their needs and interests”.

“I am so proud that we managed to produce something that will be of value to the current and future students”.

“I was pleasantly surprised to see that students’ views were being used to co-construct knowledge and not limited to filling in module evaluation forms”.

The responses above show that students were proud of what they had produced and believed that it would be of value to the future student groups. There are also glimpses of their desire to participate more in participatory democracy rather than representational democracy (Fielding, 2011), often measured through pre-determined structures, such as module evaluation forms. The students appeared much happier to be involved in a small scale participatory project that offered them chances of real participation where they

could experience participatory democracy first hand, rather than reading about it from books.

“Interesting being a research participant and feeling that I was an integral part of the process rather than observing others and reading about participation and research from books”.

All these aspects of critical reflection as a participatory researcher made me think about the role of participatory approaches in an HEI. The critique developed further as I continued to reflect upon the pedagogic use of PR, as discussed in detail in the next section.

9.3 Reflections as a reflective practitioner

As a reflective practitioner, I wanted to analyse whether participatory approaches could contribute to HE pedagogy. This was an opportunity for me to revisit theoretical arguments and analyse how underpinning ideas from critical theory and social constructivism can help to conceptualise and implement participatory principles in practice; and how they can contribute towards co-constructing critical knowledge amongst various participants. This reflection on the use of combined theoretical perspectives enabled me to analyse the power effects of collective participation, as compared with individual contributions. It helped me to take a step beyond the voice work, generally represented in structural procedures within universities, and consider different theoretical frames that could have a profound impact on pedagogy, informing professional practice.

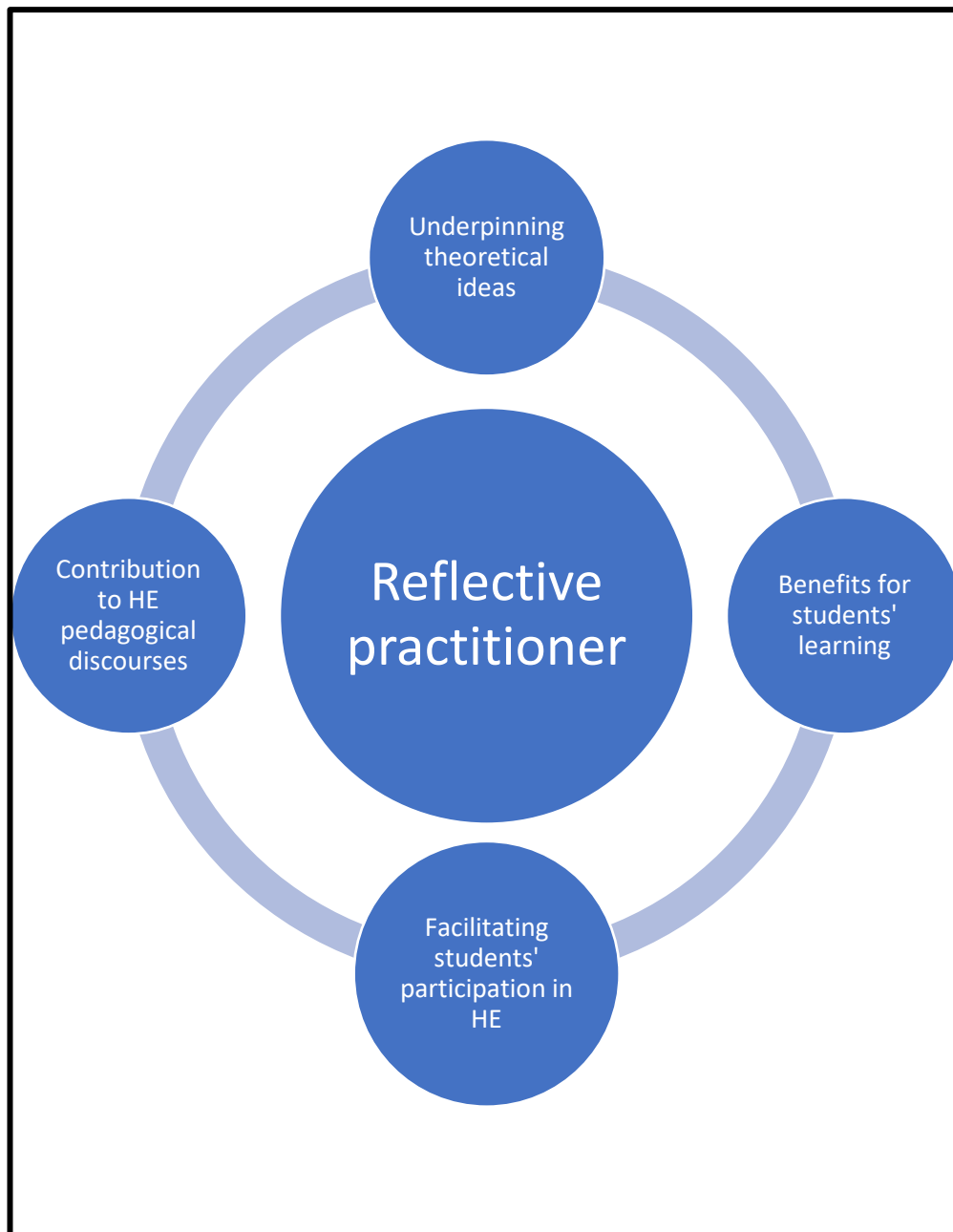


Figure 9.2: The dimensions of my analysis as a reflective practitioner

Figure 9.2 shows different dimensions that I considered whilst critically analysing my role as a reflective practitioner. These dimensions, similar to the dimensions of a critical researcher, were not always exclusive to each other and overlapped in various processes of research, again represented by the interconnected circles. Reflection on both roles, as a critical researcher and a reflexive practitioner, was not mutually exclusive either, and the arguments and evidence to support analysis, overlapped and intersected. They have

been presented in separate figures for the purpose of clarity and illustration. The four elements of figure 9.2 are discussed in detail in the next section.

9.3.1 Underpinning theoretical ideas

The design and collective analysis of the project drew heavily on critical theory and social constructivism, two frameworks which belong to separate, yet related ideologies (for their shared underpinning ideas, see Chapter Four). Social constructivism, which has been accepted in response to critique of earlier constructivist theories, extended the theorisation of learning by proposing the significant role that social interaction and learners' active participation can play in knowledge construction (Spyrou, 2011). Critical theory, on the other hand, originated from a sociological and humanistic perspective of human emancipation from different forms of oppression, and referred to the social aspect of emancipation, where participants collectively reflect on the conditions of oppression, thereby developing critical awareness about the issues surrounding them (Roberts, 1994). It was this critical consciousness, as identified in the critical theory of Freire (1970, 1973) that I believed became an implicit empowering process and enabled the participants to take action and change their own decisions (Freire, 1970, 1973). Oppression, unlike the notion of disempowerment that Freire (1970, 1973) conceptualised during his 1960s and 70s research with the marginalised peasant farmer communities, is contextualised differently in my research. Its meaning is mediated within the existing HE inequalities, especially the power imbalances between students and staff, between student groups, and also between the institution and its members, through the more dominant use of pre-established student voice mechanisms that promote conformity to consumerist culture, by indirectly favouring certain social groups (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three).

The social aspect of co-construction, therefore, became a common element between both theories and so did the nature of enquiry. Being an academic, I was more inclined towards using a methodology that could help the participants both construct and sustain knowledge. Also of vital importance was the building of opportunities for critical reflection to extend learning beyond descriptive points (Pant, 2008) and that participants

were able to challenge any assumptions by asking probing questions, rather than unquestioningly accepting the dominant processes of institutional meaning making (Bowen, 2010). The enabling of the conditions that led to questioning, reasoning, negotiating, reflection and therefore enquiry, was a driving force to combine the two theoretical perspectives, under the umbrella of participatory research

The findings from research, especially from the joint participants' analysis (as shown in appendix 7), shows the richness of data and data analysis when this combined theoretical approach was used. Had the project stopped at the WGM stage; where a list of resources and activities was co-constructed for the ECRR Room (see appendix 5), the opportunity for sustained engagement and critical reflection may have been missed, which, arguably, is essential for taking learning at a metacognitive level (Spencer, 2011; Murawski and Garza, 2012). Metacognition, although not a focus of my research, is a common feature between social-constructivism and critical theory, as it enables the participants to view their learning at a higher level. I was more interested in the methods of open discussion that involved a series of questions, to promote critical reflection at both individual and collective levels, resonating closely with metacognitive thinking (Spencer, 2011; Murawski and Garza, 2012).

In a similar vein, applying the lofty ideals of critical theory into practice can be challenging. Exploring the potential of engaging participants with conscientisation, mediating power imbalances, and finding opportunities for empowerment, was only possible through the use of dialogic approaches to reasoning, questioning, negotiating and reflection. Likewise, it was the co-construction mechanisms used in WG and RG meetings that enabled the development of a democratic pedagogical environment, which, in turn, gave participants the opportunities to foster an inquisitive, respectful, reflective approach to knowledge construction. A *critical social-construction* of knowledge, I would argue, was only possible due to combined theoretical perspectives applied via participatory approaches.

Figure 9.3 shows the overlap and integration of these two theoretical perspectives and how this helped with knowledge co-construction processes in the participatory project.

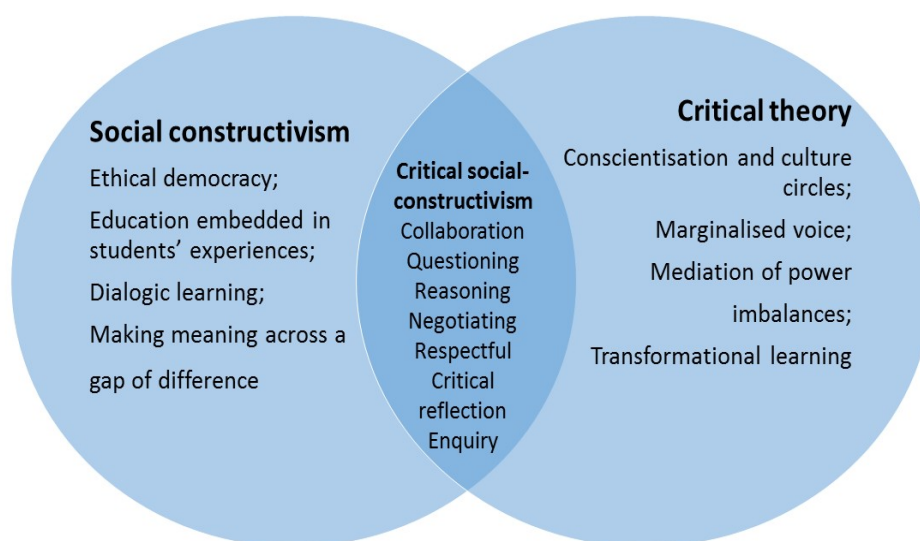


Figure 9.3: Illustration of the combination of social constructivism and critical theory- critical social-constructivism

Figure 9.3 shows the intersection between social constructivism and critical theory in my study and how a theoretical combination fostered the development of critically co-constructed knowledge and understanding about the use and development of an ECRR Room. The figure also demonstrates the power of collective approach over separate, individual views, and how this collective approach for knowledge co-construction can offer potential benefits for HE pedagogy. The benefits, especially for students learning, are discussed in the following section.

9.3.2 Benefits for students' learning

The benefits of including participatory approaches in HE pedagogies have been argued in previous chapters of this thesis, for example, Chapter Eight (see section 8.2.2.3.3). As Pant (2008) argues, the benefits of such processes for the participants can be summarised in the form of various outcomes. These outcomes can range from the participants being

able to “*refine their intellectual capacities, developing new knowledge, collective decision making for informed options, liberation of the mind from unchallenged dominant discourses, increased ownership of the work, and therefore empowerment*” (Pant, 2008: 101). Participants can be said to be empowered as a result of their learning from critical reflection, where they were able to challenge the major methods of institutional meaning making, therefore not accepting dominant ideologies without questioning (Brookfield, 2009). Pant (2008) further argues that empowerment can be realised at three levels - personal, relational and social levels. In this study, at a personal level, participants were able to develop a sense of self and individual confidence. At a relational level, participants developed the ability to participate, negotiate and influence the nature of relationship within groups, and the common decisions made within these groups (ibid). The discussion in WG and RG meetings, especially during the matrix activity, gave opportunities to the participants to negotiate and make decisions for the ECRR Room. Empowerment, at social level, is realised when groups achieve extensive impact due to their collective action (ibid). The collaborative work between students and staff managed to produce a blueprint for the ECRR Room, which in itself was an extensive outcome for the project. The existence and the use of the room as a shared pedagogical space, in itself, is a reminder of the impact of the project.

The section above demonstrates the benefits of participatory project in students’ learning, taking specific examples from the ECRR Room project, but in order to apply these ideas into generic HE practice, I summarise below the facilitation steps, that emerged from my own experience of engaging with theory and practice of participation.

9.3.3 Facilitating students' participation in higher education

With a secure theoretical conception and its application its application in practice, I was able to reflect on the ways in which these ideas could be applied for pedagogical benefit, in HE. A theoretical conception using insights from social constructivism and critical theory (as discussed above), certainly helped with knowledge co-construction, but we have to be mindful of any institutional challenges that may come on the way. For the integration of participatory pedagogy in the current HE system in England, there is a need for the alignment between democratic education and the contemporary HE systems.

The acceptance of the proposed participatory processes, as stated earlier in Chapter Two, has to come from “*the margins to the centre of institutions and the policy environment within which these operate*” (Taylor and Fransman, 2004: 33). Without this acceptance, the processes would still be beneficial for the participants, but may not be able to bring the extent of action and social change as is expected and claimed by the use of such approaches.

To apply a generic participatory work in HE, I suggest the following four facilitation steps, as summarised below in figure 9.4. These can be treated as either linear or spiral, depending upon the context and aims of the study or work.

The entire process can also be seen as cyclical, where critical reflection can lead to new motivation and insights and henceforth a new start. The application of these generic steps in HE (figure 9.4) may not work as effectively with larger sized groups. My insights are based on the work that I did with 20 students and 3 staff participants. Due to the timetabling issue, the actual WG and RG meetings had to be split between Tuesday and Wednesday groups, further reducing the size of participatory group members. The reduced size must have favoured the quality of discussion participants were able to have in the meetings. In general terms, the larger the group size, the more difficult it becomes to engage all participants in the process (Carey, 2013a). The level of participation and engagement, in addition to the number, is also affected by the density of the group (Porter, 2006). The higher the density ratio between participants and staff or facilitators, the more difficult it becomes to pay attention towards the quality of interaction. A potential solution may be to work with sub groups, working within a main group. Also, as the processes get embedded into practice and policy, their routine use can afford the confidence to the tutor to share facilitation with participants, as part of learning and teaching strategy.

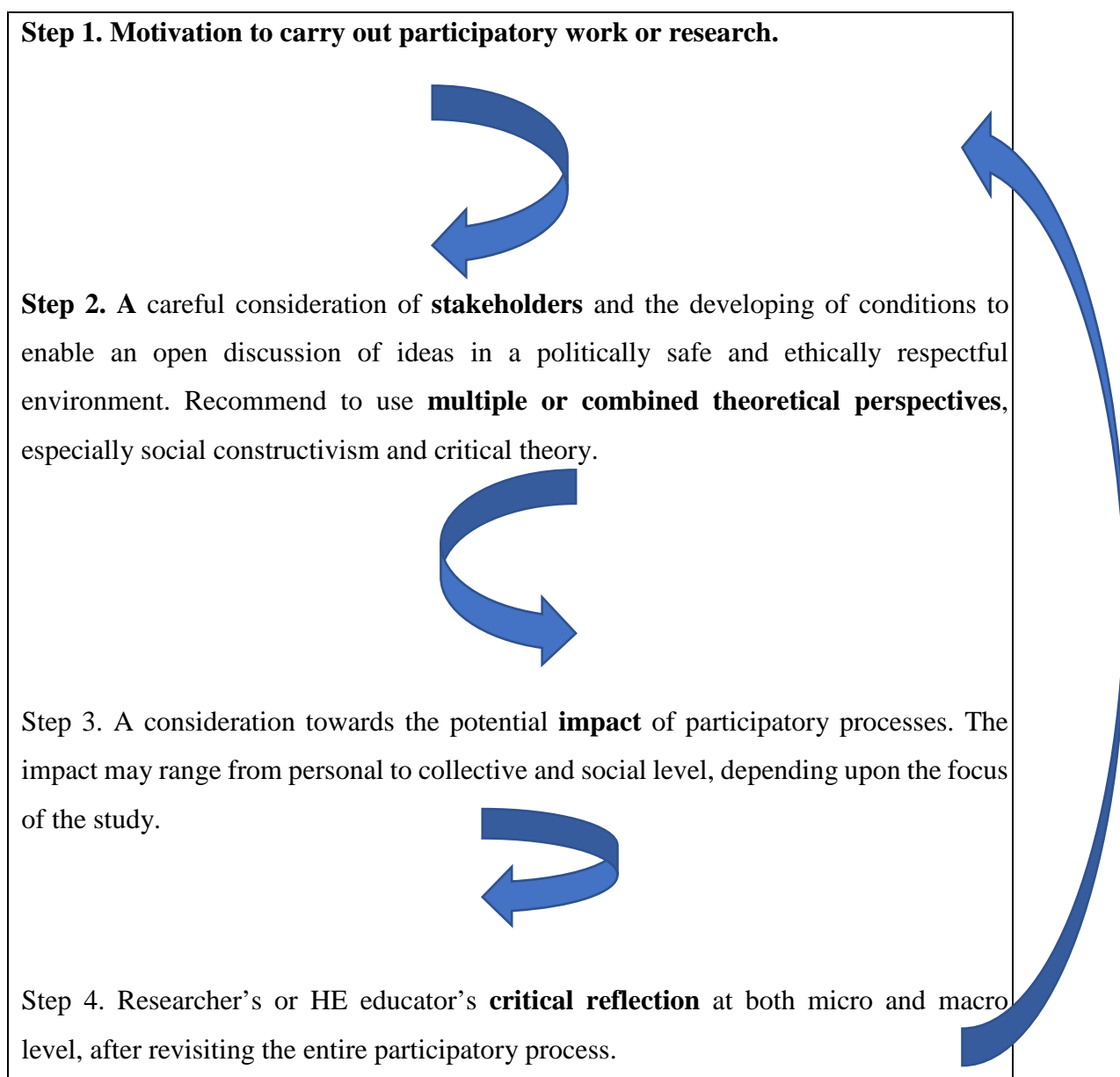


Figure 9.4: Key facilitation steps in a participatory project

Without the alignment between institutional policy and practice, the tutors may be left to fend for themselves while applying these ideas into practice. The absence of institutional policy, when coupled with the issue of group size and timetable, such situations may create ethical dilemmas for the participatory researcher where they may think that they are asking too much voluntary time of the participants. I went through a similar predicament in this project at the time of the final matrix scoring activity, especially when a final score was being agreed as the average score from Tuesday and Wednesday groups. On reflection, a final score between the two groups should have

been calculated using similar discursive methods, as used in other RG meetings. This would have, however, proved difficult due to the unavailability of common free time between the two groups. Participatory practices, as stated earlier in section 9.2.4, take extended periods of timeframes to embed. Sustaining a pedagogy of listening, questioning and reasoning can therefore pose its own challenges within a rigid HE system.

Another similar challenge faced in this project was during the stage of my personal reflection, which I carried out without students' input. My critical reflection, again, could have been shared with the student participants to reveal my own learning and professional development as a result of my engagement with the process. In a similar vein, students too, might have gone through a stage of personal critical reflection; and an opportunity for us all to discuss and share our critical reflections could have been illuminating. This sharing and critiquing, however, would have taken more time, when, as a researcher, I already felt that I was demanding too much time from students. The current systems in HE do not always allow us these prolonged periods of time which are needed to embed the ethos of participatory work within HE pedagogies.

An additional challenge that I faced whilst analysing the ways to facilitate students' participation was linked with my theoretical conception of social constructivist ideas. As argued earlier, in Chapter Four, I was more convinced by a dialogic approach to knowledge construction (see Mercer, 2004, 2008; Wegerif, 2013a, 2015, 2016), than the application of Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978- see section 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 in Chapter Four) to a participatory research methodology. My conception was challenged whilst analysing the videos of the training that I imparted to the students, as part of the study. I provided training to all participating students at the time of project briefing and data analysis, particularly, while introducing the notion of participatory research and participatory analysis (see Chapter 5, section 5.8). These training sessions were quite informal in nature and facilitated in a way that encouraged discussion (Cotterell, 2008). The aim was to make the students aware of the ethos and underlying principles of PR, to encourage collaborative discussions and challenge any rigid ways of thinking and decision

making (Richards, 2011). The discussions in the training sessions led to the selection of participatory research and analysis methods, which were chosen by students, hence increasing the likelihood of selecting the tools that were part of participants' cultural and educational life (Krishnaswamy, 2004). The process also helped to make me, the tutor and the lead researcher, aware of the contexts of students' professional and educational lives, an insight which I might have struggled to achieve via other more formal methods of teaching, learning and research. The discursive nature of the training sessions encouraged inclusive and shared decision making and was useful in helping me to avoid and impose my ideas around appropriate research methods and analysis, onto students. The training, therefore, helped to avoid any prospective situation where the students might have felt uncomfortable with a lack of research knowledge, and therefore, not able to contribute confidently to the participatory group meetings (Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Goins, et al, 2011).

The above argument fits with the notions of PR (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Goins et al., 2011) but on closer introspection, it appears that I was applying both Vygotsky's idea of ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation, in these training sessions. On reflection, it seems that I was convinced with one aspect of social reality, which was sharing 'a particular way' of conducting PR in education. Through facilitated discussions, I was trying to appropriate participants' dialogues, and therefore knowledge construction, to match closely with my own knowledge and understanding of PR. Although inclusive decision making and the sharing of the research agenda, process and analysis were an integral part of the process, especially to establish students as powerful agents (Baum, et al., 2006), but with knowledge appropriation and seeing myself as the 'knowledge bearer', I was also portraying myself as a 'master', and the students as legitimate peripheral participants in the research training process (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The same explanation could be applied to the group dynamics in initial participatory group meetings where the more confident students were taking the control but eventually facilitating the participation of younger and less experienced students into group discussions. With the progression of participatory group meetings, the student participants became more confident, thereby making me diminish the intervention that I afforded. My study, therefore, demonstrates that working within a ZPD fits with a

participatory approach, as there were opportunities for inclusive decision making, but at the same time, there was room to accommodate the need for a ‘more knowledgeable other’ (Vygotsky, 1978), be it a tutor, lead researcher, or peers, to support and facilitate participants’ learning.

9.3.4 Contribution to pedagogical discourse

To what extent can the practice of participatory work then influence pedagogical approaches in HE? It is through the practical examples and arguments in this section that I include from my research that the HE educators, including ECS tutors, would be able to see the reasoning behind arguing for a place of PR in pedagogical practices.

Firstly, at a practical level, the practice of PR can be seen to be conflicting with the current neo-liberal model of education. The neo liberal model of education focuses on the relationship between students and their university as a conventional customer-provider relationship (Carey, 2013b), whereas the participatory model regards students as co-producers in their learning (Bovill, et al., 2016). With growing recognition and acceptance of the customer service relationship between students and institutions, the overall management of pedagogic environments of HEIs is also being affected (Bragg, 2007; Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Cochrane and Williams, 2013). As a result, HEIs are under constant pressure to produce trained, ready-made, quickly adaptable manpower for the labour market, (Tandon, 2007; Buchanan, 2014), making institutions use more technocratic, structured and policy driven student voice mechanisms, such as large scale surveys (Currrens, 2011), which generally lack dialogic interaction. There is, however, research evidence that shows that students do not necessarily see themselves positioned separately in either the consumer or the participatory model of education, but somewhere in between (Bergan, 2003; Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Carey, 2013a). This means that, if given the opportunity, students would be interested in contributing to participatory work, and this was evidenced through students’ willingness to participate in my project. An excerpt from a discussion in RGM 3, after the debriefing event, shows a dialogic exchange between student participants on the value of participatory processes in HE pedagogy, as shown below:

Participant C: *“A lot of students think that this is an adult college and because they pay the fees, why don’t they get given the exact guidance and told what exactly needs to be done. They need to learn that they need to do a lot more research and a lot more reading. There is a culture of telling, telling exactly what to do, both in schools and in college. It is so good to see that there are opportunities for wider discussions and debates. Why don’t everyone want to put forward an idea and discuss and debate it further? I think we need more joint projects. Maybe we need to engage people in such work right from the beginning, when they start the university. That may help to set up the expectations. People need to experience it. If you put effort into it, you get a lot. If people are willing to work in participatory projects like this, I’m sure they will gain a lot out of it”.*

Participant A: *“I agree, by working together in joint projects, you realise that you actually have a lot to offer. It also makes you reflect on your own ideas and listen to what others have to say. I can clearly see how my thinking has moved from my personal preferences to something that is now more social, maybe more collective. I’m glad that I came to all the meetings. Our ideas, which were maybe not so firm and informed at the beginning, with more meetings, discussions and debates have become critical. I now understand what is meant by critical analysis”.*

Participant C can be seen to be challenging the consumer: service relationship of the consumerist model of education and embracing the opportunity given to her to work in a participatory project. Her comments on including more dialogic and debating ideas in learning and teaching direct us to the application of combined theoretical perspectives in knowledge construction processes, hence affirming ideas for including co-constructed pedagogy in HE. Participant A, similarly agrees with the inclusion of collaborative and critical discussions and debates in pedagogy, and acknowledges how by actively participating in the project, she became aware of the practical process of critical analysis, a vital attribute of learning in HE. Critical analysis, one could argue, is also a key to success in HE as it can help the students achieve higher grades. Participatory processes, in that capacity, do not necessarily disadvantage student’s consumer attitude (as discussed in section 9.2.4), and perhaps, may fit with the consumerist education agenda, too.

Another practical dimension that PR can offer to pedagogical approaches is its actual methodology, which being more democratic and enquiry based, can help to address the issues of power and knowledge. Murawski and Garza, (2012) suggest certain dimensions in participatory pedagogy, a majority of which have already been discussed under my critical reflection sections 9.2 and 9.3 (above). First and foremost, they suggest that HE educators must pay attention to the use of language. The use of words and phrases, Murawski and Garza (2012) argue, should not suggest a right or wrong way of seeing things, and this is what gives flexibility to the participants to develop open and richer interpretations. Second, the more we are able to integrate participants' contextual information and knowledge, the higher the chances are of rich dialogues and students' recognition of themselves as being part of a wider community. Third, they suggest that educators should build openings for critical reflection as it helps the learners to ask questions about their own and collective thinking processes. Last, but not least, they believe that whenever opportunity arises, tutors must model the open exchange of ideas and views, for the students to be able to see and use it respectfully. The modelling, they argue, would encourage the students to discuss various issues amongst themselves and more importantly, feel comfortable whilst asking each other critical questions (Murawski and Garza, 2012).

To conclude the practical contribution of PR in HE pedagogy, the application of this dialogic and collaborative approach to knowledge construction can enable HE educators to be able to build opportunities for students to draw upon their professional, educational and social experiences; and co-construct learning with staff, lead researchers, practitioners, facilitators, administrators, other students or other people with different roles in the faculty, thereby portraying an egalitarian conceptualisation of knowledge construction (Taylor, 2014). The collaborative and critical process would also help to construct a strong message of mutual, lifelong learning, especially useful to encourage participation from more qualified students and staff, thereby diminishing the effect of power and power relations (Taylor, 2014). The processes can therefore benefit everyone involved. To make the contribution of PR practically effective and theoretically sound, participation must therefore involve aspects of both power and knowledge (ibid).

In addition to the practical contributions, the inclusion of PR in HE can also offer theoretical contributions. Participatory pedagogy can influence participants' learning at different levels. It can, as stated earlier in section 9.3.3, benefit and empower the students at personal, relational and social levels (Pant, 2008). The research that I undertook was not directly a part of the curriculum for ECS courses but an extra-curricular opportunity to engage students in wider institutional pedagogical processes. Also, as evident from students' responses in the evaluation questionnaire as well as their decision to include a 'relationship and engagement' theme in the ECRR Room resources and activities list (see table 8.3 in Chapter Eight), demonstrate the capacity of participatory processes to enable its participants to stretch their learning from personal to relational and collective level, a process encapsulated as "*jumping of scales*", by Cahill (2010: 186) (see section 9.2.3). The desire of the students to get involved and engage with the local community and other participatory processes in the faculty (table 8.3) shows the development of a desire in them to both learn as well as contribute to the wider community. Such examples from participatory projects can, therefore, offer educative experiences that can help to make a difference to the lives and learning of individuals as well as the social and professional community where they live and work and, ultimately, to the wider society (Taylor, 2014).

This takes the argument back to the purpose of HEIs in society. Universities exist not only to produce highly skilled labour and research outputs to meet the economic demands of a society, but also to lay the building blocks for new institutions of civil society (Brennan, et al., 2004). HEIs, therefore, play an increasingly important role in society through providing theoretical contributions to academic knowledge and, equally importantly, opportunities for practical engagement with local community, the skills and attitudes for which can be honed by including students in real life projects.

To what extent then are our dominant methods of pedagogies equipped to support learning of this nature? With the current debate on sustainability, not only of resources but also the ability to thinking critically and contextually using humanitarian approaches (Davis and Elliott, 2014), are we able to contribute knowledge not only for the sake of discipline knowledge but also for the production and betterment of the world?

Participatory approaches have the potential to contribute to achieving a vision for a better world for all, but the institutional contexts in which such approaches operate are subject to significant pressures created by the neo-economic policies of education (Tandon, 2007; Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Dearden, et al., 2011; Cochrane and Williams, 2013 ; Buchanan, 2014). Participatory programmes may help to recognise and shift power structures (Taylor, 2014) but only when the contributions are recognised and acknowledged within the wider systems. A few independent projects may help to bring some change, but only a temporary change. For the action and change to be transformative, it will have to sustain, which is only possible with a collective effort by the institution.

Conclusion

The themes presented in this chapter reflect my position as a critical researcher and an HE practitioner; and the challenges and possibilities of using participatory approaches in HE pedagogies. The ECRR Room project is used as an example to evaluate the benefits and issues of delving into such processes in a consumerist education system. The benefits clearly outweigh the challenges but, in order to sustain the democratic practices of critical meaning making, the need for more institutional and sector support, in the form of recognition and usage of such principles in HE routine activities, is emphasised.

The chapter also aimed to create openings for discussion about professional learning by taking a more reflexive stance on my research. One of the biggest changes to come out of this project (in addition to having an ECRR Room as a pedagogical space) is in the way I understand participatory pedagogy, and because of this, my thesis continues to influence my work with students. The experiences that changed my practice throughout this project, as discussed in the chapter, have helped me to work more democratically with students, creating further respect for their knowledge and experiences. These are just a few of the lessons that I take with me into my future work.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

At the start of the thesis, in Chapter One, I presented my desire to carry out insider research to understand the nuances of students' participation in HE. A review of literature, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three, showed the dominant view of students' participation as a representational democracy construct, with limited implications for pedagogy and knowledge construction. The chapters argued how the grip of neo-liberal policies have led to the development of a consumerist culture of education, limiting the conceptualisation of students' participation at a policy level, for example, as a measure for student satisfaction. Alternative conceptions of students' participation, especially the ones with a more pedagogical foundation, therefore, are needed to correspond with the sector's broad purposes and aspirations. Chapter Four discussed these pedagogical constructions by examining theoretical contributions from social constructivism and critical theory. A combined theoretical perspective, critical social- constructivism, therefore, provided a powerful pedagogical framework for my study, the application of which assisted in developing a socially and critically constructed view of the ECRR Room, by working in partnership with ECS students and staff.

The value and ethical use of participatory approaches while working in partnership with students is discussed in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Nine was an opportunity to critically reflect on my role as a participatory researcher, which was vital to examine my own practise of facilitating a participatory project with students, in my own institution. Chapter Ten, therefore, is an opportunity to continue to reflect on the entire process of research and summarise its successes, limitations and opportunities for further work. The chapter is also an opportunity to summarise the pedagogical conceptualisation of student voice in HE, by drawing upon my learning from different phases of the research. A clearer conceptualisation, along with the major contributions of my research to HE knowledge and practice, is therefore, presented in this chapter.

10.1 Successes of the research

The research achieved its aim of creating a shared pedagogical space by working in partnership with students. Various participatory approaches, adopted in WG and RG meetings, allowed the participants to co-construct a critical understanding of an ECRR Room, whilst applying the theoretical principles of social constructivism and critical theory. As stated earlier, in Chapter Two, the research was carried out with a specific group of students, registered onto ECS courses, who were either practitioners or students aspiring to be young children's educators, or enrolled onto postgraduate early years programmes in the university. The implications for learning and teaching, through the ECRR Room project, therefore, were high for this group of students, due to the potential for transfer of skills and knowledge, within and between educational environments. The research, therefore, is anticipated to have a dual benefit: in the short term, in the form of an ECRR Room; and also long term, in the form of students taking these skills and insights gained from the project forward into their professional lives. Staff, too, had opportunities to familiarise themselves with the meaning making processes of students and understanding their perspectives in a more fluid, dialogic and open environment.

My research, as stated above, was carried out with a group of ECS students, but the methodology of applying participatory approaches by means of working and research group meetings is applicable in other disciplines and educational contexts too. The methodology allows the participants to determine their degree of involvement in pedagogical and research activities. The involvement of students in knowledge co-construction, through working and research groups, has multi-layered benefits. The processes benefit students in helping them realise their own potential and a sense of achievement is generated through any collective action that emanates from the participatory activity. There are potential benefits for academics too, as students engage more deeply in learning and teaching, and with the institution as a whole. There are potential benefits for the institution itself through an improved sense of student belonging and satisfaction.

The project and thesis also has relevance for educators and educational researchers as it offers a combined theoretical perspective, *critical social-constructivism*, which can usefully be applied to participatory research. For co-construction to be successful, attention should be paid to the language used and openings provided for participatory activities. The language used should be simple, dialogic and open, not suggesting any right or wrong answers and activities used should allow participants to bring in their contextual information and knowledge into the process. It is also vital to build opportunities for critical reflection where participants are able to question and critically reflect upon their own thinking and collective decision making. This allows the participants to challenge some of the dominant assumptions and conceptions that may have been held due to our conditioning to institutional processes.

Thus, both methodological and theoretical insights have been achieved through this project. These are applicable to other academics, researchers and students in ECS. There is also scope to share these innovative ideas and approaches more widely and to explore their use in other disciplines within Higher Education and in other similar contexts.

10.2 Limitations and opportunities for future work

The building of more participatory activities within HE, which I recommend through my research, has to be considered with a caveat. There remains a valid criticism of participatory work that it has to remain voluntary. People cannot be pressurised to participate. This raises the question of whether people who choose to participate in projects (like mine) are likely to reflect the views of those who do not? In my research, I was able to include other students' views by combining departmental survey results into WGM discussions. More research, however, needs to be done to find out if there can be a further step that could help to take the participants' or researchers' decisions back to a wider group.

Another challenge in generalising a participatory pedagogy in HE concerns the best deployment of time. HE pedagogy, in general, due to the impact and pressure of consumerist education, is being dominated by standardised methods of learning and

teaching (Carey, 2013b), often more prescriptive and didactic in nature. In parallel, the field of early childhood, especially, has become increasingly pressured in recent years to implement standardised tests, using more positivist methodologies, also reflected in HE pedagogy and educational policies and reforms (Winterbottom and Mazzocco, 2016). The routine use of more co-constructive approaches to learning and teaching, therefore, are becoming marginalised, with more didactic methods taking precedence (ibid). The use of didactic and structured approaches to learning and teaching do not necessarily allow sufficient engagement and commitment to be developed between tutors and students. This lack of engagement restricts the students to draw upon their social, educational, professional and cultural capital. Integral to the engagement debate is the provision of critical reflection, which, as argued in Chapter Nine, is essential to take learning at a higher level. Participatory pedagogy, therefore, raises the implicit question of 'time', and whether our current education system can give both, the tutors and students that essential mental space and physical time, remains unclear.

The utilisation of participatory methodologies in my research enabled the student participants to openly discuss their views about the ECRR Room, by drawing upon their academic knowledge and practice experiences. All participants, however, had a common grounding in 'early childhood' knowledge which shows that pedagogical influences, along with personal and social factors, are important considerations in doing any student voice work. Moreover, the congruence between core features of critical theory and social constructivist approaches, as reflected in the methodology and key elements of my findings (in Chapters Five, Six and Eight), prompt us to look into further research opportunities from a student voice perspective, for example, at modular and curriculum level. My study was built on an extra-curricular activity of developing an ECRR Room, but more research is needed to broaden students' participation beyond such 'extended' curriculum activities. Further work can be done, for example, to build opportunities for participation within courses, modules and session designs; as well as in decisions about assessment and assessment processes. Researchers and HE practitioners, therefore, may want to consider more participatory democratic ways of working collaboratively with students, in addition to representational and structural procedures of documenting student voice (Maunder, et al., 2013).

10.3 Conceptualising students' participation in higher education

Despite the seemingly powerful indicators of contribution of PR in knowledge construction amongst the ECS students, as shown in Chapters Eight and Nine, there still remains a question as to what extent these processes can be applied in general HE pedagogical contexts. To demonstrate this I have illustrated a generic process in facilitating a participatory project (see figure 9.4 in Chapter Nine), briefly summarising what a researcher or tutor may want to consider whilst applying participatory principles into practice. The figure below (figure 10.1) further elaborates this process by conceptualising student voice in HE. Doing this allowed me to establish practical links between various stages and components of my research, arguing for conceptual interconnectedness in students' participation work.

Figure 10.1 (below) shows a skeletal outline of the different stages and components of my research and the theoretical inspirations that guided me to make key decisions at different phases of the project. These key decision stages are shown as different parts of the megaphone, for example, 1. Origin; 2. Recruitment; 3. Data collection; 4. Analysis; 5. Participatory group meetings; and the rest of the figure shows the extended impact of the project on participants' personal, social and professional levels; and also my critical reflection on the sustainability of the entire process within an HEI (as discussed in Chapter Nine). The shape of a megaphone is an illustrative metaphor for the 'voice' component of the project.

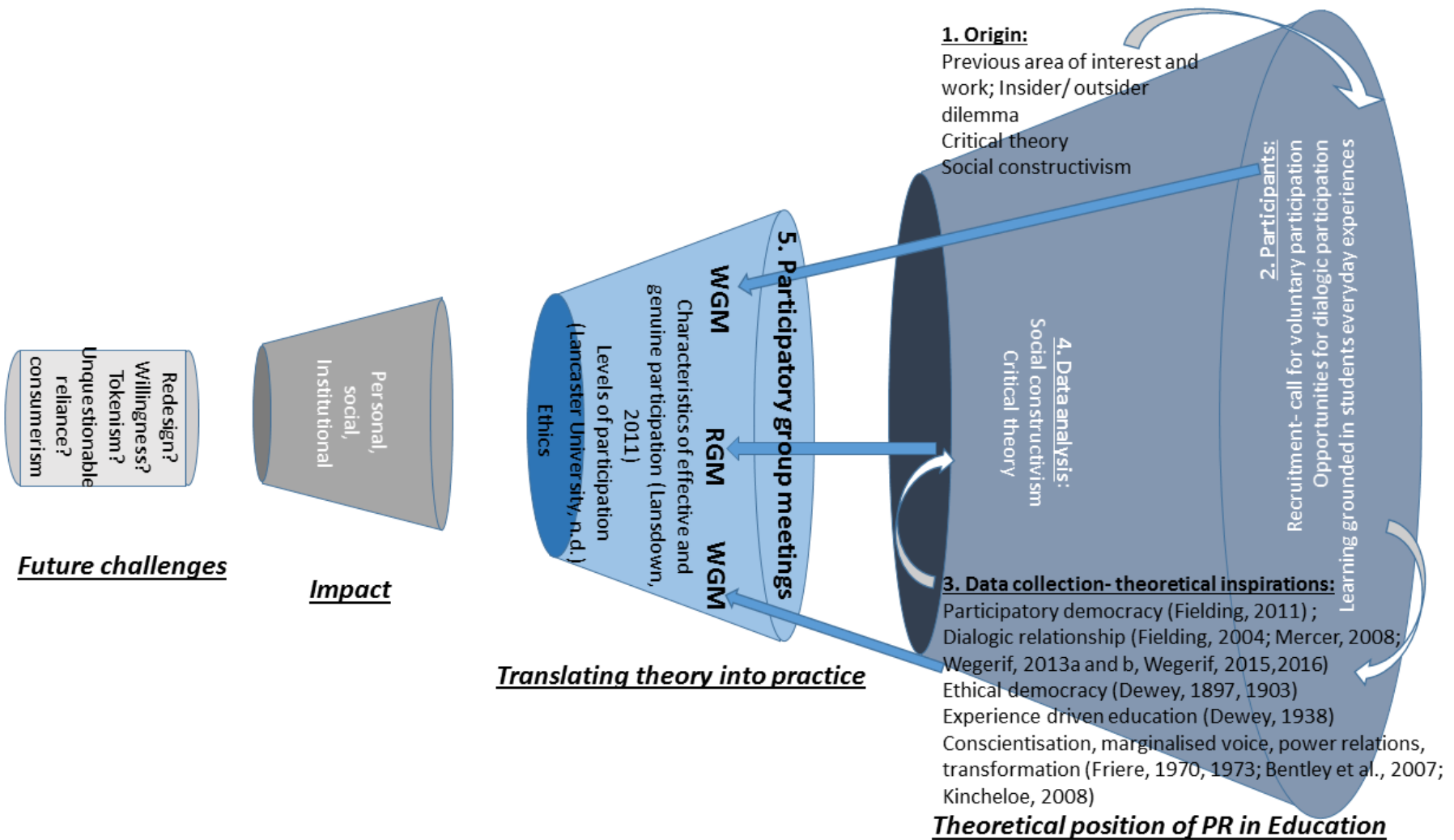


Figure 10.1: Conceptualising students' participation in higher education

As illustrated in stage 1 of figure 10.1 and discussed in Chapter One of the thesis, the project idea originated from my previous research interest in young children's participation. The discomfort of not being able to find similar examples of democratic and participatory pedagogic practice in HE, led to the conception of the ECRR Room project. Although researchers like Campbell, et al., (2007), Healey, et al., (2010), Seale (2010), Bovill, et al., (2011), Dunne and Zandstra, (2011) and Seale, et al., (2014), have significantly contributed to the participatory debate, a majority of the studies on student voice are focused upon the structural and representational features of democracy, through the use of institutionalised mechanisms of listening to the views and voices of students (for example, Baryana, 2013; Carey, 2013a, 2013c; Freeman, 2014). I wanted to look beyond the structural aspects of democracy and analyse the potential of knowledge co- construction through the use of participatory approaches that favoured participatory democracy over representational democracy (Fielding, 2011). To be able to contribute to the argument of including participatory approaches in HE pedagogies, I decided to reflect on methodological insights for providing more respectful, democratic yet critical knowledge construction processes.

To listen to the views of the students, I used various inclusive and participatory ways of recruiting the participants (see Chapter Six), as shown in stage 2 of figure 10.1. The decision to recruit students as partners was inspired by the collaborative knowledge construction processes as advocated by social constructivists and learning theorists, like Dewey (1897, 1903, 1938) and Wegerif (2013a, 2015, 2016) and the ideals of PR that put forward the argument of including stakeholders in decisions making, for example, by Fielding (2004, 2011). Opportunities were built throughout the project for collaborative work between students and staff in the form of WG and RG meetings. The data collection and analysis stages of the project, shown as phase 3 in figure 10.1, continued with these participatory ethos, enabling participants to produce critically co-constructed views on the ECRR Room.

Integral to the WG and RG meeting were the consideration towards ethics, for example, respecting varying forms and levels of participation; recognising less dominant and more facilitative roles of staff; breaking of power hierarchy; and the informal nature of

discussions in the meetings, all helped to co-construct knowledge in an unthreatened, safe and participatory environment.

In order to make participatory approaches sustainable and useful in an HEI, it was necessary to look at their impact, which is shown in the third part of the megaphone. The impact on students' learning and experiences is discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine but the impact of participatory approaches also needs to be analysed through a pedagogical lens. Freire and Macedo (1995) suggest three conditions for more sustainable and transformative learning to take place. These three conditions include: the equality of relationship between students and tutor; building of opportunities for critical reflection; and inclusion of methods that encourage questioning and reasoning. A fulfilment of these three conditions, Freire and Macedo (1995) insist, helps to transform individual participants personally as well as socially.

Transformation occurs through the action and social change that happens as a result of that action. Physical transformation, for example, in my project, was in the form of an ECRR Room, which is being used by students. Its existence, however, can be questioned for sustainability, due to its threatened longevity within a consumerist education system. Transformation, however, can also be in the form of joint knowledge which offers further opportunities for change (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). The ability of the participants to question and challenge their own individual and group views, was transformative in itself. It allowed them to take collective action to change their own decisions that were taken whilst planning the resources and activities for ECRR Room.

The last stage, which is researcher's critical reflection, opens up the possibilities and challenges of including participatory approaches at pedagogical level. Reflecting on my project, for example, the changes that happened at the institutional level after the completion of my participatory project (as discussed in Chapter Nine, section 9.2.4), made me question the likelihood of prolonged existence of participatory projects in consumerist driven education systems (Bragg, 2007; Taylor and Wilding, 2009), as illustrated in the last part of the megaphone. For a secure conceptualisation of participatory work in an HE context, researchers and educators need to confront these

challenges. More research needs to be undertaken to discuss and suggest alternatives to overcome the barriers to participation, which, if not brought to the foreground, may continue to reproduce exclusion, limiting the opportunities for empowerment through tokenistic participation.

The sensitive position of a participatory researcher can get pushed and pulled between the neo-liberal institutional targets and a desire to engage with democratic pedagogy. The dilemma could eventually hinder the sustainability of such pedagogies in the long term. Whilst conceptualising, it therefore became necessary to look at the long term impact of such approaches. At a micro level, the conceptualisation of participatory work in HE can make use of combined theoretical perspectives for knowledge construction, as evident from my study. The extent to which the practice of participatory pedagogy can foster a democratic process of bringing multiple voices together, allows the participants to seeing things through multiple lenses. It can also foster a healthy environment of dialogue, discussion and debate, making learning an ongoing process that builds upon the experiences of students (Murawski and Garza, 2012).

These vital components of pedagogy and knowledge construction cannot be ignored, despite the unanswered question on the sustainability of such processes in HE. Sustainability, I would argue, should not be restricted at an institutional level but also viewed at a personal and professional level. As discussed in Chapter Nine (section 9.2.3), the evidence of contextual validity of such processes helps to appreciate the longevity of these approaches at personal and social level, which, in turn, helps to sustain the ideas of democratic pedagogy, in a wider sense. The inclusion of stage 4, a critical reflection stage, therefore, is necessary to include in the conceptual model, as it can be revealing of the possibilities and challenges of participatory approaches in HE.

To conclude, a pedagogical conception of students' participation in HE can consist of the following interrelated phases: starting from an authentic reason for the consideration of participatory work; followed with the appropriate selection of stakeholders; to the ethical and participatory methods of collaborative working, joint analysis and meaning

making; to evaluating the impact of the work whilst critically reflecting on the possibilities and challenges (as illustrated in figure 9.4, Chapter Nine).

10.4 Contributions

Following on from the above conceptualisation, my study makes two major contributions to the practice and knowledge in HE. The methodology, being the first contribution, offers insights that are adaptable and repeatable within HE practices, as it provides opportunities for students' involvement within different degrees of participation. A combined theoretical framework, the second contribution of my research, has the power to foster co-constructive learning environments. The evidence that informs practice is generally imposed from external sources (Pascal and Bertram, 2012), but the use and application of participatory approaches in this research helped to gain evidence that originated from the real world of practice and students' first hand university experiences. Students themselves were able to identify ways of improving their course experiences and took responsibility for this action, inspiring and generating collaborative learning and action. The methodology and theoretical combination, therefore, were able to give a close account of what works, how and why (Pascal and Bertram, 2012), thus ensuring credibility and utility in students' real world of education.

When combined, the theoretical and methodological approaches contributed towards deploying knowledge construction methods that enabled participation and critical reflection through questioning and reasoning (see Chapters Eight and Nine). The processes, therefore, reinstated the importance of an enquiry based approach in HE pedagogy, and in doing so, helped to counter the hegemonic discourses of knowledge construction. The methodology and theories used in my study demonstrate that more sustainable learning environments can be created through the involvement of several participants, provided everyone is able to share and co-construct knowledge, within safe spaces. Safe spaces allow the participants to ask questions and challenge assumptions in a respectful environment, without portraying the rigid binary division between right and wrong answers. I am, therefore, making a contribution through proposing a methodology for participatory pedagogy in HE (for example, by utilising

working group and research group model); and also arguing for critical social-constructivism as a combined theoretical framework to conceptualise student voice work in HE.

Concluding remarks

At a macro level, the role of HE should not be restricted to engineering of employees but amalgamated with the concept of education for change. The change, as argued in Chapters Eight and Nine, can be both explicit and physical; or more implicit in the form of evolved insights and capacities for critical engagement with the surrounding situations. There is, therefore, a need to challenge the dominant discourses of meaning making, mainly driven by economic market demands, and continue considering ways of combining educational practices that can transform current HE pedagogy from domestication (reproduction) – to emancipation (transformation) (Vieira, 2015). The reality, however, may lie somewhere in between. We must, therefore, invest time and resources in fostering a vision of education that is more powerful; a vision of pedagogy that is more democratic and inclusive; a vision of the teacher, who can be an agent of change; and a vision of the student, as a co-constructor of knowledge (Vieira, 2015).

Through this thesis, I, therefore, argue for the inclusion of participatory approaches in HE pedagogy, as they certainly offer the potential to make important contributions to the knowledge base of HE and, as in this case, the discipline of ECS. I end by acknowledging the continuing struggle of HE practitioners (and early years practitioners) who may be left to fend for themselves whilst considering different ways of making student voice work more democratic, participatory, empowering and above all, deeply ethical and political in its orientation (Winterbottom and Mazzocco, 2016).

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Appendices

Appendix 1.0: Project recruitment

The following three recruitment materials were used by me to invite students to show an initial interest to participate in the project.

Appendix 1.1 Recruitment poster

(displayed in the corridors of common teaching areas)

Exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education by listening to students views in the development of an Early Years Resource and Research Room within a department of Education in a Higher Education Institution

Mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk
Extension: 0845 196 4664

- Are you an Undergraduate or a Postgraduate student on a taught programme in the Department of Education at Anglia Ruskin University?
- Submit an expression of interest for your participation in this research by contacting Mallika Kanyal (by 4th February), who is undertaking this work as part of her Professional Doctoral programme.
- Quote the following reference in your e mail to submit an initial expression of interest '*Participatory approaches in Higher Education*'.

The study aims to explore the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education to understand students' voices for improved social and pedagogical relevance. An opportunity has arisen in the form of an Early Years Resource and Research Room (EYRRR) within the Department of Education, the development of which is currently in its inception stage. The invitation is therefore for you to join and create a shared pedagogical space in the form of an EYRRR. The idea is to listen to both students (and staff) views.

The study will offer you

- A platform to share your expectations from an EYRRR
- Understand the educational value of participatory approaches
- Develop research skills
- Participate rationally and critically in group situations
- Your expression of views might also get built in some way into the provision of an EYRRR

- 20 places available, offered on a first come first serve basis, until (4th February)
- No previous research experience needed
- Looking forward to having representation from all course groups in the department
- Drop me an e mail to further discuss the aims and objectives and your participation in research

Appendix 1.2: Recruitment leaflet

(leaflets left in social areas, for example, canteen)

Exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education by listening to students' views in the development of an Early Years Resource and Research Room within a Department of Education in a Higher Education Institution

Mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk
Extension: 0845 196 4664

Shared pedagogical environment

Speak it loud

If you are an Undergraduate or a Postgraduate student on a taught programme in the Department of Education at Anglia Ruskin University, then please submit an expression of interest for your participation in the following research study being conducted by Mallika Kanyal for her Professional Doctoral programme at the above e mail address, quoting reference, '*Participatory approaches in Higher Education*'.

I am interested in exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education to understand students' voices for improved social and pedagogical relevance. An opportunity has arisen in the form of an Early Years Resource and Research Room (EYRRR) within the Department of Education, the development of which is currently in its inception stage. I would therefore like to invite you to join me in the exciting project of creating a shared pedagogical space in the form of an EYRRR by listening to students (and staff) views.

I am looking forward to having representation from different course groups within the department. You do not need to have any previous research experience to join the project. Just drop me an e mail and I will make further contact with you to discuss the aims, objectives and your participation in research. I am hoping you will enjoy your participation in the study as it will not only give you a platform to share your expectations from an EYRRR but also provide a meaningful experience in terms of understanding the educational value of participatory approaches, developing research skills and also a capacity to participate rationally and critically in group situations. Opportunities will also be given to present findings from the research into faculty's Brown Bag seminar with Mallika Kanyal (Faculty Health, Social Care and Education). Your expression of views may also get built in some way into the provision of an EYRRR.

Participatory approaches

So if you are interested in joining and would like to hear further details of the project, please let me know now. Twenty spaces are available, offered on a first come first serve basis (until 4th February), but I am looking forward to having representation from all course groups in the department.

Mutual agreement

Students' participation

Listening to each other's voices

Appendix 1.3: E mail invitation

(E-mail invitation sent to all ECS students for participation in the project)

From: mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk [mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk]

Sent: 28 January 2013 17:08

To: (Student)

Subject: Invitation to be involved in students' participation in Early Years Resource and Research room project

Dear

Exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education by listening to students views in the development of an Early Years Resource and Research Room within a department of Education in a Higher Education Institution

You are being sent this e mail to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting as part of my Professional Doctorate programme, within the Department of Education, at Anglia Ruskin University.

I am interested in exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education to understand students' voices for improved social and pedagogical relevance. An opportunity has arisen in the form of an Early Years Resource and Research Room (EYRRR) within the Department of Education, the development of which is currently in its inception stage. I would therefore like to invite you to join me in the exciting project of creating a shared pedagogical space in the form of an EYRRR by listening to students (and staff) views.

I am looking forward to having representation from different ECS course groups within the department. You do not need to have any previous research experience to join the project. Just drop me an e mail and I will make further contact with you to discuss the aims, objectives and your participation in research. I am hoping you will enjoy your participation in the study as it will not only give you a platform to share your expectations of an EYRRR but also provide a meaningful experience in terms of understanding the educational value of participatory approaches, developing research skills and also a capacity to participate rationally and critically in group situations. Opportunities will also be given to present findings from the research into faculty's Brown Bag seminar with Mallika Kanyal (Faculty Health, Social Care and Education). Your expression of views may also get built in some way into the provision of an EYRRR.

An initial expression of interest can be submitted through completing this short survey, which can be accessed through the following VLE link:

<https://vle.anglia.ac.uk/faculties/education/rq1/Lists/Mallika%20Kanyal%20Research/overview.aspx>

The survey will give me an indication of the course groups you belong to and also an initial idea of your expectations from an EYRRR. It will also enable me to identify common times for further meetings (by referring to your course timetables) that will be held as part of the research study.

If you are interested in joining and would like to hear further details of the project, please reply to this e mail, quoting the reference, 'Participatory approaches in Higher Education'. I will reply back within 2 working days outlining the details of your participation and the time and venue of the first of two Working Group meetings.

Twenty spaces are available, offered on a first come first serve basis until (4th February), but I am looking forward to having representation from all course groups in the department.

Thank you and best wishes

Mallika Kanyal

Senior Lecturer and Course Leader

Anglia Ruskin University

Ext- 4664

Availability: Monday- Wednesday

Upcoming event HEA funded seminar on Students' participation in Higher Education, 27th February 2013. For booking and seminar details, please visit

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2013/Seminars/Disciplines_SS/246_Anglia

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Appendix 2.0: Ethics

The following two forms/ letters were used to inform students of the research details and negotiate their consent to participate in the study

Appendix 2.1: Participant information sheet

Exploring the use of participatory approaches in higher education
by listening to students' views in the development of an Early
Years Resource and Research Room within Department of
Education

For further information please contact Mallika Kanyal at mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk, quoting the reference 'Participatory approaches in Higher Education'.

You are being invited to participate in a study which I am undertaking as part of my Professional Doctorate (Doctorate in Education) programme at Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford. I am building on my previous work on 'children's voice in education' to 'students' voice work in Higher Education' (HE). I am interested in studying the value of participatory approaches in Higher Education and an opportunity has arisen in the form of an Early Years Resource and Research Room (EYRRR), within the Department of Education. A physical space in the form of a room has been provided to the Department of Education to be developed and used as a practice and research base for students. The aim is for the students to use this space to understand the practical dimension of theoretical concepts as well as hone their research skills.

The proposal of an EYRRR therefore gives me an opportunity to explore the use of participatory approaches in understanding your perceptions (of an EYRRR) and also analyse the feasibility of building these views into the running and designing of the EYRRR. The study, therefore, adopts a participatory research design which values input from various local stakeholders, which in this case will be you as 'student participants' and staff in their facilitative role. The students representation is anticipated to be coming from various course groups in the department; and staff representation is going to include myself (Mallika Kanyal), as lead researcher; an EYRRR Project Leader; a university Teaching Fellow; members of the Early Childhood Research Group and any other staff members from the Department of Education who are interested in the development of an EYRRR. The main aim of the study is to create a participatory and shared space where participants (both students and staff) can contribute their views in an open and fluid environment and share their perceptions of an EYRRR within a Higher Education Institution.

Having expressed your initial interest in the study through an e mail and/ or VLE discussion board, you are now invited to become a member of the Working Group. The group will meet at two different occasions to discuss the aims and objectives of the study and also decide the main methods of data collection to understand your perceptions of an EYRRR. The meeting times will be identified and negotiated after referring to your course timetables. After deciding on the appropriate methods of data collection, you will be choosing one of the methods (from a mutually agreed list) to record your perceptions of an EYRRR. The working group will further look at all participants (students and staff) perceptions of the EYRRR with Mallika Kanyal and draw an initial interpretation of the responses.

If you want to take a fuller part in the research then there is a further opportunity for you to volunteer as a member of the 'research group' and be included in data analysis and presentation of findings. The research group will constitute of Mallika

Kanyal and the voluntary members from the 'working group'. The group will meet at two different occasions to analyse data, again using participatory approaches to decision making. A reasonable time gap (for example, one week) will be provided in between meetings to give you a 'thinking' and 'reflection' time. As part of the research group you may also choose to disseminate findings with Mallika Kanyal to the wider faculty within the university through faculty's Brown Bag seminar.

If you agree to take part in the study, the expectation will be for you to be able to participate in the meetings (two working group and two research group meetings), with each meeting anticipated to last for about an hour. You can however choose to participate in the working group and not the research group meetings but a membership of the working group is essential to participate in the research group meetings. Depending upon the diversity of course groups' representation, common time slots from the course timetable will be identified to meet in face-to- face situations. To widen the accessibility, online streaming option through 'Skype' will also be considered. Your agreement to take part in the study will be recorded through a consent form which you can sign and give back to Mallika Kanyal. If you consent to take part and later change your mind, you can still withdraw from the study by filling in a withdrawal slip on the attached consent form and giving it to Mallika Kanyal by hand or by giving the slip- in a sealed envelope, named for Mallika Kanyal- to the Education helpdesk, which is located in the second floor of the Sawyers building. You can also e mail your wish to withdraw from the study by sending an e mail to Mallika Kanyal at mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk. You do not need to express any reasons for your withdrawal from the study. It does not affect your university studies in any way.

There are no potential risks associated with your participation in the study. There will be an opportunity towards the end where you can record your feedback and evaluation of how you felt about your involvement in the project. This feedback will be valuable not only for the current project but also for any future work on how to best involve students in any participatory work within HE. The findings from the project will get included into my Doctoral thesis, however, no mention of the names or any other identification measure will be included in any written or verbal form. The data collected will be stored in a secure place, such as, a lockable cupboard or a password

protected laptop. The findings may also be presented to other conferences about student participation and articles written for journals about participatory work in HE.

Besides helping me in my Doctoral study, the process is also hoped to benefit your learning and experience within a HE context. Through your involvement in the study you will not only learn about participatory research approaches but your expression of views may also get built in some way into the provision of the EYRRR. The project will also provide opportunity for reflection on your own capabilities which could partly go into your Professional Development Portfolio (PDPs). It will also contribute in capacity building through participation in various research processes, such as data collection and data analysis, helping you develop research skills and techniques, which is also a transferable skill.

I hope that you will enjoy your participation in this study. Taking part in this research will help you, and me, to think carefully about adopting participatory approaches in Higher Education.

Appendix 2.2: Participant consent form

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: Students' participation in the development of an Early Years Resource and Research room within a Department of Education in a Higher Education Institution.

Main investigator and contact details: Mallika Kanyal; mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk; 0845 196 4664 (Department of Education, Anglia Ruskin University)

Members of the research team: Mallika Kanyal, Dr Tim Waller (EdD supervisor)

1.I agree to take part in the above research. 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.

2.I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

3.I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

4.I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

5.I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University³ 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.....

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

³ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges

If you wish to withdraw from research, please complete the form below and return to Mallika Kanyal, either by hand or by giving the form- in a sealed envelope, named for Mallika Kanyal- to the Education helpdesk, located at the second floor of the Sawyers building. You can also e mail your wish to withdraw from study by sending an e mailing to Mallika Kanyal at mallika.kanyal@anglia.ac.uk.

Title of Project:

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please indicate below if you also wish to withdraw your data with your withdrawal from research or if you are still happy for me to use your data in the research.

EITHER

I WISH TO WITHDRAW MY DATA FROM RESEARCH

Signed: _____ Date: _____

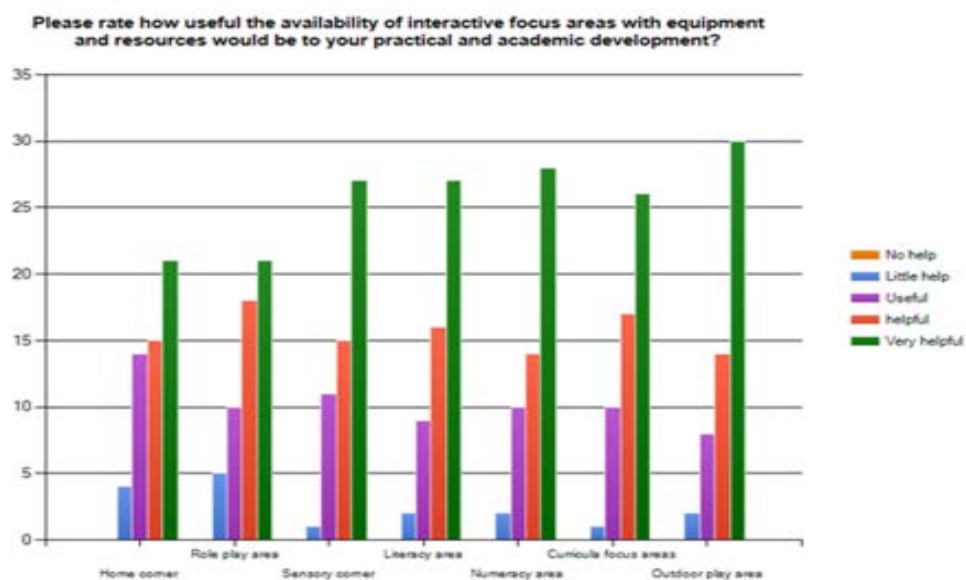
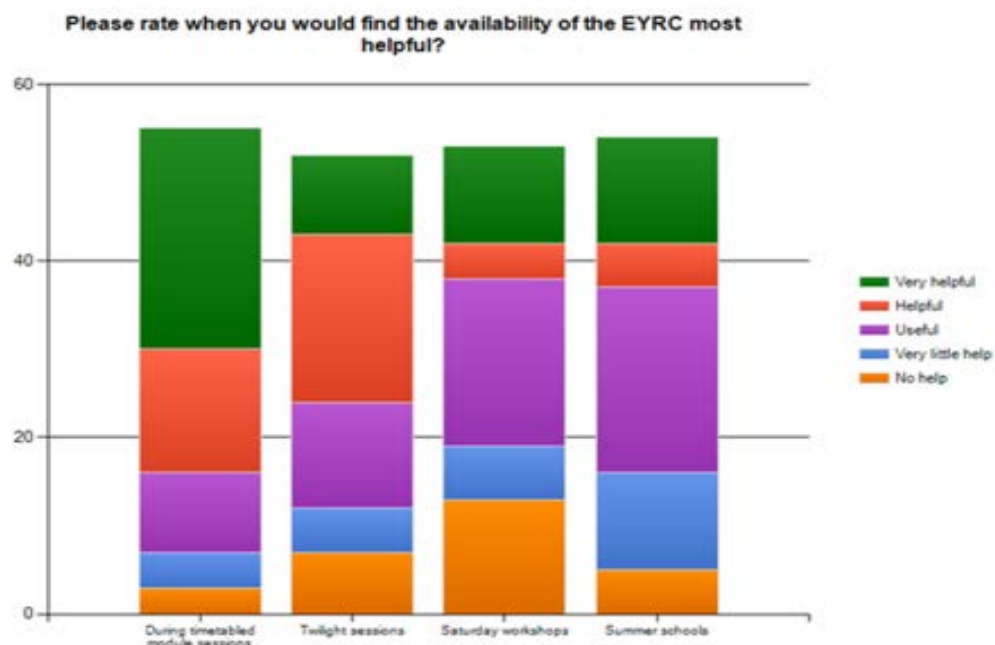
OR

I AM HAPPY FOR MY DATA TO BE USED FOR RESEARCH

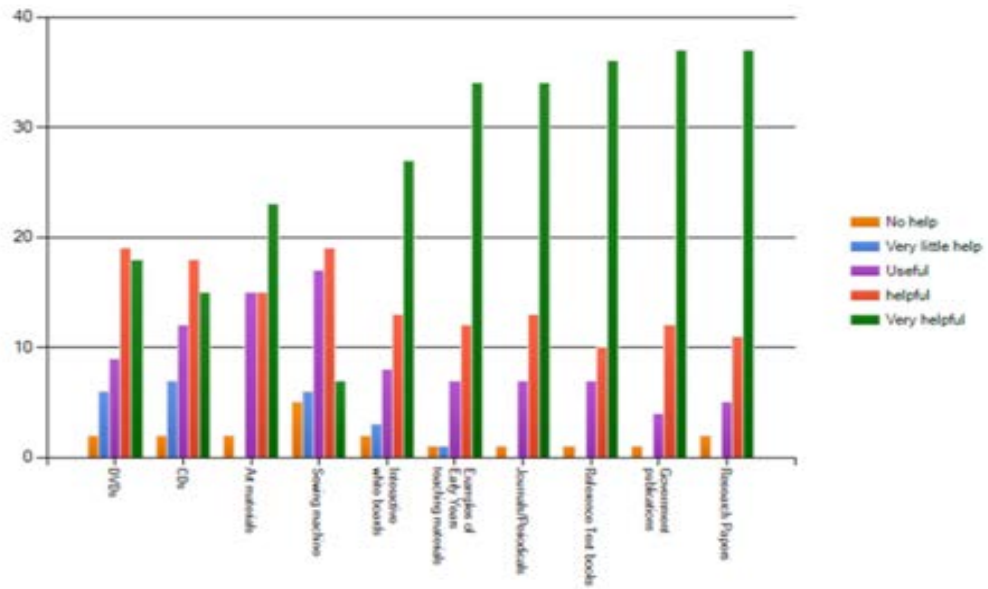
Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3.0: Online (VLE) questionnaire analysis

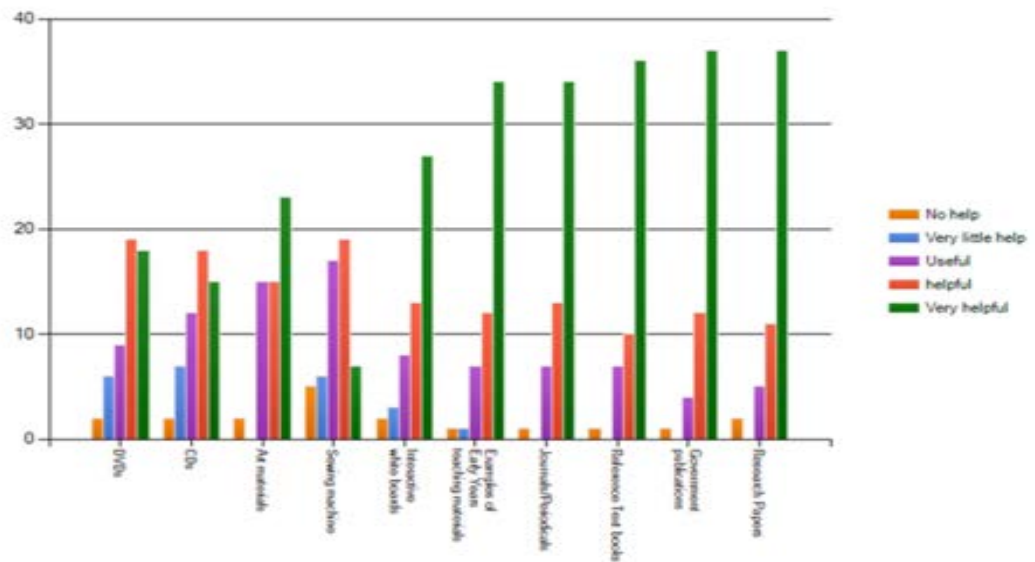
(Questionnaire open to all ECS students in the department)



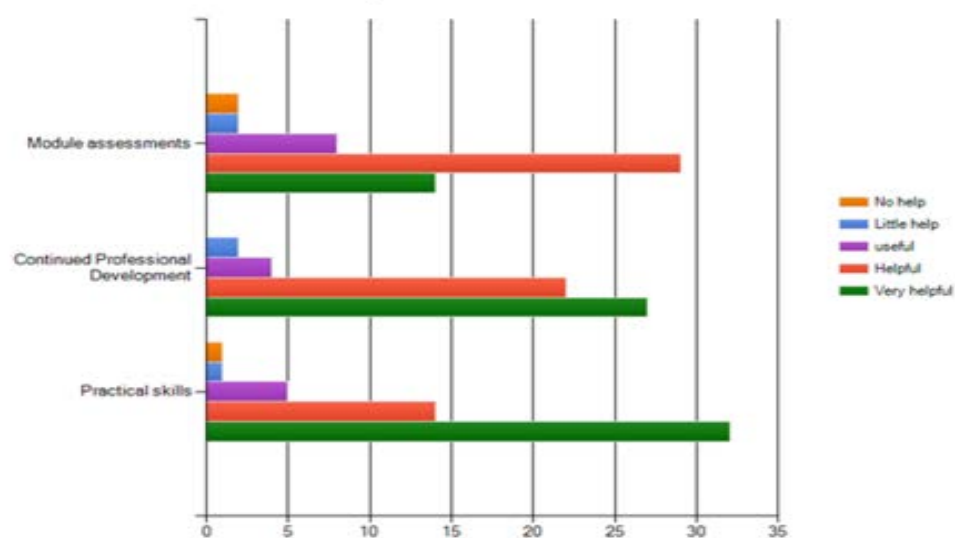
Please rate how useful the availability of resources held in the EYRC would be to your practical and academic development?



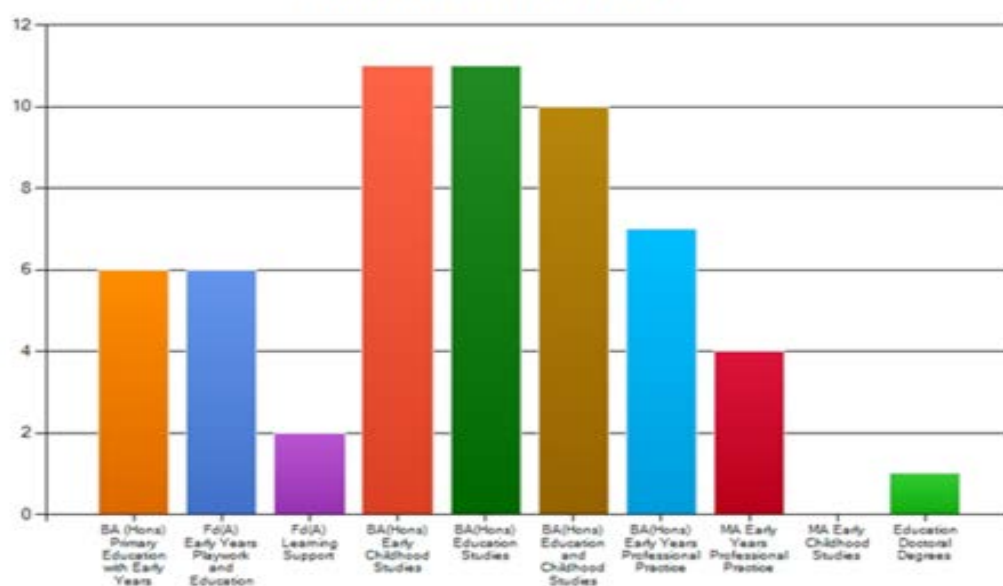
Please rate how useful the availability of resources held in the EYRC would be to your practical and academic development?



Please rate how useful the availability of an EYRC and its resources would be to your studies?



Which programme are you studying?



Appendix 4.0: Example summary of working group meetings

WORKING GROUOP MEETING 1 SUMMARY

15th February, 2013

SAW 315, 12:00-1:30 pm

Attending: Names of the students

Apologies: Names of the students

Title of project

Exploring the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education by listening to students views in the development of an Early Childhood Resource and Research Room within a Department of Education in a Higher Education Institution

Aims:

The research aims to critically analyse the use of participatory approaches in Higher Education (HE), especially by involving students in the development of an Early Years Resource and Research Room (ECRR Room). The benefits of participatory approaches have been realised in various educational contexts, and the present study will extend this work by looking at students' participation in wider pedagogical processes, such as, the creation and development of an ECRR Room. The room is intended to provide students with curriculum enhancement opportunities through the use of practical resources and the development of research skills, such as, observation, interviews and use of technology.

The overall aim is therefore to create a participatory space where participants can work together in a democratic environment and co-construct the scope and possibilities of an effective ECRR Room for its improved social and pedagogical relevance.

Consent form

Please sign the attached consent form if you agree to participate in research. Please read it carefully before you sign it. You will be given a copy to keep, along with the participant information sheet.

Agreement about attendance in meetings: By agreeing to participate in research you are agreeing to participate in two more Working Group meetings and three Research Group meetings (each meeting to last approximately for an hour and a half). You can however choose to participate in only Working Group (and not Research Group) meetings, but a membership of the Working Group is essential to participate in Research Group meetings.

Social group: students and staff participants.

Note card activity: “In two years time, I would like our ECRR Room to have/be _____”.

Discussion on note card activity: we made a note of the varied perceptions of an ECRR Room within the Department. We now need to think of some questions that would enable us to best capture the essence of students (and staff) views on an ECRR Room.

Draft questions (to be negotiated and finalised within WGM 2):

What is your perception of an ideal Early Childhood Resource and Research Room within the department of Education?

What do you see yourself, your friends and your tutors doing in the Resource and Research room? (Please try and see that everyone is doing something)?

What are your choices of resources that you would like to see included in the ECRR Room. How do you think these resources will be helpful for learning and research in early years?

How would you like to design the ECRR Room? You can share your thoughts through a layout of the map or a general perception of the themes/ focal points.

We will also agree on the list of questions in WGM 2.

What could be the optimal participatory tools/ methods to document/ record answers to the above questions?

We can think of devising a list of participatory methods to record our responses to the above (agreed) questions. The list may look something like this:

- i. Write or audio- video record a one to two page letter to an ‘imaginary’ friend;
- ii. Write a commentary describing answers to the above questions;

- iii. Produce a piece of creative writing or art (e.g. poem, picture, artefact, etc) that expresses our thinking behind the above questions; and
- iv. Be interviewed face-to-face, by phone or by webcam by the lead researcher.
- v. Any other method

In our next meeting we can choose and agree on a list that shows our consensus on the most appropriate participatory methods to answer the agreed research questions.

By the end of WGM 2: We would have a good idea of the project, its aims and outcomes and the methodology being adopted to find answers to the posed questions. We would have discussed the main methods of data collection to get your views on the planning and designing of an ECRR Room; this includes questions that need answering and the methods that we are going to use to share our perceptions with the rest of the Working Group.

Meeting's main discussions will be summarised and the time and date for next Working Group meeting (2) will be identified. A summary of the meeting will be e-mailed to all participants (students and staff) with a reminder of the date and agenda for next Working Group meeting.

After the meeting: You can use a method of your choice (out of the agreed list of participatory methods) to record your perceptions of an ECRR Room by answering the agreed questions. You do not need to write your name with your response. It can remain anonymous.

Working Group meeting 2: We will look at each other's views and arrive to an initial interpretation of the varied perceptions of an ECRR Room. We will start by mixing the responses to ensure anonymity. Each one of us will look at at least one anonymous response and put forward our initial analysis of that response.

All ideas can be noted down on a flip chart and common themes can be identified and debated. A summary of the responses and common themes can be agreed in the form of an initial interpretation. A further invitation to be part of the Research Group will be given, the aim of which will be to analyse data in detail and come to a final conclusion of students' perceptions of an ECRR Room within the Department of Education.

Date and time of next meeting:

February, 22nd (11:00-12:30); February, 23rd (2:00-3:30 pm)

Appendix 5.0: Collectively agreed list of WG members perceptions of resources and activities in the ECRR Room

	Themes	Examples	Form
1. Knowledge and practice		National- EYFS and National Curriculum; Policy documents (SEN related, Safeguarding, Children's Acts, etc)	Documentation CDs, Videos, flashcards
		International- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD); Curriculum- Reggio Emilia, Te Whariki, High Scope, Jiddu Krishnamurti, etc Multiple childhoods- socio-cultural awareness- representing childhood from different parts of the world; International students to display work that shows EC and ECE in their context; Visiting academics to come and share their work	Documentation, Online resources; Open Door policy for international students and visiting academics
		Display and posters- key pioneers and theorists in Early Childhood/ Education, to be changed regularly	Displays to be changed on a regular basis- themed periods to enable representation of ideas from a range of fields
		Technology resources- White board, computers/ laptops that store important websites (Early Years resources and information) and online journals and books	Favourites saved in 'named' folders on the computer(s)/ laptops accessible to all students
		Learning by doing- using various resources	Timetabled sessions
		Mixing of students where more experienced students can mentor the less experienced	Workshops/ small group work
2. Resources		Creative and sustainable resources- paint, poster, sensory resources, recyclable material.	Consumable resources
		Resources for child development and education curriculum	Consumable, flexible and recyclable resources
		Computers/ laptops	Computers/ laptops
		Books and journals for reference	Popular books and journals for reference
		ARU publications- where staff can display their work and make it accessible to all	Books/ articles for reference
3. Research		Information on ARU projects (with practitioners/ local providers)	Notice board
		Information on current research projects	Notice board
		Signposting- topical research	Notice board
		Ethics workshops	Workshops
		Guest speakers/ visiting academics	Seminars/ workshops

	Themed research workshops	Workshops
	Webinars	Notice board- information on online access
	Individual/ group research work	Study space
4. Communication	ARU research updates	Notice board, updates on Twitter and Facebook
	Communication alerts	Mobile texts
	Research seminars updates	Notice/ news board
	Reminders of themed sessions/ workshops	Notice/ news board
	Students participation in dissemination of university based EY/ Education work to local community	Seminars/ workshops
5. Relationship	Socialising space	Comfy seating areas
	Social events	Small social gatherings
	Fund raising	Support for events
	Charities	Support for events
	Group work	Study space
	Relationship with local providers	Document saved in computer/ laptop
	Research links with local settings and schools	Research projects, case study
	Engagement with local community- settings and schools	joint/ partnership work, consultation work
	Students engagement with the local community	Meetings, visits, participation in seminars/ workshops
	Students access to employability sessions	Seminars/ workshops
	Building relationship with guest speakers and visiting academics	Seminars/ workshops/ meetings

Appendix 6.0: Criteria, definitions and scoring of evaluation matrix

Impact scores for action: High- 3; Medium- 2; Low- 1; Not applicable- N/A
<p>Cost effective impact score: the associated cost of the resources and activities and their impact on learning-teaching-research. If the impact was regarded as high, a score of 3 would be given; medium, a score of 2 and in case of a low impact, a score of 1 would be given: High (3); Medium (2); Low (1)</p> <p>Time- effective impact score: the assumption around the amount of time that will be required to set-up the resource and activity and its impact on learning. If the time required to set up a resource or theme was less than 6 months and it could have a high impact on the learning experiences, a high impact score of 3 was agreed, if around 6 months- 1 year, a medium score of 2 was agreed and if the time required would be more than a year, and the impact on learning would also be low, then a low score of 1 would be given: High (3); Medium (2); Low (1)</p> <p>Pedagogical impact score: the impact that a resource and activity could have on curriculum enrichment experiences, for example, the information or displays on key pioneers and theorists in early childhood education would attract a high score as an easy visual access to this information at all times will be useful for students. Again a score of 3 would mean high impact; 2 would be medium impact and 1, low impact- High (3); Medium (2); Low (1)</p> <p>Ecological impact score (sustainability): referred to the sustainability of resources within a HE environment. It included criteria such as, how long the resources can last for, for what duration will the resources be useful, what is their source of origin- can they be obtained from reclaimed and/ or recycled materials, and overall, what will be the impact of these resources on environment. Highly sustainable resources would get a score of 3; moderately sustainable a medium score of 2 and anything low on sustainability would get a score of 1- High (3); Moderately sustainable- Medium (2); Low/ Not sustainable- Low (1)</p> <p>Collaboration: referred to the impact that the resources and activities could have on the feeling of belongingness, belonging to the ECS community; opportunities for social events and social identity- High (3); Medium (2); Low (1)</p>

Appendix 7: Average matrix scoring of ECRR Room themes by RG members

	Themes	Examples	Form	Average score	Responsibility
1	Knowledge	National- EYFS and National Curriculum; Policy documents (SEN related, Safeguarding, Children's Acts, etc)	Documentation	11.5	CGLs and Students reps
		International- International Early Years curriculums; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD); Multiple childhoods- socio-cultural awareness; International students; Visiting academics	Documentation, online resources; Open Door policy for International students and visiting academics	12	International Committee with help from Mark Miller (VLE notifications, e mail alerts)
		Key ideas- pioneers and theorists in Early Childhood/ Childhood	Displays to be changed on a regular basis- themed periods to enable representation of ideas from a range of fields	14	CGLs, tutors (module seminars, module assessment), students
		Online- important websites (Early Years resources and information) and online journals and books	Favourites saved in 'named' folders on the computer(s) accessible to all students	12.5	MLs and students
2	Skills and Practice	Learning by doing- using various resources	Timetabled sessions	15	Tutors and students

		Experimental space- try before doing- form and bring ideas from settings and vice versa, e.g., toy making, etc	Workshops/ small groups bookings	15	Tutors and students
		Mentoring and supporting each other by sharing ideas	Workshops/ small group work	14.5	Tutors and students
3	Resources	Creative and art resources- paint, poster; resources to help understand different areas of child development; e.g., socio-emotional, language; National Curriculum subjects, e.g., Literacy, Numeracy; sustainable resources to further develop resources for EYFS and National Curriculum	Consumable, flexible and recyclable resources	12	Tutors and students
		Computers/ laptops	Computers/ laptops	10.5	Management
4	Research	Information on ARU projects (with practitioners/ local providers); Signposting- topical research	Notice board	13.5	Tutors/ researchers
		Ethics workshops and themed research workshops	Workshops	14	Tutors/ researchers
		Guest speakers/ visiting academics	Seminars/ workshops	13	
		Webinars and online access to lectures	Notice board- information on online access	11.5	Mark Miller
		Individual/ group research work	Study space	15	Students
5	Communication and Dissemination	ARU research updates including ARU publications	Notice board, updates on digital social networks (Twitter and/ or Facebook)	14	Everyone- admin initial set up; workshop organisers

		Communication alerts- Research seminars updates, reminders of themed sessions/ workshops	Mobile texts, Notice/ news board	11	Admin (research administrator)
6	Relationship engagement	Socialising space, Social events, Fund raising	Comfy seating areas, Small social gatherings, Support for events	12	Management
		Engagement with local community- settings and schools; students' participation in developing links and relationship with the local community and/ or EY providers; building relationship with guest speakers and visiting academics	Research projects, case study, joint/ partnership work, consultation work, meetings, visits, participation in seminars/ workshops	13.5	Tutors and students

Appendix 8.0: Students' evaluation questionnaire of their participation in the project

Thank you for participating in this study. To enable me to analyse the value of participatory work, I would appreciate your feedback through completion of this form.

1. Title of the course (and year group) you are registered into

--

2. Were you a member of:

Working Group

Research Group

Both

3. Reaction

How did you feel when you were asked to participate in this project as a student?

4. Added value

Do you feel that students' involvement made the ECRR Room project more valuable?

Yes/ No

If yes, please give example(s)...

5. Impact

Do you think your involvement in the project helped you learn about participatory approaches in research and education? Yes/No

If yes, please give example(s)...

Do you feel the use of participatory approaches helped in understanding students' voices and their perceptions of an ECRR Room?

Yes/No

If yes, please give example(s)...

Do you think your involvement in the study helped in your personal development as a Higher Education student?

Yes/No

If yes, please give example(s)...

6. Benefit

What is the best thing that you will take away from this experience?

7. Format

If the student voice was presented in a different way (other than through participatory approaches), would it enhance the effectiveness of this project? Yes/No

If yes, please give example(s)...

8. Changes

Could changes be made to the methods used in this project to make the study more effective?

Yes/No

If yes, please give example(s)...

9. Further information

Is there anything else that you would like to state? Please feel free to use the space below.

Form adapted from: Campbell, F., Beasley, L., Eland, J. and Rumpus, A. 2007. Hearing the student voice: promoting and encouraging the effective use of the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education. *ESCalate (Education Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy)*, Corp creator. (Online). Available from <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/13053/> , Accessed September 28, 2012

Appendix 9.0: Students' comments on the open questions of the evaluation questionnaire

"This was the best experience of my university life. I enjoyed it so much and I learnt so much from it. I do not mind whether or not my views get built into the ECRR Room, the experience of working in a participatory project was a fantastic thing in itself. I am going to use these ideas further in my work. Thank you very much."

"I never knew that I can contribute something valuable to the course I study in. It helped me change my perception about myself!"

"I really enjoyed the matrix activity as it made me think about my views, within a group, and from there, what we took further was the best possible ideas for the ECRR Room"

"It is lovely to see that the space is being developed in collaboration with students. The ECRR Room will be more inviting and appealing to students as it reflects their needs and interests".

"I am so proud that we managed to produce something that will be of value to the current and future students"

"Interesting being a research participant and feeling that I was an integral part of the process rather than observing others and reading about participation and research from books"

"I was pleasantly surprised to see that students' views were being used to co-construct knowledge and not limited to filling in module evaluation forms"

"Mallika never said 'no' to requirements but asked questions and encouraged to consider alternatives- no despondency"

"It is OK if people prefer not to talk- there are other alternative ways"

"I was surprised to see how we changed our views after the matrix activity. Critical questioning and reflection helped to refine our ideas and made us think more about the priorities"

"When we all started questioning each other, I could see a pattern of learning from peers. I could see how the freedom and flexibility given to us made us more aware of our group potential and also how we can influence the working of ECRR Room"

Appendix 10.0: A summary of research and theoretical inspirations shaping the methodology and research design of my study

Phases of Research	Explanation	Method	Members	Theoretical inspirations
<p>Phase 1:</p> <p>Recruitment and introduction (Working group meeting 1 WGM 1)</p>	<p>Seeking students initial expression of interest via university e mail, announcement on Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), leaflet, poster and briefing in lecture sessions</p>	<p>Various communication means- E mail, announcement on VLE, leaflet, poster and briefing in lecture sessions to inform students about the project</p>	<p>Recruitment open to all Early Childhood Studies (ECS) courses students, ranging from Undergraduate level 4 to Doctoral researchers</p>	<p>Tools used in research (including recruitment) should be a part of participants' cultural and educational life (Krishnaswamy, 2004)</p>
<p>Recruitment</p>	<p>A variety of media were used to reach students, recognising their different confidence levels. They were anticipated to either self-read the information (in paper or online) or ask me any questions, if needed.</p> <p>All recruitment material made the 'first come first served' information clear, reinstating the recruitment of first 20 students in the project</p> <p>Twenty five students put themselves forward to</p>	<p>The staff in the Early Childhood team were invited to take part through announcement in department meetings and other program meetings</p>	<p>Invitation open to all early childhood staff within the Department of Education</p>	<p>The experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders should be taken into account to enable listening to the views of all (Ainscow, n.d.; Kidd and Kral, 2005; Richards, 2011)</p> <p>To make the recruitment and participation all inclusive and not a preserve of the 'clever ones', an 'open to all' approach to be used (Bragg, 2007)</p>

	<p>participate in the study, mainly responding through the email</p> <p>An online survey made available on VLE, for students, who could not participate in the project but still wanted to share their views</p>	<p>Online survey on VLE- a link of which was sent with original recruitment e mail to all students</p>	<p>Twenty five responses from Early Childhood Studies (ECS) students through the online survey</p>	<p>Students to be included in decision making, especially in the processes that are going to be meaningful for them and affect their everyday education experiences (Mann, 2001)</p>
Project briefing	<p>Briefing of the project and informed consent –</p> <p>Project introduction</p> <p>Introduction to participatory research</p> <p>Value of participatory research in education</p> <p>The general principles of participatory research</p> <p>Participant information sheet, consent and withdrawal forms</p>	<p>Working group meeting</p>	<p>Twenty students came to attend the first meeting (and also subsequent meetings), along with 3 members of staff, including an ECRR Room administrator.</p>	<p>Giving responsibility to students to shape any outcome becomes difficult if they lack pedagogical and subject knowledge. Therefore, a briefing session, with an aim to discuss the nature and role of participatory research, in general as well as in education, was necessary (Taylor and Wilding, 2009; Goins, et al, 2011)</p> <p>The participants should know the benefits of participating in a participatory research (Krishnaswamy, 2004)</p> <p>The participants need to know the aim and scope of the project as well as their role to understand the social situations which they are going to face subsequently (Barreteau et al., 2010)</p> <p>The participants to identify themselves as a community, in this case a research community, with common aims and objectives (Goins et al., 2011)</p>

				the research group (Krishnaswamy, 2012; Nhamo, 2012)
Phase 3: Research group meetings RGM 1 RGM 2	Analyse all the information collected and collated by the working group The use of matrix to encourage critical analysis and reflection-prioritising various themes and resources for the ECRR Room	Research group meeting Research group meeting	RGM T (Tuesday group) RGM W (Wednesday group) RGM T (Tuesday group) RGM W (Wednesday group)	Scope for capacity building of participants by learning research skills and techniques (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Pant, n.d.; Seale, 2010; Seale, et al., 2014) Encourage collective decision making for shared meanings and interests (Veale, 2005) The unquestioning reliance on the views of the less powerful can lead to uncritical value being placed on the project, irrespective of the nature of views. Therefore it was vital to have aspects of critical analysis built into the process (Bovill et al., 2011) PR develops capacity to participate rationally and critically in group situations, instead of producing descriptive ideas (Pant, 2008) The critical decision making aspect of participation was vital to avoid the hiding of unequal participation and the generation of false consensus (Veale, 2005)

	Identification of dissemination opportunities			Sharing the control of research agenda, process and analysis empowers participants (Baum, et al., 2006)
RGM 3: debriefing event	<p>Debriefing of the project, encapsulating the findings</p> <p>Students' feedback on their participation in the project</p> <p>Identification of the next steps</p> <p>Participation in dissemination</p>	Research group meeting	17 students and 1 staff	<p>Seeing our efforts through learners'/ participants eyes is one of the most critical lenses of reflection (Brookfield, 1998)</p> <p>The participants need to know any consequent action, after their contribution in shared decision making (Fielding 2001; Holdsworth 2005; Manefield, et al., 2007)</p> <p>The ethics of opening up the academy to participants- members being able to help to select and edit the data in order to get the message across to the wider audience (Lancaster University, n.d.)</p>