ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL CARE

Exploring a cyclical model of professional development: Insights from childminders.

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia Ruskin University for the degree of Doctor of Education

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I write my thanks in a very different world from when I began my doctoral journey. A time of deep uncertainty, yet also a time of family. A time in which there is a greater focus on early childhood education and care in the home, and one in which childminders are critical in their role as key workers for our youngest generation. I am extremely thankful for the opportunity I have had to work with such a remarkable group of childminders, who gave up their valuable time to join me for this study. You are incredible ladies.

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL CARE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

EXPLORING A CYCLICAL MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM CHILDMINDERS

KAY AARONRICKS

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Childminders are key contributors to early childhood education and care, in England. They employ a distinct pedagogical approach and are required by the Early Years Foundation Stage framework to be accountable for their own professional development. Yet, their voices are scarce throughout research. This thesis presents work undertaken with a group of childminders, in the East of England that explores the ways in which professional development activities could be improved, to better suit childminders' particular requirements.

This research builds upon UK studies of childminders and research into professional development, in early childhood education and care. A collaborative, interpretive approach to an action research enquiry is presented, in which the childminders contribute their insights, through ongoing reflection and evaluation of a cyclical approach to professional development. Collection of data emerged through reflection on workshop activities and opportunities for the childminders to develop and document practice. Crystallization is utilised as an approach that promotes the co-creation of multiple understandings and representation of data, through collaborative opportunities for analysis.

Childminders make existing challenges visible and share insights into their experience of an alternative approach to professional development. The findings demonstrate their reflections, presented across five dimensions: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect of their participation. A three stage, cyclical model of professional development, is proposed to better meet childminders' distinctive needs and that has the potential to create communities of practice and build networks of support.

Childminders can and should have a voice in research and in issues that affect them. They offer a distinctive approach to providing care and education for children from birth, from a base of their family home and within a local community. This research offers inspiration for a contextualised and community-based approach to professional development, one that is childminder-led, supportive and reflective, within an ever changing policy landscape.

Keywords: Childminding, action research, professional development, early childhood.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

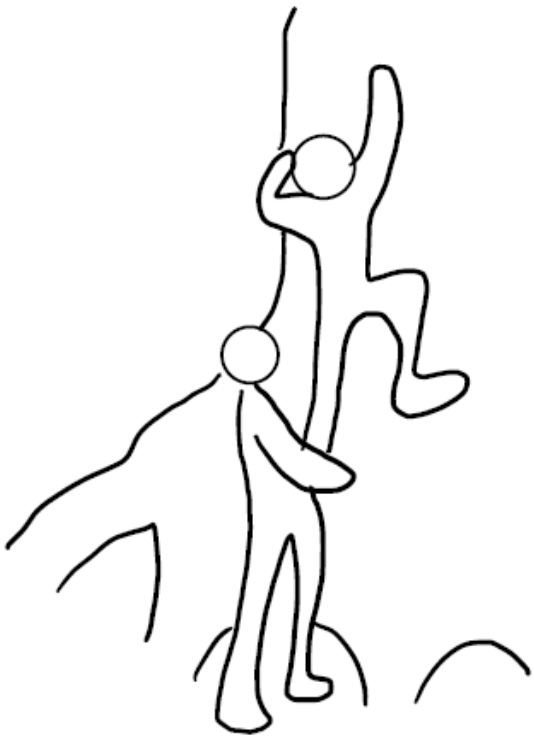
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARU	Anglia Ruskin University
CACHE	Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education
CAR	Core Action Research
CGFS	Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage
CRC	Community Relations Commission
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DNN	Diploma in Nursery Nursing
DoH	Department of Health
EECERA	European Early Childhood Education Research Association
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECM	Essential Childminder Magazine
ECSDN	Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network
EdD	Education Doctorate
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education
EYE	Early Years Educator
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYITT	Early Years Initial Teacher Training
EYP	Early Years Professional
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYR	Early Years Register
EYT	Early Years Teacher
FCCERS-R	Family and Childcare Environment Rating Scale - Revised
FEEL	Fostering Effective Early Learning
FDC	Family Day Care
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTTP	Graduate Teacher Training Programme
ICO	Information Commissioners Office
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCMA	National Childminding Association
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PFA	Paediatric First Aid
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SEED	Study of Early Education and Development
SEF	Self-Evaluation Form
SSTEW	Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing

TACTYC	Training Advancement and Co-operation in Teaching Young Children
TAR	Thesis Action Research
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1

Introduction



1 INTRODUCTION

'Inquisitive. Dedicated. Varied. Dependable. Professional. Caring. Work. Versatile. Motivated. Experienced. Impassioned. United. Reliable. Family. Fun. Unselfish.'

Childminders self-descriptions.

I was a childminder for seven years. During that time, I welcomed eleven children into my family, ranging from the ages of six months through to thirteen years, some of whom I remain in contact with today. In 2013, I made the decision to cease childminding; instead, embarking successively on a Graduate Teacher Training Programme (GTTP), then in October 2014, the Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD). In this thesis, I present insights from a local group of childminders in England, gathered through a collaborative action research enquiry, during which time, we explored emerging features of a model of continuing professional development (CPD). The voices from the group of childminders, who took part in this enquiry, feature above, in answer to the question of what terms they would use to introduce themselves within a written report. Through their responses, they offer an initial insight towards the complex occupation of childminding, as a way of life and an extension of the family; underpinned by business, education and policy. These notions framed the context of this research, as we explored a model of CPD which better meets their distinctive requirements.

1.1 CHILDMINDING

Childminding is a long established service, originating in England from the industrial revolution (Mayall & Petrie, 1983). Over time, the role has developed and altered, shifting into varying constructs of a childcare service, to meet the evolving needs of working parents. Whilst this variety has created an early years sector which flexes to

accommodate political and social change, it has also created a ‘multiplicity of roles’ (McGillivray, 2008, p. 244) that can be difficult to define. A childminder is now just one type of childcare provider, offering a distinctive service (Ang, et al., 2017), which is not widely visible or understood. Terms such as babysitter, or nanny, are often used interchangeably to describe the childminding role, however, they are differing roles, subject to different, or no, regulatory requirements. As an example, McGillivray (2008) explores issues of identity across the early years workforce, considering the various job titles used, such as; ‘practitioner, nursery worker, nanny, child-carer, and nursery nurse’ (p. 244), recognising the term childminder as a 1970s construct. Harwood, et al., (2013) extend these titles to include ‘early years educators… caregivers, babysitters, specialists, advocates, teachers and foundation builders’ (p. 5). More recently, Basford (2019) argues that ‘the choice of term to use when defining practitioners… is never straightforward’ (p. 779).

I began childminding in 2007; a year prior to the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008), which was the first universal, statutory framework to guide policy and practice in all registered early years settings in England. It also brought with it, an expectation for childminders to complete initial training to support their understanding of the framework, and to engage in opportunities for professional development on a regular basis. In my experience, the implementation of the statutory framework was the most significant, mandatory change, to impact on the role of childminders, notwithstanding the prior requirement to register with a regulatory body; first with the Local Health Authority in 1948, then the Local Education Authority and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) from 2001 (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016). As a result, this enquiry into the needs of childminders, in relation to CPD, is situated within the

current regulatory context of the childminding role, in England, since the implementation of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) and subsequent revisions (DfE, 2012; 2017a).

1.2 Regulatory Context of Childminding

Individuals in England, who wish to care for children under the age of eight years, for more than two hours per day, and for financial reward, are required by the government to register as a childminder with Ofsted (gov.uk, 2017). Becoming a childminder is a complex process, which can take approximately six months to achieve. Childminders work from their own homes, offering care and education for children aged from birth to five and beyond, and are guided by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework (DfE, 2017a). They have the option to register with Ofsted, or with a childminding agency, who themselves register with Ofsted. Childminders also have a number of options: to join the early years register if they wish to look after children aged five years and under; the childcare register if they wish to look after children aged five to seven years; or both registers in order to care for children of any age, under eight years. Exemptions to registration, such as for children over eight years old, are stipulated by the government for various types of childcare provision: crèche facilities; tutoring; sports clubs; and care by a family member (Ofsted, 2018).

The childminder registration process requires completion of a number of tasks, including: an occupational health check; an enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS) check; completion of sufficient training which 'helps them to understand and implement the EYFS' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21), as determined by the Local Authority; payment of a registration fee; and an initial Ofsted inspection (gov.uk, 2017). One of the features of childminding that distinguishes it from other types of childcare settings, is that it takes place inside the childminders' family home. Consequently, the juxtaposition of creating a

business, which provides a service that cares for and educates children, necessitates further responsibilities. These include registering as self-employed and advertising the service to local families, as well as preparing the domestic premise to meet Ofsted quality and safeguarding requirements. Moreover, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2017a) adds stipulations to the definition of a childminder as a 'suitable' (p. 18) person to work with children under five, extending the requirement to hold a full DBS to all individuals over the age of 16 years, living on the childminders domestic premise. Finally, all childminders must have 'sufficient understanding and use of English' (DfE, 2017a, p. 22); hold a full and current Paediatric First Aid (PFA) certificate; and complete a child protection training course.

1.3 Context of my Research

When I commenced the EdD, Ofsted (2014) reported a total of 50,416 childminders on the Early Years Register (EYR). Over the course of undertaking this doctoral enquiry, this diminished to 37,600 (Ofsted, 2020a) and by a further 600 childminders (1,300 left and 700 joined) just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ofsted, 2020b). Statistically, the decline is attributed to a trend of more childminders leaving the role, than the number of new childminders choosing to register (Ofsted 2020a; 2020b). Nonetheless, alternative reasons exist within research, such as the identification by O'Connell (2011, p. 797) that 'unless… childminders can compete on a level playing field in a supported childcare system, they are unlikely to take up the offer of professionalisation and continue to leave the work'.

Childminding in England, is described as an 'under developed area of early years research' (Ang, et al., 2017, p. 261), and there are a wealth of avenues for research in the field. Various suggestions are put forward, for example: to develop an understanding

of childminders' education and experience (Otero & Melhuish, 2015); the implications of ongoing policy changes on childminding, and on the children and families with which they work (Brooker, 2016); and childminding practice and quality, as well as the links with children's experiences and outcomes (Fauth, et al., 2011; Ang, et al., 2017). In addition, challenges around the professional development, knowledge base and identity of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, in which childminders work, continue to be explored (Nutbrown, 2012; Hordern, 2013; Callanan, et al., 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2018; Basford, 2019) with an increasing 'move towards 'localism': allowing groups of… settings greater autonomy in supporting each other' (Cotton, 2013, p. 18).

According to Mac Naughton, et al., (2010), the purpose of research is to uncover new information, gain a greater understanding of a topic, and enable growth and development within a specific area. In addition, the purpose of research is extended within an Educational Doctorate, to include a contribution to practice, for which Burgess, et al., (2006, p. 4) distinguish 'many students undertake an EdD, not because they wish to further their careers, but simply because they have a curiosity and interest in an aspect of their own work'. My interest in developing understandings of childminding is rooted in my lived experience within the field. While I was childminding, I gained Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), which extended my responsibility to be an 'agent of change' (Whalley, 2008), and as a result I began offering standalone CPD sessions, with the support of my local childminding group. Soon afterward, I began to research aspects of childminding and professional identity that were changing as a result of policy developments, through a Masters degree in Early Years Professional Practice.

During this time, I sought the views of childminders on the introduction of childminder agencies, in response to changes that had occurred within the early years sector, based on two independent reviews: Tickell (2011) who focused on the implementation of the

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); and Nutbrown (2012) who focused on qualifications. They put forward recommendations for increased professional development of the ECEC sector, such as the streamlining of qualifications, increased support, and a focus on opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD). In addition, Tickell (2011) identified the need to support childminders, deeming them to be 'uniquely vulnerable in their single practitioner status' (p. 44) during times of change. As a result, the Department for Education (DfE) proposed childminding should move away from individual Ofsted regulation, towards a new model of childminder agencies, whereby the agency would register with Ofsted, rather than the childminder (Truss, 2013a).

The sector response to the introduction of childminder agencies in England, was described as 'all out rebellion' (Leitch, 2013, p. 5), and the childminders who responded to my survey during this time, expressed a number of concerns. These included: increased costs associated with using what they deemed to be a brokerage service; and a perceived negative impact on their professional identity, caused by the associated removal of the requirement for individual registration with Ofsted. The negative impact of similar deregulation systems internationally, had also been identified (Daycare Trust, 2012), resulting in concerns, for example, over quality of practice and an increased perception of home-based childcare as a 'second class service' (p. 4). In three years, eight childminder agencies formed in England, registering approximately twenty childminders between them (Gaunt, 2016). The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), since report the number of agencies to have grown to eleven, however, only seven of these are actively supporting childminders (PACEY, 2018).

There was a lack of consultation between the government and the childminding workforce during these reforms (Ransom, 2013), which McGillivray (2012) suggests results in a sense of disillusionment, when practitioners are not 'connected to, consulted

on or informed' (p. 242) of the changes that directly impact on the ways in which they work. In this case, childminders were successful in demonstrating their dissatisfaction with agencies, by disengaging as a collective with the initiative, and they continue to be considered essential members of the childcare sector (Otero & Melhuish, 2015). However, they also continue to be a largely invisible workforce, within a demanding and challenging sector, which is 'continually changing and evolving' (Hallet, 2013b, p. 312). The responsibility to support the early years workforce is tasked to Local Education Authorities, yet, they continue to experience decreases in government funding (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016), which, in turn, leads to a reduction of the level of support they are able to offer.

1.4 Research Question

Through my previous focus of research, on the MA Early Years Professional Practice, I gathered views from a group of 100 childminders, via an online survey, on the introduction of childminder agencies (Aaronricks, 2014). Through their responses, the childminders demonstrated their lack of engagement with the initiative, yet also identified the value they place on support networks, and on opportunities to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Consequently, these would have been areas of practice that agencies could work to develop successfully, if they had been modelled without the loss of individual registration for childminders.

CPD is a complex notion (Sheridan, et al., 2009; Crowley, 2014), often utilised as an umbrella term (for example, Tickell, 2011; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Callanan, et al., 2017), to encompass a range of differing activities, aimed at learning and developing knowledge and skills, within early childhood. The term 'training' describes just one of these activities, utilised in discussions across early studies on childminders (Jackson &

Jackson, 1979; Ferri, 1992); within early childhood sector documents such as the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) and Local Authority training brochures (Essex County Council, 2018b); and is used to describe formal introductory training courses and qualifications (Kennedy, 2005; Campbell-Barr, 2018). Further, training is differentiated as a model of CPD by Kennedy (2005), and described by Sheridan, et al., (2009) as providing 'specific skill instruction… for on-the-job application' (p. 381).

Training is also used alongside the term CPD, and sometimes interchangeably; for example, Callanan, et al., (2017, p. 69) identify 'staff training and development needs', then 'describe three ways in which staff CPD needs were identified' (ibid). PACEY (2020) is a membership organisation who provide advice and support to the early years workforce, including insurance packages, legal support, access to sector publications and CPD resources. For the purpose of their 'Report on the State of the Childcare and Early Years Sector in England' (Kalitowski, 2017), PACEY defined CPD as 'anything done to maintain and improve knowledge and skills, such as training; attending meetings and workshops; reading factsheets; practice guides, and magazines; and/or accessing peer support programmes' (p. 12). I explore the varying terminology and types of CPD further in chapter three (see 3.4. Professional Development), and for the purpose of this research, I utilise the overarching term of CPD to encompass differing types of professional development activities.

Continuing professional development has been recommended for childminders for different purposes, including: raising quality; as a means to provide support; promote collaboration and build a collective understanding of identity (Otero & Melhuish, 2015). It has also been suggested that CPD needs to encompass specific features in order to be effective, including being: accessible; relevant; collaborative; and affordable (Gibson, et el., 1977; Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Owen, 2007; O'Connell, 2011; DfE, 2017a).

However, there remains a need for further research in this area. I chose to continue my exploration of the recommendations for increased professional development of the ECEC sector (Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012), in context of the statutory requirement to engage in 'appropriate training and professional development opportunities' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21) as determined by the EYFS, asking one overarching question throughout my enquiry:

> In what ways can CPD be developed, to be more appropriate for childminders?

1.5 Aim of the Research

My primary aim in undertaking doctoral research, was to work in collaboration with childminders, to explore and develop solutions to the challenges they encountered, when engaging with existing CPD opportunities. Support and training for childminders is tasked primarily to Local Authorities, who employ roles such as Development Workers and Early Years Advisors. They, in turn, offer CPD opportunities to all types of early years settings in each Local Authority area, in England. In addition, independent organisations and membership groups, such as the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) (2020) and Childcare.co.uk (2017) offer a place for childminders to access online support services such as guidance documents, discussion forums and CPD programmes. However, challenges remain.

Current opportunities for CPD do not consistently meet the needs of all childminders. My own experience, and the results from a pilot survey for this study (see Chapter Five), support Kennedy's (2005) description of training models, as being the dominant form of CPD offered to childminders that are often generalised; delivered by individuals without childminding expertise; during times when childminders are working; and through a transmissive process of topic based knowledge delivery. Membership groups offer online

services, which, whilst accessible, do not easily support opportunities for local networking. Childminders had previously reported Local Authority networks to promote confidence and address a sense of professional isolation (Owen, 2007). However, they now report a lack of understanding of their role (O'Connell, 2011), which is coupled with reduced Local Authority training and external support services, themselves largely generalised and sometimes costly (Otero & Melhuish, 2015).

CPD has the potential to address some of these challenges: as a means to prevent professional isolation (Hevey, 2010); promote communities of practice; increase motivation; form local support networks; and develop knowledge and practice (Ingleby, 2017). Furthermore, I argue that research into a model of CPD that is better suited for childminders, needs to be informed by their voices and experiences, in order to 'gain greater control over their continuing professional development and ongoing formation' (Hordern, 2012, p. 115). To achieve this, I was drawn towards an action research approach to my enquiry, which enabled the identification and exploration of challenges, as well as the opportunity to develop current ways of working. This was achieved through a series of cycles; each encompassing individual stages of planning, implementation and observation, and finally reflection. The cyclical approach to the research thus influenced the structure of this thesis.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The thesis writing process is referred to by Burgess et al (2006, p. 90) as a 'messy' activity, necessitating fluidity of movement, back and forth across the chapters through the drafting, re-writing, and editing stages. I drew inspiration, throughout this process, from Richardson's (1990) concept of writing as a method of enquiry, wherein she suggests the need to view writing as 'in-progress' (p. 49). This notion enabled me to

engage with the literature through initial review and continue to develop upon the ideas as the research evolved; writing, drafting and re-drafting over the six year period of the EdD programme. As I reflect on the way in which the thesis structure evolved as a result of writing, presenting and reviewing the research, I recognise the extent to which I have developed my own understanding of academic writing and scholarly research processes throughout this time.

In chapter two, I explore the historical and political development of childminding in England, into the role that it is today, providing both care and education to children from birth onwards. I draw out and synthesise key themes from the literature, including insights into childminders' evolving identity in England and the significance of support networks. Further, I identify challenges towards notions of what constitutes appropriate CPD opportunities for childminders. I then develop these ideas within chapter three, through review of the regulatory requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a), and by differentiating between key concepts that include qualifications, training and professional development. Finally, I draw out and review dominant features of CPD, from research in the early childhood sector.

In chapter four, I examine methodologies utilised by previous researchers of childminders and within the early childhood sector that helped me to refine my own approach. I reflect on the way in which the traditional linear reporting structure of a thesis was not a suitable arrangement through which to report on my cyclical action research, I therefore began to seek alternative solutions. Action researchers such as Fletcher and Phelps (2006) and Davis (2007), demonstrated the possibilities for 'rethinking the architecture' (p. 181) when reporting on the evolving, layered and messy process that characterises action research (Nyanjom, 2018). The work of Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) supported my deeper engagement with the notion of structuring my enquiry through a framework of thesis

action research, and core action research. Following this, I discuss the use of open-ended data collection methods, designed to capture the collaborative approach to the enquiry. Finally, my use of crystallization, to support a constructivist approach to data analysis and representation of voice (Ellingson, 2009) that framed my enquiry.

Prior to commencing the core action research, I undertook a survey, presented in chapter five, to gather the views of childminders on their current experiences of CPD. These views were sparse within current literature, therefore, I drew an understanding from McNiff (2017) that I could take stock, and gather a localised insight to inform the subsequent enquiry. From the responses, I was able to profile three overarching groups of childminders and draw out key themes by coding and grouping the childminders' narratives. The voices of these childminders were then presented and discussed at the first meeting, with the core action research group of childminders, which forms chapter six.

From the outset of the enquiry, I recognised that 'a collaborative action research project requires time and effort from participants to get underway and be carried forward' (Platteel, et al., 2010, p. 432). Therefore, in chapter six, I present an account of our initial meeting, designed to introduce the research and facilitate a collaborative consideration of key elements of the forthcoming research, including ethical boundaries, and a shared understanding of the aims and design of the enquiry. During this session, we reviewed the key themes arising from the survey and reflected on the possibilities for undertaking and developing current CPD experiences.

Next, I present and discuss the emerging findings from the core action research, across chapters seven, eight and nine. Each of these chapters portray insights from one full cycle of the core action research, and each chapter has its own central theme: chapter

seven introduces a three stage, cyclical model of CPD; chapter eight characterises the concept of the childminder approach to childcare and education; and chapter nine presents our collaborative analysis of the core action research. Throughout these chapters, I re-engage with the literature, working to build an informed understanding of how our collaborative research sits within, and advances, current understandings of childminding and continuing professional development.

In chapter ten, I bring together the core and thesis action research, reflecting on my research journey, and contributing my insights into the ways in which CPD can be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, in answer to my research question. In addition, I summarise my contribution to knowledge and make practical recommendations for future research to further develop CPD opportunities to meet the distinctive needs of childminders.

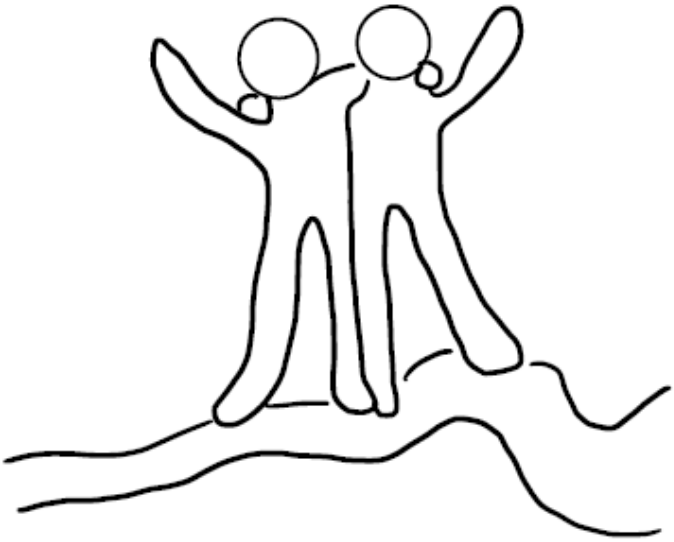
1.7 Chapter Summary

I have introduced the personal context for this professional doctorate, positioning my research as a localised enquiry, carried out in collaboration with a group of childminders. In this thesis, I offer a deeper insight into the childminding role, adding to existing understandings of their distinctive pedagogical provision (Ang, et al., 2017). I provide examples of contextualised knowledge (Campbell-Barr, 2018), and explore solutions to the challenges that childminders encounter, when sourcing appropriate opportunities for professional development (Hordern, 2012). In the forthcoming chapters, I reflect on my own research journey and demonstrate how it interweaves with that of the childminders. I begin in the next chapter, with a review of literature, during which I research the gendered business of childminding in England and argue that the political shift to education has influenced the development of their professional identity. They are now

required to engage in CPD opportunities that are not reflective of their distinctive pedagogical approach, to the care and education of children from birth.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Childminding



2 CHILDMINDING IN ENGLAND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature exploring childminding in England, is sparse and fragmented (Ang, et al., 2017). According to a UK government Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) (Otero & Melhuish, 2015), childminders have a critical role in the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC), yet, based on current trends of decline (Ofsted, 2019d), are predicted by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) (2019), to have disappeared by 2034. In order to address this issue, PACEY (2019), reports that a greater understanding is needed, of the ways in which childminding can become a more attractive career and support is required to encourage existing childminders to remain in role.

For over 40 years, childminders have been described as invisible and isolated providers of childcare (CRC, 1975; Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Mooney & Statham, 2003; Owen 2007; Brooker, 2016; Ang, et al., 2017), and have been subject to a political gaze (O'Connell, 2011), which has resulted in a complex evolution of identity within the broader early childhood sector. Much of the research has been 'done on them' (Otero & Melhuish, 2015, p. 7) and gaps in knowledge, particularly around insights into childminding practice and children's experiences, continue to be observed (Ang, et al., 2017). The objective of my research, was to build upon current opportunities for childminders to engage in continuing professional development (CPD); seeking to identify existing challenges, then work in collaboration with childminders, by drawing upon their localised experiences, to explore the ways that CPD could be developed to meet their needs.

In this chapter, I situate my enquiry within existing understandings of childminding, and define key terms. I engage with literature that focuses primarily on childminding in

England and draw from international examples to broaden my discussion. Previous reviews of childminding literature were available, including a review by Moss, et al., (2001) at the turn of the century, and more recently that of Ang, et al., (2017). These reviews of existing literature and studies of childminding were useful in signposting me to key texts (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Ferri, 1992; Owen, 2003, Fauth, et al., 2011), and supported my own literature search; some of which, I was able to purchase as original copies, (CRC, 1975; Gibson, et al., 1977; Jackson & Jackson, 1979), whereas others were available online to download through my university library access. In addition, I own sector specific sources of information from my time as a childminder, including Local Authority brochures (Barnetson, 2012), guidance documents (Ofsted, 2001; DfE, 2017a) and handbooks (Lee, 2007).

In comparison to the multitude of professional articles written about childminders, which are widely available in sector publications such as Nursery World Magazine (2019), peer reviewed articles in academic journals are less common. Nevertheless, reviewing previous work, such as that of Owen (2000; 2006; 2007), Jones and Osgood (2007), and O'Connell (2011) enhanced the scholarly approach to my work, and enabled me to build upon previous research and existing understandings of childminding. Within this chapter, I offer a brief overview of childminding as a common form of childcare internationally, then provide insight into the development of the role of a childminder in England, by way of six key themes, drawn from across the literature: registration; the gendered business of caring; the shift to education; discovering a collective identity; support networks; and training. Through these themes, I build an insight into the distinctive characteristics that define the childminding role, since the introduction of the EYFS, and build the argument for a model of CPD that is better suited to meet the needs of childminders.

2.2 Overview of Childminding Internationally and in England

Internationally, Statham and Mooney (2003) believe there is 'remarkably little research… attributable in part to the invisibility of family day care' (p. 12). Nonetheless, it is considered a common form of childcare (Bauters & Vandenbroeck, 2017), of which the status, policy context and organisational structures vary, as does the terminology used to describe the role. For example, Statham and Mooney (2003) utilise the generic term Family Day Care (FDC) to introduce cross-national comparisons of home-based childcare. Lanigan (2011) utilises a similar term 'Family Child Care' in the United States of America (USA), whereas, in Germany they are termed 'Tagesmütter' (day mothers) (Gelder, 2003; Bauters and Vandenbroeck, 2017), 'Onthaalmoeder' in Belgium, and 'Dagmamma' in Norway and Sweden (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Nevertheless, the term childminder is not exclusive to England, for example, it is utilised by O'Regan, et al., (2019) to describe home-based childcare services in Ireland, where the role also incorporates 'childminders/au pairs/nannies' (p. 760). The childminding role in Ireland, is largely an informal arrangement, comprising 'fewer than 100 childminders registered with Tusla, the national regulator, as the vast majority of childminding services are exempt from regulation' (ibid, p.760). Whereas in England, childminders are all legally required to register with Ofsted.

International variations of the role range from unregulated, informal arrangements such as those provided in Israel (Rosenthal, 2003), to a formally recognised childcare service, in countries such as Germany (Gelder, 2003), Hungary (Korintus, 2003), and the United States of America (USA) (Kontos, et al., 1995; Lanigan, 2011). Collombet (2016) provides a further overview of the diversity of the role within Europe, to inform the development of international childcare strategies. Collombet (2016) reports on the breadth of family day care provision, by presenting a comparative, statistical overview of

childcare places provided by this type of early childhood setting. Yet, in doing so, recognises the need to 'better distinguish regulated individual child care from other child care solutions' (Collombet, 2016, p. 14) across Europe, in order to enable a deeper understanding of the nuances and to inform policy development.

International constructs of FDC encompass similarities to childminding in England, through the way in which it is carried out, for example; comprising a workforce primarily of women, who are providing a childcare service from their own home; perceived as low-skilled and unqualified, and referred to by Bauters and Vandenbroeck (2017, p. 387) as 'Cinderella's of childcare'. They also suggest the continued 'importance of exploring inspiring practices of family day care, to open up the possibility of constructing new understandings about the commonalities and differences of FDC providers in the professionalisation debate' (Bauters & Vandenbroeck, 2017, pp. 387-388).

In England, childminding has been inextricably shaped by the development and requirements of government policy, commencing with the Nurseries and Childminders Regulation Act (HMSO, 1948). This was the first time that basic requirements for childminders to register with their Local Health Authority were introduced, if they cared for more than two children for reward. Although childminders began to be incorporated within the government childcare agenda, they were omitted from national studies of early childhood, therefore, little was understood about the type, and quality of care they provided. Elfer and McQuail (1996), for example, report on the experience of a representative from the National Childminding Association (NCMA) who was invited to a review of day care, childminding and out of school provision, after the introduction of the Children Act (HMSO, 1989): 'we were delighted to be a part of it… we gave up so many hours… but later they said basically we don't need you' (Elfer & McQuail, 1996, p. 29).

Large scale studies on family day care have been carried out internationally, such as that of Kontos, et al., (1995) who defined elements of quality of care, such as the responsiveness to children's needs, and explored the benefits of regulated childcare provision for parents and children in the USA. Nevertheless, childminders have been absent from early studies in England, prior to the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008), such as the national sampling of 141 early childhood settings in the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) longitudinal project (Sylva, et al., 2004). This study is reported to have 'produced major government policy changes since 2008' (Birkbeck College, 2014, p. 1), including the expansion of free early years provision and recommendations in relation to early years qualifications. However, these changes were not informed by examples of practice from home-based childcare settings, as childminders did not fall within the remit of education provision at this time.

Childminders remain an under-researched part of the early years sector in comparison to other forms of childcare, such as non-domestic or group-based provision (Brooker, 2016; Ang, et al., 2017), which include Ofsted registered day nurseries and pre-schools. A problematic identity, and discordant comparisons between home-based and group-based provision, were identified through early research (Mayall & Petrie, 1983). These associations persist within more recent studies, such as that of Brooker (2016), as a challenge that continues to impact upon the complexities involved in defining childminders' identity. Terms such as 'domestic pedagogy' (Jones & Osgood, 2007, p. 295), 'implicit pedagogy' (p. 297) and in being defined as 'distinct from any other type of provision' (Ang, et al., 2017, p. 263), emerged through research studies. Notions such as these substantiate O'Connell's (2011) proposal for childminding to be re-conceptualised as a distinctive form of childcare, one that is different from group-based settings, and one

that warrants further exploration in terms of pedagogical values and distinctive characteristics.

2.3 Registration

From 1948 childminders were required to register with their Local Health Authority, for which the responsibility then moved across to the Social Services department after the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970); thus, situating childminding within a policy discourse of care and protection for children. Yet, it was not until the introduction of the Children Act (1989), that safety inspections of childminder's premises were introduced, providing the Local Authority with the right to withdraw a childminders registration if they deemed necessary.

Localised studies of childminding began during this time, deriving from concerns of quality and disadvantage (CRC, 1975), consequently identifying a lack of knowledge, understanding and support for childminders (Gibson, et al., 1977). However, childminders were difficult to find, described by Jackson and Jackson (1979) as the 'world outside the institutions' (p. 16). The invisibility of childminders was identified as both a barrier to research and a challenge to enforcing the requirement to register. Unregistered, illegal minding was common place, 'followed by more lurid reports of children tied to chairs and of 'get rich quick' minders' (Gibson, et al., 1977, p. 1). Further, Local Authorities did not have adequate systems in place to keep sufficient records of childminders or provide the support they needed (CRC, 1975). Ten years on, Mayall and Petrie (1983) continued to report a similar story, that 'little was known and what was known was disturbing' (p. 3).

During this time, childminding was entrenched within a working class culture, considered as a necessary service for working mothers, yet possessing a poor public image (Gibson,

et al., 1977). The alternative childcare option of non-domestic settings such as day nurseries were in existence, however, they were scarce and, at the time, reserved to provide support for children deemed at risk by the Local Authority (CRC, 1975). During one of the earliest childcare studies that comprised a series of surveys exploring the childcare needs and experiences of ethnic minority mothers, the Community Relations Commission (CRC) (1975) acknowledged that 'no official provision' (p. 7) was made for working mothers, therefore, childminders formed the sole source of non-relative childcare for families. At this time, the government actively promoted the use of childminders for working families with young children (Mayall & Petrie, 1983), even though they had received little research attention, and concerns remained rife with regards to the safety and wellbeing of the children in their care.

2.4 The Gendered Business of Caring

Vivid portrayals during the 1970s, such as that of childminder Mrs Owen (Jackson & Jackson, 1979), reinforced the derogatory view and lack of a positive childminding identity:

> *'Jimmy won't have seen or held a toy in his hands all day. Winter or summer, no chance of moving about in the fresh air. No conversation, no exploration. Just the restricting straps of the pushchair. I once asked Mrs Owen why she was a childminder… 'Don't know, really. Never thought about it'* (Jackson & Jackson, 1979, p. 149).

The study made a number of recommendations, including the need for a Minister for Children, and a support service which could meet the 'training, educational and social needs' (Jackson & Jackson, 1979, p. 254) of childminders. However, in order to achieve this, a deeper understanding of these needs was necessary. Shortly afterwards, Mayall

and Petrie's (1983) qualitative study of provision for young children, added a further proposal of the need for increased government funding, to support better quality childcare services.

The study carried out by Mayall and Petrie (1983) consisted of interviews comprising between 35 and 42 childminders, across four London boroughs, totalling 159 childminders and including 64 parents. In addition, the sampling of fifteen day nursery settings, comprised 41 nursery nurses and 40 parents, sampled across the boroughs. The number of interviews undertaken across the two different types of provisions are disproportionate in this study, nonetheless, the more systematic sampling approach of childminders within this research, is in stark contrast to that of Jackson and Jackson (1979), who asked their research team to 'get up before dawn, be in any working-class area of any city you choose in Britain, see and feel it wake up. Take notes. Above all watch for working parents, toddlers, babies and backstreet childminders' (p. 12). Mayall and Petrie (1983) detail the work they carried out with the Local Authorities, asking them to 'check the lists in advance' (1983, p. 224) and worked together to obtain a proportionate number of registered childminders from each list across the four boroughs.

Disparity in quality and provision between childminders and group-based settings was identified by Mayall and Petrie (1983), comparing factors such as: the consistency of care; the socialisation of children; purposeful activity; the childcare environment; and staff qualifications. As a result, childminding as a type of provision was recognised to be beneficial as a community service, providing a homely setting with one care giver, and going 'beyond what parents could ask of a nursery school' (Mayall & Petrie, 1983, p. 183). Nonetheless, described as 'kindly, concerned women' (ibid, p. 183), childminders fared less favourably, in comparison to group-based settings, against early indicators of quality, such as lower levels of qualifications, a lack of adequate resources and being

overburdened in their multiple roles as wives, housekeepers, mothers and carers. Mayall & Petrie (1983) recommended that children needed education from group-based settings, to supplement the care they received from childminders. Nevertheless, it was also suggested that children in group-based settings were educated by 'immature and insufficiently well trained' (Mayall & Petrie, 1983, p. 193) nursery nurses, and that these children were segregated from daily life through their fixed routines and the enclosed nature of the environment.

Comparisons such as these, between childminding and group-based provision (such as day nurseries or pre-schools) were considered by Owen (2000) to be inappropriate, and suggestive of the need to generate a better understanding of childminding in its own right. Thus, studies continued to build a profile of childminders (Mooney, et al., 2001a; Dawson, et al., 2003), and highlighted the importance of creating a collective childminding identity (Greener, 2009) within the broader early childhood sector. Childminding has long been characterised as 'the domain of working class women' (Osgood, 2005, p. 296), typified by low pay, status, and poor working conditions. It was thought to need drawing out into public view, in order to 'lose its image of exclusively home-based care, in which the minded child's experience is indivisible from the family regime of the provider' (Ferri, 1992, p. 193).

Ferri (1992) had discovered, that the childminders in her study considered the existing experience they held as mothers, to provide them with sufficient knowledge and skills to undertake the role of a childminder. Similarly, the notion of a domestic pedagogy, referred to by Jones and Osgood (2007), draws from work such as that of Walkerdine and Lucey (1989), which explores the idea of domestic work as the 'basis of children's cognitive development' (1989, p. 67) and the responsibility of the mother to transpose these into opportunities for learning and thus upward social mobility. Jones and Osgood (2007)

acknowledge the possibility for childminders to be viewed as 'simply doing women's work, the everyday domestic stuff that requires no legitimising' (p. 294), which, with appropriate training, has the potential to be 'transformed into teaching and learning encounters' (p. 295).

The policy discourse towards improving the identity and status of the childcare sector, is described by Osgood (2005) to place the responsibility on the workforce; asking them to upskill, 'with the aim of moving towards a framework that fairly rewards skills and responsibilities, and ensure effective incentives for good practitioners' (DfES, 2003). Similarly, Jones and Osgood (2007) recommended a 'new sociology of early childhood' (p. 289), through which a 'sense of agency' (ibid) within regulatory practices can be achieved, supported by 'appropriate training' (p. 297). Thus, the identity of the workforce continues to be explored (Dockett, 2019).

The number of registered childminders peaked in 1992 totalling 109,000 (Mooney, et al., 2001a), and they were recorded as the largest provider of childcare in England. Moss, et al., (2001) summarised childminding at the end of the 1990s by analysing a number of surveys, case studies and interviews with parents, childminders and Local Authorities; they profiled childminders as mothers, who viewed childminding either as a means to work whilst raising their own children, or as a long term career, and who were committed to their role and the sense of satisfaction it afforded. However, they also identified challenges; reporting that the childminders felt their role was undervalued by society, defining themselves instead, as a professional service. Nevertheless, Moss, et al., (2001) found that the childminders in their study, did not place value on training and qualifications, which have since been recognised through research (Brock, 2012) and policy (DfE, 2017b) as key elements of a professional identity.

Introductory requirements for the role have developed since the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), necessitating completion of an introductory course that supports childminders' understanding of the EYFS. However, there remains no requirement for childminders to gain formal early years qualifications or training (DfE, 2017a). Mooney, et al., (2001b) believed in the longevity of childminders and their prominent position in the childcare market, partly due to policy drives such as the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998). This was aimed at increasing the accessibility and number of childcare spaces required, to support the increasing shift in mothers returning to work. A wider societal need for childcare was developing during this time, and childminders were believed to be 'at the heart of the government's regeneration and welfare to work programmes' (Bond & Kersey, 2002, p. 303). The responses from 497 childminders, collected through a postal survey, reported a good level of satisfaction with the childminding role 'despite their poor pay' (Mooney, et al., 2001b, p. 257), attributed primarily, to the opportunity to 'combine paid work with being at home' (ibid).

The childminders in this study, and that of Moss, et al., (2001), provided additional insight into their identity, offering two distinct positions; those who considered childminding as a long term career, and those who saw the role as a short term means to allow them to stay at home with their own young children. The concept of childminding as entrepreneurship was explored by Bond and Kersey (2002), who acknowledged the business requirements of self-employment, such as tax self-assessments and financial regulations. Mooney et al., (2001b) had identified the main reasons for childminders leaving the workforce to be the low pay, to which Bond and Kersey (2002) added, that issues with pay incorporated additional factors such as 'unpredictable weekly earnings' (p. 306).

Greener (2009), detailed additional requirements for the business elements of the role, including: contracts between the childminder and parent; rates of pay; policies and procedures; and notice periods, for example of cancellation. In addition, he highlighted the marketing of childminding as a business opportunity for mothers, by Local Authorities, who themselves had been tasked with increasing childcare provision. This outlook is also demonstrated through the publication of handbooks around this time, designed to support childminders to manage a successful business (Lee, 2007). Nonetheless, Greener (2009) questioned the disparity between self-employed business entrepreneurship, which is 'usually associated with substantial rewards in terms of both status and pay' (p. 308), and the realism of working in a childminding role typified by low status and pay.

Supported by the Local Authority, and working in their own homes, childminders therefore, held a complex identity prior to the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008). Principally, they were mothers, providing childcare through a business model (Mooney, et al., 2001b; Greener, 2009). Yet, Greener (2009) reports that due to the low status of the role, childminders in his study were 'extremely wary of defining themselves as professionals, even if they were keen to distinguish themselves from babysitters' (p. 317). Further, they were supported by Local Authority Social Services departments until 2001, whereas sector research was taking place under the umbrella of Education, which in itself was being driven by dominant understandings of characteristics of group-based settings.

2.5 The Shift to Education

The importance of the early years, in terms of children's development and life chances, was beginning to be recognised through government policy at the turn of the century (OECD, 2011), and from 1997 the New Labour government introduced 'the most wide ranging and comprehensive changes to early years policy ever to take place' (Fitzgerald

& Kay, 2016, pp. 20-21). As part of this reform, childminders experienced a change in who was responsible for their registration and regulation in 1998, previously held by the Department of Health (DoH), to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Soon afterwards, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established (1992), as an independent, non-ministerial department, reporting directly to the UK Government. They now inspect and regulate all providers of education and care, including: childminders and day nurseries; primary and secondary schools; and further education colleges (Ofsted, 2020c). In addition to carrying out inspections of quality, Ofsted began to produce provider reports and gather national statistical information. Subsequently, a set of fourteen National Standards for Childminding were introduced (Ofsted, 2001), and the responsibility for childminders and group-based provision was moved to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016).

The significance of this move was anticipated by Jackson and Jackson (1979), who had previously reported that the childminders in their study, believed registration would be the key to receiving 'recognition' (p. 247) and called for a Minister for children to support the role. They also determined that registration would denote the beginning of a commitment to providing a high quality childcare service to children and families. Alongside the shift into the education sector, implementation of the first educational frameworks for early years were also introduced, comprising the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) (QCA, 2000), and the Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002). These were reported by the DfES (2004) to be targeted towards providing children with the best start in life, to support the 'nation's social and economic interests' (p. 7). However, these frameworks were not compulsory for childminders. The Birth to Three Matters was distributed to all early years settings to guide practice, whereas implementation of the CGFS was only required if they wished to be part of the National

Childminding Association (NCMA) accredited network of childminders, which entitled them to claim government early years funding to support pre-school education for children aged between three and five years old.

It was in 2008, that the first statutory framework was introduced, to guide practice across the full early childhood age range of birth to five years. The introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework (DCSF, 2008) made it compulsory for all childminders to provide their childcare service in line with four core principles: providing an enabling environment; working in partnership with parents; valuing each child as unique; and the responsibility to plan, observe and assess children's learning and development. Soon afterwards, O'Connell (2011) found that childminders were concerned that they were being required to 'become something else' (p. 796) and independent government reviews such as Foundations for Quality (Nutbrown, 2012), questioned what it meant to be qualified to work in any early years role. Nutbrown (2012) held the view that 'all of those working in the early years – whatever their job title and role – must be carers as well as educators, providing the warmth and love children need to develop emotionally, alongside and as part of planned and spontaneous learning opportunities' (p. 19). However, for childminders, these developments were fraught with complications, including a lack of understanding towards a collective professional identity.

The notion of being classed as a profession has historical roots in providing a service to society, which requires high levels of expertise; such as in the fields of law, medicine and science (Eraut, 1994). Whilst childminders provide a childcare service to society, there remains no requirement to be formally qualified, and they reside in a sector for which the body of knowledge is complex and ill defined (Nutbrown, 2012). In addition, childminders implement a home-based approach to their practice, which is not visible and thus not yet

fully understood (Jones & Osgood, 2007). Furthermore, they retain the tradition of being self-employed, which includes sole responsibility for the running of their business, yet they are attempting to do so, within an ever changing early years policy landscape and with minimal support and understanding (Bonetti, 2018).

2.6 Discovering a Collective Identity

The key factor to becoming a childminder, was that the role allows mothers to stay at home with their own children (Mooney, et al., 2001b; Fauth, et al., 2011). Consequently, some childminders view the role as a passing phase, whilst others continue to stay in the role as a career, once their own children no longer require childcare (Mooney, et al., 2001b). Jones and Osgood (2007) carried out a critical review of research gathered during the end of the twentieth century, deconstructing texts to identify how childminders came to be 'both valorised and demonised' (Jones & Osgood, 2007, p. 289). They defined the common traits of childminders as being mothers, in their 30's, with few or no qualifications. Prior to the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), research such as that of Osgood (2005) and Jones and Osgood (2007), questioned the gendered, classed based identity of childminding, describing it as a 'fragile [construct]… 'shaped by and subject to powerful forces that include current childcare workforce reforms' (p. 298).

O'Connell (2011) built upon Jones and Osgood's (2007) critical examination of childminders' identities, suggesting, through her ethnographic insights, that the childminders themselves were now 'performing' (O'Connell, 2011, p. 786) their professional identity, to conform to the dominant perception of quality, particularly for the purpose of Ofsted inspections. The production of 'fabrications' were found by O'Connell (2011, p. 784) to take the form of paperwork, adoption of specific vocabulary, and through the childminders dressing both themselves and their environments in a particular way, to

demonstrate what they deemed to be the wider view of professionalism. Subsequently, this resulted in the childminders feeling a sense of resentment, that they were being forced to engage in a model of professionalism that was not suitable for their identity (O'Connell, 2011). Instead, O'Connell (2011) put forward the notion that childminding warrants alternative conceptions of quality, from those of the dominant measures applied to group-based provision. Thereby, strengthening the need to continue to build an understanding of childminding practice and pedagogy, which begins to construct 'a professional knowledge base that recognises multiple forms of knowledge [and which] needs to articulate both what is understood by attitudes morals and beliefs and question the meaning of theoretical knowledge' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 85).

Osgood (2006) and Chalke (2013) suggest that professionalism is demonstrated through the way in which practitioners, such as childminders, negotiate their own identity within the policy and regulation context in which they work. Support is therefore needed, for childminders to construct their own professional identity, within the existing measures of quality and curriculum frameworks within which they work. In agreement, Ang, et al., (2017) believe that there remains a clear lack of knowledge within research, on how childminders perceive themselves, thus a collective identity needs to continue to be made visible. Further, research such as that of Campbell-Barr (2018) and Basford (2019) identify the need for practitioners, such as childminders, to 'mediate their own knowledge, experience and values within the wider political field' (Basford, 2019, p. 782)

Nevertheless, a collective identity is complex. For example, Fauth, et al., (2011) categorised 581 childminders in their study into four clusters, which they defined as: (1) highly networked and qualified; (2) highly networked and qualified, additionally of ethnic diversity and/or caring for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); (3) moderately qualified and not members of networks; and (4) low levels of

qualifications and knowledge of the EYFS, less likely to be networked, but had been childminding for the longest period of time.

O'Connell (2011) identified additional features of an emerging 'distinct collective identity' (p. 796) comprising 'a shared ethic characterised by an emphasis on context/flexibility; the integration of paid caregiving and domestic domains, and the practice of care' (ibid). A more positive public image of childminding is thought by Brooker (2016) to have been achieved through policy development such as registration, supported more recently by 94% of childminders recorded as good or outstanding by Ofsted (2018). In addition, external support from Local Authorities and organisations, such as the NCMA (now PACEY), have also worked to promote quality, cultivating a more skilled image of childminding from that of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, childminders professional identity is complex, it remains a focus of research, and involves differing perceptions towards responsibilities of care and education (Brooker, 2016).

By working with childminders in focus groups, Brooker (2016) identified that two distinctive groups were articulated, through a difference in priority towards care and education. Both groups viewed their identity as professional, yet those who primarily valued care, drew from an understanding through their relationships with parents, that the care element of the role was the foremost consideration when choosing a childminder over a group-based childcare setting. Further insight, through group discussions, highlighted a sense of disparity between what the childminders saw as constraints imposed through the EYFS and Ofsted requirements, and what they deemed as best practice for young children, through their implicit understanding. For example, the childminders considered that the administrative task of recording that a child had been unwell or upset on a form, or in a daily diary, took time away from the child and therefore had no positive purpose. The childminders' close relationships with parents, invited

effective verbal communication to enable them to work together for the child's best interests, thus they felt that swapping paperwork and signatures on a form were not necessary (Brooker, 2016).

Most recently, Ang. et al., (2017) have determined a number of defining characteristics of childminding, as being: care provided by a single caregiver; in a home environment; flexibility of provision; a strong source of support for parents particularly within vulnerable families; and encompassing the benefits of long term consistency of care. One common feature, which does continue to unite childminders, is their difference from group-based settings. Demonstrated for example, by the childminders in O'Connell's (2011) study who voiced their frustration that childminders were being turned into nurseries and, whilst they valued the validation provided by Ofsted and the EYFS (Brooker, 2016), they also valued their own mother-like, home-based approach.

During an online conference organised by TACTYC (the Association for Professional Development in Early Years) (2020), discussions focused on the continued need to re-define the professional skills that are broadly considered to be women's work, yet which are also considered to be vital and valued within the early years sector, such as: empathy, positivity, compassion, and care (TACTYC, 2020). Basford (2019) identifies the complexity of core values of those working in the ECEC sector and 'appropriate professional knowledge' (p. 779), determining that practitioners are required to 'be all things to all people' (ibid). Basford (2019) calls for future research by practitioners, educators and researchers, to continue to influence practice and policy makers, in order for these values and early years knowledge to shape policy. In addition, the OECD acknowledge that actions are needed by governments, and call for the continuation of international policy developments, to support the development of the workforce (OECD,

2019), including a focus on provision of accessible training and professional development opportunities (OECD, 2019).

2.7 Support Networks

Education and training for childminders was recommended through early studies (Gibson, et al., 1977), and the complexity of developing a professional identity, forged from a mother-like approach to childcare, began to emerge (Ferri, 1992). During the latter part of the 1970s, reports began to signify the importance of working with childminders through action groups and by establishing support services (Gibson, et al., 1977; Jackson & Jackson, 1979), in order to raise quality of provision and address their poor public image. Gibson, et al., (1977), who undertook a study of support services for childminders in London boroughs, recommended that childminders should be educated not through formal means which had 'proved relatively useless' (p. 191), but through support strategies such as coffee mornings or drop in centres. However, Gibson, et al., (1977), had also acknowledged a significant lack of resources to implement these strategies, due to local authorities being overburdened with social services crises. Instead, they recommended collaboration with voluntary organisations and childminder action groups to enable the support system to work more efficiently.

In order to provide this much needed support, to a largely un-trained workforce, the National Childminding Association (NCMA) was established in the same year (1977). This grass-roots movement was instrumental as a support service to childminders, as it had evolved from a place of inherent understanding of the role. Formed by a group of childminders, Local Authority workers and parents, the NCMA had achieved a membership of 30,000 by 1989 (Ferri, 1992), and was awarded government funding for initiatives which included supporting the training of childminders and creating accredited

networks. By 2007, there were approximately 300 nationally approved networks and support initiatives (Owen, 2007), which included a multitude of campaigns and strategies aimed at promoting childminding as a valuable service to parents, as well as tackling issues such as working conditions and pay.

Owen (2000; 2006; 2007;), and in collaboration with Fauth, et al., (2010; 2012; 2011; 2013) for the National Children's Bureau (NCB), carried out extensive research into childminding support networks, including for her own doctoral thesis (Owen, 2006a), as a means to explore quality and the professional development of childminders. Support, particularly from the NCMA, had been aimed at unifying childminders (Owen, 2000), primarily through the creation of accredited childminding networks which, in turn, allowed childminders to deliver government funded education places for three and four year olds (DfEE, 1998).

These networks were reviewed by Dawson, et al., (2003) as part of the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) through case studies with nine Local Authorities. The networks were found to be a means through which childminders could enjoy a higher status, improved recognition of quality, as a result of being required to adhere to the NCMA quality standards (NCMA, 2002), and increased access to support. Overall, the findings demonstrated a variation in Local Authority network provision, yet were all found to offer key benefits for childminders including, improved self-esteem, professionalism, self-development, support through visits, and accessibility to a network co-ordinator (Dawson, et al., 2003).

Similarly, other studies revealed positive responses to childminder networks, for example Mooney, et al (2001b) found that 55% of the 497 childminders they surveyed were members of the NCMA, and 65% cited other childminders as their primary source of support. By 2007, Owen (2007) reported that being part of a network had made a

‘profound difference’ (p. 29) to the identity and professional development of childminders, through training and support systems. This encouraging indicator of professional development through access to support, and the growth of such systems continued to be reported. For example, in 2011, research undertaken for the National Children’s Bureau (Fauth, et al., 2011), found that 79.6% of the 581 childminders in their sample were members of the NCMA, and the primary source of support used by childminders continued to be other childminders (73.3%).

During the growth of childminder networks, government policy began implementing ‘radical change’ (Hordern, 2012, p. 106). The level of investment enjoyed under the Labour Government was withdrawn, through the formation of a coalition government, in 2010 (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016), impacting negatively upon Local Authority funding for support systems. The EYFS (DCSF, 2008) had been designed to ‘unite the state maintained and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, through their joint care and education responsibilities’ (Basford, 2019, p. 779). Further reflected by the National Childminding Association (NCMA) changing its name to the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) in 2013, in a move to provide support to all types of early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision (PACEY, 2020). Local networks continued to be supported by Local Authorities, however, disparity in provision started to emerge, and childminders reported a reduction in support from local services (Callanan, 2014).

The continuing withdrawal of government investment in ECEC, resulted in a shift to online support forums, and internet based resources from organisations such as PACEY and Childcare.co.uk. Childminders are now reported to use a range of support systems which they view as ‘invaluable, and important for maintaining standards’ (Callanan, 2014, p. 41), and access to support continues to be recommended, for example by Otero and

Melhuish (2015, p. 49) to 'improve the quality of care provided by childminders'. However, the quality improvement programmes they identified to be important, such as; 'meetings, group activities, setting visits and a local neighbourhood network of childminders and other professionals in the ECEC field' (Otero & Melhuish, 2015, p. 49), incorporate a number of ways through which support can be received, yet are not online systems. Therefore, a disparity remains, between the importance of support, and the resources available to provide this, in a way that best meets the needs of childminders.

2.8 Training

In chapter one (see 1.4. Research Question), I introduced the complexity of the terms training and CPD. Training was suggested by Jackson and Jackson (1979) to be needed by childminders on a 'modest and practical level' (p. 254), in order to support their understanding of basic child development. In addition, it was given greater consideration through the later Study of Training for Childminders (Ferri, 1992), as a means to raise quality. During this time, the quality of care was not determined through a regulatory body or a statutory framework, instead, Ferri (1992) gathered views from the childminders in her study, in response to their ideas of 'the ingredients of good quality care [which] reflected the multi-faceted fabric of daily life' (p. 147). Responses included: the experiences and wellbeing of the children; the relationships between childminder and child; and the quality of the home environment. The notion of 'greater social responsibility' (Ferri, 1992, p. 199) from public agencies, to support childminders' needs, was presented through her research. However, these needs were complex and required awareness 'of alternative value-bases… which, by virtue of its privacy and diversity, consensus regarding what constitutes good quality care cannot be taken for granted' (Ferri, 1992, pp. 148-149). Thus, support for a large invisible work force, who were self-employed and diverse in their practice and motivation for the role, created challenges.

Recommendations for training already existed within the literature, trialed through examples of Local Authority programmes, and informal networking opportunities (Gibson et al., 1977; Jackson & Jackson, 1979, Mayall & Petrie, 1983). From one of the earliest studies with childminders, Gibson, et al., (1977) determined that 'education for childminding is essential' (p. 192). They suggested that education could address the low status of the role linked to the association with mothering. However, they also identified that childminders have unique knowledge of what it is like to childmind, and a localised understanding of the children and families in their demographic area, which the trainers did not, thereby, suggesting training should be a collaborative process. In addition, Gibson, et al., (1977) recommended attention should be paid to key features such as; locality, level of sophistication and cultural differences, whilst offering practical resources, such as crèche facilities to enable training to take place during the working hours of childminders.

Jackson and Jackson (1979) agreed with these recommendations, as a result of their pilot attempt to run a course for childminders, identifying three similar considerations: firstly, the childminders they worked with needed, what Jackson and Jackson (1979, p. 214) termed as supportive, 'not aggressive' methods of training. This was in reference to the approach of working collaboratively with the childminders; rather than lecturing them, as had been a common approach at that time by social services, who positioned themselves as the experts. In addition, supportive training needed to be consistently offered, as opposed to being a one off opportunity. Finally, training needed to incorporate cultural dialogue, in order to ensure that the content of the training was tailored to the childminders' specific needs and therefore, appropriate for them. These recommendations remain relevant, forty years on; they are conveyed in this thesis, in response to a pilot survey in chapter five, as the need for training as an element of CPD

to be an informed and ongoing opportunity, which is accessible and relevant to the current needs of childminders.

Mayall and Petrie (1983) recognised that training, thus far, had evidenced little impact on childminding practice, although only small scale pilot schemes were available from which to draw upon. They agreed with the potential for training to raise standards of care, whilst also providing a caution against Local Authorities imposing a requirement for formal qualifications which, they believed, could dissuade people from registering and result in the rise of illegal minding. Mayall and Petrie (1983) considered 'the kind of care children get depends a good deal on what policy-makers think and do' (p. 3), whereas, childminding practice was considered by Ferri (1992) as a 'private activity' (p. 22), instead stating that the 'greatest influence over a childminder's approach to day care provision is… the shape and substance of her own family life' (p. 190).

Ferri (1992) used a case study approach, to explore childminders' experiences of Local Authority training courses. Through her use of interviews with childminders and parents, alongside observations of practice, Ferri (1992) found that training opportunities consisted primarily of business support, and ten years on, remained in agreement with previous research (Gibson, et al., 1977 & Jackson & Jackson, 1979), that barriers continued to include: locality; cost; and relevance to childminding. Ferri (1992) considered these features of training activities important, in order to maximise accessibility and participation. However, the juxta-positioning of childminders running a business, based on the skills of mothering, was found to be a critical barrier to providing appropriate support for them, by trainers who were not childminders themselves. Ferri (1992) recommended continued support from services such as Local Authorities, the NCMA, and by 'attaching childminders… to a local nursery school' (p. 194), to bring

childminding into the public view and achieve a development of quality in childminding provision.

Ferri's (1992) reports of childminders' views on training, are situated in a time period when the role of a childminder was predominantly to care for the child, rather than educate them. Nevertheless, training was considered a means for professional development, and with the potential to situate childminding as a recognised occupation (Ferri, 1992). However, whilst training at this time supported knowledge acquisition and awareness of quality, the lack of understanding of what a childminders' role entailed, held by the trainers, imposed difficulties. The training itself was embedded in the dominant perception of childminders as mothers, and so childminders were 'strongly resistant' (Ferri, 1992, p. 192) to being trained, in what they considered to be parenting skills, which they already possessed. Therefore, an importance continued to be placed on research with childminders, in order to develop a wider understanding of their specific professional development needs.

Since the move to registration with Ofsted, and the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), Miller (2008) argues that regulatory frameworks support the development of a professional identity and provide a greater awareness for practitioners, such as childminders, of the value of professional development. Regulation with Ofsted promoted a degree of parity between home-based and group-based settings, by implementing a unified approach to childcare services. The childminders in O'Connells (2011) study believed that their registration with Ofsted, validated childminding as a government endorsed form of childcare, on par with group settings such as day nurseries and pre-schools. However, Crowley (2014) suggests that the trust now placed in professions by the wider society has developed through the requirement for formal qualifications, which childminders are not required to hold. The introduction of audits and scales, designed to

measure quality, are aimed at reassuring stakeholders, rather than promoting professional autonomy and faith in ethical practice. As a result, research such as that of O'Connell (2011) reports on the complexities involved for childminders, in now having to work within a system in which they need to fabricate conformity to the dominant perception of quality, in order to gain positive recognition from outcomes awarded to them through inspections.

Through independent reviews, both Tickell (2011) and Nutbrown (2012), considered CPD as a critical feature to improving early years practice and in continuing to raise the quality of provision. Tickell (2011, p. 42) stated 'the evidence is clear on how a well-qualified and appropriately skilled early years workforce makes a real difference to the quality of provision and outcomes for young children'. She went on to recommend 'that the Government retain a focus on the need to upskill the workforce… and to maintain the ambitions for a graduate-led sector'. In addition, the Nutbrown review (2012) recognised that a requirement to engage in CPD had not yet been embedded into government policy or legislation, even though it is considered a key driver for development of quality (Siraj, et al., 2017; OECD, 2018; OECD 2019). Engagement in CPD opportunities were subsequently promoted through the developing versions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (DfE, 2008; 2012; 2017) the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b), and encompassed as a criteria for inspection by Ofsted. Nevertheless, it continues to be affected by cuts in Local Authority funding and reduced availability of external training (Callanan, et al., 2017).

The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) report (Otero & Melhuish, 2015), which examined the quality of childminder provision, suggests six possible sources from which childminders can access professional development opportunities: through Local Authority Coordinators; professional associations; childminder networks; Children's

Centers; childminder agencies and the internet. In response to the findings from the report, the DfE (2017b) stated a commitment to the development of CPD opportunities, which included a promise to develop an online portal 'which brings effective online CPD together in one place and provides online training modules (p. 31)'. They recognised that Local Authority provision of CPD had diminished to costly or statutory courses, such as safeguarding, and proposed that online CPD would be a more cost effective solution.

Professional associations such as PACEY provide a membership based service, which includes online access to support, and a platform for childminders to communicate via online forums. However, unlike the previous iteration of the organisation (NCMA), they no longer provide a networked means for childminders in local areas to physically meet, thus childminder networks have largely moved to online forums. Childminding networks, now take many forms, including localised informal groups of childminders, Local Authority run networks and online network communities. Dawson, et al., (2003) distinguished successful childminding networks as those which offered 'tailored training' (p. ii), to support childminders' everyday practice.

Children's Centers were established as a result of Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003), which aimed to strengthen multi-agency partnerships between education and health and social care services in England, in a government move to promote a more joined up, multi-agency approach to the support of children and their families (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016). Amongst their wide-ranging services, children's centers offered a space for childminders to meet at organised sessions, often termed 'drop ins', during which time the childminders could engage their minded children in the session (for example rhyme time or stay and play) in order to support their learning and development, as well as use the time to network with other childminders. Children's centers remain central to opportunities for childminders to meet, however, as a result of continuing reductions in

government funding, the number of centers, and therefore, the number of sessions available for childminders and their minded children, have declined (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016). Further contributing to diminishing numbers of support services for childminders and the children and families they work with.

The final suggestion within the SEED report (Otero & Melhuish, 2015), to utilise childminder agencies as sources of support, is also not feasible, as they barely exist, having not received the support of the workforce (Morton, 2015). Therefore, from the original six possible sources of support suggested by Otero and Melhuish (2015), challenges are rife, caused mainly by a lack of funding. Local childminder networks seemingly have the greatest potential to create CPD opportunities, which are accessible, appropriate, collaborative, consistent and affordable, therefore, further exploration of how this might be achieved is necessary.

Proposals by the DfE (2017b) as to how the ECEC workforce including childminders, could access support, suggest a shift in responsibility from that of Local Authorities and external organisations, to one held by the workforce themselves. Suggestions such as 'internal training by managers or pedagogical leaders; learning through experience and peer observation; and maintaining good practice networks' (DfE, 2017b, p. 31) all lend themselves to implementation within the collaborative nature of group-based provision. However, they also resonate with Jackson and Jackson's (1979) original notions of action groups, and the work of Owen (2006a) championing the value of sector led networks.

This, therefore, presents a dilemma for childminders. They are being driven to develop as professional carers and educators from within their workforce, which as Evetts (2003) suggests is central to developing a professional identity. Yet they work in isolation, receive minimal support to forge networks and engage in CPD, and do not currently share

a collective identity. Resources which could support childminders in this task, such as Local Authority Advisors, or Children's Centres, are experiencing an ever diminishing capacity and number of resources, as a result of ever decreasing funding (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016).

2.9 Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed within this chapter provides an exploration of the development of the childminding role, thereby, providing in an insight into the context within which childminders are working, and within which they are expected to continue to develop their knowledge and practice. Studies such as that of Oterio and Melhuish (2015) report that 96% of childminders have access to CPD and research such as that of Gibson, et al., (1977), Owen (2007), and O'Connell (2011), continue to recommend that training opportunities should be appropriate for childminders. However, the notion of what is appropriate has yet to be defined. For example, the childminders within Ferri's (1992) study evidenced their frustration at the lack of childminding examples within current training programmes, identifying the need for the content of training courses to be relevant, in order to better reflect the distinctive approach to providing education and care offered through a home-based, childminding service. More recently, Oterio and Melhuish (2015) recommend 'professional development can improve the quality of care provided by childminders' (p. 49), but do not provide insight into the views of childminders who engaged in these opportunities, which suggests further potential for research.

Childminders are not required to gain formal qualifications, however they are required to participate in appropriate CPD. They are tasked with understanding how to implement the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017a) in their settings, which itself continues to be developed. Furthermore, they are charged with holding an understanding of their role

and responsibilities (DfE, 2017a). These are complex and challenging demands for childminders, who do not currently hold a collective sense of identity (O'Connell, 2011), and work within a sector which comprises complex contradictions between responsibilities towards care and education (Brooker, 2016). Further, policy and research is fragmented in its ability to suggest potential strategies to support the professional development of childminders, exhibiting significant gaps in knowledge. For example, the DfE (2017b, p. 31) consider it important that 'creative ways of accessing CPD are identified, developed and promoted across the sector', whereas further research is needed to explore how such opportunities might be created. Moreover, this research needs to be informed by the voices of childminders, and the children and families they work with (Ang, et al., 2017) to promote ownership and autonomy in the formation of an appropriate model of CPD (Hordern, 2012).

Studies such as that of O'Connell (2011), Brooker (2016) and Ang et al., (2017) exemplify the value childminders place on their experience of mothering and home-based approach to providing childcare. Further, they support the developing view of childminders as having a distinctive pedagogy (Ang, et al., 2017). Therefore, training also needs to reflect the features that characterise childminding. Jones and Osgood (2007) specifically defined childminders' identity as being fragile, shaped by government discourse and based on individual perceptions. Hence, future research needs to be carried out in collaboration with childminders (McGillivray, 2012), and move away from current, dominant, research approaches, which primarily comprise interviews and surveys 'on childminders' (Otero & Melhuish, 2015, p. 7) rather than with them.

In the next chapter, I look to the broader early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector to examine current understandings of professional development and explore how

these ideas could inform and develop an understanding of what constitutes ‘appropriate… training, skills and knowledge’ (DCSF, 2008, p. 31) for childminders.

Chapter 3

Literature Review: Professional Development

3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDMINDERS IN ENGLAND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I explored the influence of developing early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy, on the childminding role; commencing with the requirement to register with the Local Health Authority in 1948, changing to the Social Services department in 1970, and then moving over to the Education sector through the Care Standards Act (HMSO, 2000). Fitzgerald and Kay (2016) acknowledged, that whilst the requirements and regulations introduced by the Labour Government, were aimed at standardising a minimum level of quality of care and education across all early childhood provision, they 'required a new professionalism of both providers and childcare inspectors' (2016, p. 22). However, the notion of what this new professionalism encompassed, in order to 'comply with external regulation' (Elwick, et al., 2018, p. 348) and how childminders could work towards achieving this, was unclear.

I defined childminders as having a complex identity, which centers on a 'fragile equality' (Brooker, 2016, p. 82) and distinctive pedagogy (Ang, et al., 2017), within the broader ECEC sector. I ascertained that childminders are under-researched and demonstrated that insights into their experiences of professional development are sparse and fragmented. I now turn to the wider early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in which childminders work, to explore the broader understanding of continuous professional development (CPD) in early childhood, and to consider the ways in which these notions could be developed, to support the specific needs of childminders. Through this chapter, I explore the move to an integrated approach; the regulatory context; qualifications and training; and key features of CPD.

3.2 An Integrated Approach

Childminders have long been supported by organisations such as the National Childminding Association (NCMA) and Local Authority support networks (Owen, 2006b), and provided with National Standards for Day Care and Childminding (Ofsted, 2001), which formed the basis of Ofsted inspection criteria. However, only childminders who wished to offer government funded childcare places to two and three year olds, were required to hold an additional accreditation with their Local Authority, through which they were supported to implement the Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002) and Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (QCA, 2000). This degree of choice catered for two groups of childminders who held different priorities; those who held a more traditional notion of a home-based childcare service, and those who saw the role to be aligned more closely to working within early years educational frameworks (Brooker, 2016).

Then, in 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008) was created as part of the ten year childcare strategy (DfES, 2004), and implemented through the Childcare Act (2006). It brought together the Birth to Three Matters (DfES, 2002) and the Foundation Stage curriculum (QCA, 2000), with the aim of providing one unified statutory framework for all children aged 0-5 years. Underpinned by four key principles of: a unique child; positive relationships; enabling environments; and learning and development, the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) introduced statutory guidance for all home-based and group-based early childhood settings. As a result, through the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), the government streamlined childminding provision within the early years sector, for the first time, to work within a single educational framework.

Previously, Sylva and Pugh (2005) had identified some of the challenges of working towards an integrated approach to education and care. They described the difficulties to start at the most basic of levels, in defining an identity for the sector, which had been

‘referred to by government as nursery education, day care, childcare, early years services, the foundation stage/phase and early education’ (Sylva & Pugh, 2005, p. 24). At that time, they asked ‘is it to be high quality early education led by well trained staff, or edu-care offered by a poorly qualified and low-paid workforce?’ (p. 24). Since then, research, which informs my understanding, such as that of Osgood (2006), O’Connell (2011), McGillivray (2012), Hordern (2016) Ang et al., (2017) and Campbell-Barr (2018; 2019), have begun to deconstruct notions of professional development within the ECEC sector, in order to ‘challenge, negotiate and reform the discourses through which they are positioned and defined’ (Osgood, 2006, p. 5).

3.3 The Regulatory Context: EYFS

Implementing a broad statutory framework such as the EYFS (DCSF, 2008) in a diverse sector required a degree of differentiation, in order to recognise fundamental differences in types of setting provision. For example, safeguarding requirements in a home-based setting take into consideration family members, and therefore, apply to all individuals over the age of 16 living in the childminders home (DCSF, 2008, p. 29). Unlike group settings, childminders are not required to have written copies of policies and procedures (p. 20), and there is also a differentiated approach to ratios of children to adults, specifically for childminders, and their assistants, to acknowledge that they care for children across the full age range of childhood from birth onwards (p. 51).

There is also an existing differentiation in qualification requirements, between childminders and group-based settings, that were maintained through the EYFS guidance (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2017a). Therefore, the requirement to hold ‘appropriate… qualifications, training, skills and knowledge’ (p. 31) was defined, for childminders, as

gaining relevant safeguarding and Paediatric First Aid qualifications as well as attending an initial training course (DCSF, 2008).

To work as an early years practitioner in group-based settings, level 2 and level 3 qualifications are required (DCSF, 2008) (explored further in section 3.4.1: Qualifications and Training). This does not apply to childminders, who, instead are required to source training opportunities 'made available by the local authority and other sources' (DCSF, 2008, p. 31), specifically, asking them to ensure they have a 'clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities' (p. 31). However, this posed a complication, between what was expected of childminders through policy, and the ways in which childminders defined their roles and responsibilities. A broader understanding of the childminding role had not yet been achieved (Ferri, 1992; McGillivray, 2008; O'Connell, 2011). Therefore, without a collective identity, the question is raised of what is considered to be 'appropriate' (DCSF, 2008, p. 31) for childminders in relation to their development of training, skills and knowledge.

Responsibility for professional development was assigned through the EYFS guidance (DCSF, 2008) to all early years practitioners, yet it is also measured as an indicator of quality during an inspection by Ofsted. Cottle and Alexander (2012, p. 651) understand quality to be a 'multi-dimensional, value-laden concept', which Elwick, et al., (2018, p. 511) argue 'is not fully problematised or questioned'. Through an impact study, Ofsted (2011) reported practitioners' commitment to professional development as a key driver for quality, later emphasising the continuing need to 'improve staff practice and teaching, learning and assessment through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development' (Ofsted, 2015, p. 12). This requirement has subsequently been rephrased in the education inspection framework, to suggest professional

development as an ongoing process in which 'the practice and subject knowledge of staff are built up over time' (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 11).

With regards to professional development, the requirements of the most recent version of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) reflect the developing understanding of a link between the quality of provision, and engagement in continuing professional development, strengthened through a growing body of research (Sylvia et al., 2014; Otero & Melhuish, 2015; Siraj et al., 2017; OECD, 2018). Through the EYFS, the government continues to state that 'the daily experience of children in early years settings and the overall quality of provision depends on all practitioners having appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21). However, the EYFS develops the definition of requirements for group-based settings, to promote supervision, coaching and training which 'foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21). Nonetheless, for childminders, the guidance on professional development remains exactly the same as in the original 2008 version; retaining the generic requirement to have 'a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities' (DfE, 2017, p.21), and maintaining the need to complete initial training to support their understanding of the EYFS.

Independent reviews (Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012) and research, such as that of O'Connell (2011), Hordern (2012), Campbell-Barr (2018), and Elwick et al., (2018), consider qualifications, quality and professional development within the early childhood sector to be interwoven, and rooted in a political agenda; deemed by Hordern (2012) to be 'used to control and discipline practice' (p. 508). Nevertheless, the repetitive use of the term 'appropriate' in government policy documents such as the Education Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2015; 2019) and the EYFS (DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2014; 2017), indicates the possibility of enabling a greater degree of autonomy for the early years workforce.

For childminders, the term 'appropriate' permits the opportunity to work within government policy frameworks; yet move towards a 'from within' (Evetts, 2011, p. 407) workforce approach, to the development of an appropriate knowledge base. Further, O'Connell (2011) suggests that an alternative conceptualisation of professional development is possible; one that is not orchestrated by external measures of quality and qualifications, but which comes from within the workforce itself. Similarly, Campbell-Barr (2018) states 'there is a need for a refocus on what the ECEC knowledge base is' (p. 85). Therefore, the frameworks in which childminders are expected to work, and the notion of reconstructing a professional identity, formed the basis within this chapter, for further exploration into the broader notion of what constitutes appropriate professional development.

3.4 Professional Development

Professional development of the early years workforce has been a focus of the government agenda for over two decades, and it is widely recognised that raising the quality of provision is fundamentally linked to raising the quality of the workforce (Vincent & Braun, 2011; OECD, 2012; Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016; OECD, 2018). Nevertheless, I identified CPD in chapter one (see 1.4. Research Question), as a complex umbrella term which incorporates a myriad of activities (Crowley, 2014) each varying in their structure, purpose and suitability. To explore these concepts further, I have structured my exploration, in this section, into two overarching areas of professional development: formal qualifications and training; and informal professional development activities.

3.4.1 Qualifications and Training

Formal qualifications are generally considered to be indicators of the quality of the workforce (Sylva, et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008; Nutbrown, 2013; Campbell-Barr,

2018), yet the qualified route into the early years sector is a complex field through which to navigate. Abbott and Moylett (1997) provide a useful framework to identify qualification routes into the early years through two distinct models: formal education routes; and work-based learning routes. Whilst the names of the qualifications have now changed, the routes remain largely similar. Formal qualifications in England are awarded in levels, and it is the level 2 and 3 vocational qualifications that are required to become an early years practitioner within group based provision.

These are achieved over a period of two years, and have developed over time, for example, the CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education) Diploma in Nursery Nursing (DNN), more commonly referred to as the NNEB (National Nursery Examination Board) has been in existence since 1945 (Slatcher, 2000) and whilst no longer delivered, it remains a full and relevant qualification as defined by the DfE (2020a). In 1994, the NNEB was replaced with the CACHE Diploma in Childcare and Education and was most recently replaced again, with the Early Years Educator (EYE) (DfE, 2020b), now offered as the primary vocational route into the early years and childcare sector.

Various iterations of the level 3 EYE have been created, for example, CACHE list a suite of five different EYE qualifications (CACHE, 2020). Yet, these routes into the ECEC sector, are just some examples of the multitude of 77 ECEC qualifications identified by Owen (2006b) and the 'many hundreds' identified by Nutbrown (2012, p. 17). The early years workforce is thought to be 'diverse and fragmented' (Dyer, 2018, p. 349), and there are no requirements for childminders to hold any formal qualifications. Nevertheless, a workforce survey demonstrates that 69% of childminders hold level 3 qualifications, with a further 16% qualified to at least level 4; 11% at level 5, and a further 8% to level 6 (Bonetti, 2018).

Whilst gradually building a route through qualifications towards a professional knowledge base and identity, the variations and changes to qualifications in pursuit of quality (Elwick, et al., 2018) have added challenges to this journey. Siraj et al., (2017) attribute an inadequacy of practitioners' knowledge and skills in early childhood, to a lack of quality and consistency within qualification deliveries. In addition, significant flaws, such as the lack of parity between Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) and Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and the impact of English and Maths GCSE requirements for level 3 entry, later redacted (DfE, 2017c), have prompted calls for an overhaul of existing systems to address the fragmented quality of provision (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016). The variance in qualification content and structure, has been questioned through independent reviews (Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012), and there is a perceived lack of focus on the direct practical application of skills within such qualifications (OECD, 2018).

3.4.2 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Through the EYFS (DfE, 2017a), 'qualifications, training, support and skills' (p. 21) are listed as separate concepts, whilst in the same section, the need to 'undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities' (p. 21) is also recommended. The variety in terminology, particularly with regards to professional development, training, and continuous professional development (CPD), is recognised through literature (Hordern, 2012; Cherrington & Thornton, 2012; Kennedy, 2014; Elwick, et al., 2018). Further, a shift towards professional learning rather than professional development is suggested by Timperley (2011), and is described by Edwards and Nuttall (2009) as incorporating 'constructivist notions of teachers as co-constructors of children's learning' (p. 2), advocating for the individual to be an active participant in the process (Crowley, 2014; Wells, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, the broad term ‘continuous professional development’ (CPD) has been utilised, to refer to the ongoing and informal process of learning (Miller, 2008; Brock, 2012; Crowley, 2014). It is defined differently from formal qualifications, which are most often delivered through accredited programmes of study, awarding academic credits based on levels of knowledge, and certified by nationally recognised quality assurance agencies. Hordern (2012) identifies that what constitutes an appropriate CPD activity is ambiguous, resulting in an extensive list of wide-ranging activities considered as undertaking CPD (Crowley, 2014). Examples of these activities range from reading a sector specific magazine, or having a professional conversation, to attending standalone ‘training’ workshops (Waters & Payler, 2015). The purpose, content and structure vary within each differing form of CPD (Kennedy, 2005), and research is ongoing to explore the effectiveness of common types of CPD such as training, coaching and mentoring, in terms of children’s outcomes (OECD, 2018).

Standalone training sessions are a common form of CPD, offered by Local Authority Early Years Advisors to all early years settings, including childminders, through an online yearly training brochure. However, the majority are unavailable to childminders, simply by being held during their working hours, or by being aimed specifically at group-based settings. For example, of the nineteen face to face training sessions advertised in the Essex County Council CPD brochure, at the time of this research, twelve of these were run during weekdays when childminders are working, and four were aimed specifically at schools (Essex County Council, 2018b). Of the three courses remaining, two were evening sessions and one was aimed specifically at childminders, held on a Saturday.

Some forms of CPD pose a fundamental challenge for childminders, in that they primarily work in isolation. Mentoring, coaching and supervisory methods of support, as recommended in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) and the Nutbrown Review (2012) are not

available to most childminders on a regular basis. Similarly, the proposal of shared learning by Tickell (2011, p. 44) through the 'known model of Teaching Schools', which she believed could be applied to the early years sector, was criticised by Hordern (2012). He claimed that the early years sector needs to gain greater autonomy as a distinct profession, as opposed to taking on the 'knowledge base and priorities of the teaching profession' (Hordern, 2012, p. 113). Herbert and Rainford (2014) consider the context in which knowledge is gained, to be as important as the type of knowledge deemed necessary. In turn, the knowledge and values of the early years sector are thought by Basford (2019) as needing to shape policy developments, considering the 'voice of the sector… to be marginalised' (p. 780).

External support services, such as Local Authorities, professional associations and Ofsted, are sometimes sourced by childminders for advice and support (Callanan, 2014). Yet, this support is reactive rather than proactive, often received via online forums, social media, telephone conversations or email. Bleicher (2014) argues that the development of CPD opportunities by external authorities and organisations, including those who hold a support role for the sector, results in transmissive models and malleable forms of CPD (Kennedy, 2014). However, CPD opportunities which include 'academics, experts or consultants' (Hadley, et al., 2015, p. 190) are thought to have been effective in developing practice. Nonetheless, Sheridan et al., (2009) provide a reminder that the concept of 'effectiveness' warrants further consideration.

CPD activities which can be achieved in isolation, such as reading a magazine article on early years practice, theoretically, can meet many CPD objectives, yet cannot promote collaborative communities of practice, which according to literature (Hevey, 2010; Cotton, 2013; Baird & Clark, 2017; Campbell-Barr, 2018) is a fundamental feature of CPD.

Therefore, a definition of what is appropriate in terms of CPD is more complex than simply considering the type of activity.

3.5 Features of CPD

Since the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), research within ECEC has recognised that different approaches to CPD are required, to acknowledge the differences in roles, types of settings and context of practice (Hordern, 2012; Kennedy, 2014; Siraj, et al., 2017), largely advocating for enquiry based projects (Sheridan et al., 2009; Ingleby & Hedges, 2012; Cotton, 2013; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013; Bleach, 2014; Lightfoot & Frost, 2015; Baird & Clark, 2017), and including mention of more specific features of CPD within the discussion.

However, there is debate into the 'number and nature of the key features' (Siraj, et al., 2017, p. 22). Therefore, in order to build upon existing knowledge in the context in which my research sits, I referred to the guidance of Creswell (2014) to create a literature map, which enabled me to draw out and thematically identify features of CPD located within existing studies of early years professional development. I presented these features to peers at the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) conference (Luff & Aaronricks, 2016), subsequently developing and refining my understandings, to suggest seven overarching features of CPD for exploration as: an ongoing process; purposeful; promoting knowledge acquisition and construction; facilitated; relevant; collaborative; and reflective. I review these features in more depth in this section, to inform our collaborative exploration of a model of CPD that might be more appropriate for childminders.

3.5.1 Ongoing Process

The term continuous professional development (CPD), denotes the expectation for professional development to be ongoing, signifying a preconceived notion that this is a process and not viewed as a single act (Bleach, 2014). Methods of engaging in CPD such as action research and enquiry-based projects, lend themselves to the notion of being ongoing within settings, individually, and as part of wider network collaborations (Kennedy, 2005).

The importance of the process of professional development, as opposed to the product of the activity, features prominently within ECEC literature (Sheridan et al., 2009; Hordern, 2012; Bleach, 2014; Kennedy, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2015; Waters & Payler, 2015). Nonetheless, to portray the existing variety in approach to CPD the work of Kennedy (2005) is useful, in which she identified nine models of CPD categorised by the process through which knowledge is gained: training; award-bearing; deficit; cascade; standards-based; coaching/mentoring; community of practice; action research; and transformative. Kennedy (2014) later reviewed these models, renaming the action research model to recognise the more commonly used term of collaborative professional enquiry. Further, she adjusted and categorised the models according to three overarching purposes of CPD, described as transmissive (training, deficit and cascade), malleable (award-bearing, standards-based, coaching/mentoring, community of practice) and transformative (collaborative professional enquiry) (Kennedy, 2014). In addition, Kennedy (2014) questions the categorisation of professional development activities into models, such as action research or transmissive models, leading to the need for future studies to make better sense of these concepts, by adding to existing ideas of professional development models.

Common CPD activities, within early childhood, are primarily structured in the form of a training model in which knowledge is delivered by an expert and attendees are provided with a certificate upon completion (Kennedy, 2005), which can then be used as evidence of CPD during staff appraisals or Ofsted inspections. This top down approach, stems from traditional models of CPD within recognised professions, such as law or medicine (Evetts, 2003; Crowley, 2014) and remains the primary mode of CPD available to childminders through their Local Authority provision. Whereas, research such as that of Campbell-Barr (2018) highlights CPD as an important means through which to create knowledge, not simply accumulate what is already known, promoting value in the 'social production of knowledge that encompasses the varied experiences of ECEC professionals' (p. 86).

Carter and Fewster (2013) explore the concept of professional development, as moving towards a constructivist approach to learning in which 'action research projects [are] seeded in professional development sessions' (p. 74), with practitioners placed as researchers. Bleach's (2014) example of an action research approach to exploring professionalism with early childhood practitioners in Ireland, mirrors the way in which the structure of CPD activities could promote aspirational, rather than passive, engagement in the process. The action research cycle of planning, evaluating, reflecting and reviewing was made evident to the practitioners, in order for them to understand the process of development they were involved in and 'connect the pedagogy and theory… with quality practice' (Bleach, 2014, p. 189).

Swim & Isik-Ecran (2013) and Ingleby & Hedges (2012) support the notion of a move away from Kennedy's (2005) transmissive models of professional development. Their understanding of these models include 'fragmented… lectures' (Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013, p. 173) driven by policy and standardisation, they instead advocate a framework in which

practitioners own daily practices are the tools for enquiry, analysis and research (Lazzari, et al., 2013); further promoting an enquiry-based approach. However, it is also important to recognise the varying approaches to CPD as being useful for different purposes (Ingleby, 2017).

3.5.2 Purposeful

Parity, and an agreed purpose is needed between the objectives of those delivering or facilitating the CPD, and those attending, if these are not the same individuals. In her editorial reviewing the usefulness of professional learning, Kennedy (2015) identifies the spectrum of purpose, as ranging from performative to developmental intentions. A performative purpose is most common in early childhood CPD, serving to mold practitioners' knowledge and skills in ways that adhere to normative values of high quality practice. It is often achieved through training and standards-based models of CPD (Kennedy, 2005) delivered by perceived experts in the subject, for example in relation to statutory training requirements such as Paediatric First Aid or Safeguarding courses.

Research such as that of Jones & Osgood (2007); Bleicher (2014); Bleach (2014); Hordern, (2016); Ang, et al., (2017); and Campbell-Barr (2018), identify the need for more general CPD opportunities with a focus outside of statutory requirements. They suggest for CPD to aim towards a developmental purpose, and to employ models such as communities of enquiry or action research (Kennedy, 2005), through which the purpose of the CPD is informed from within the workforce (Evetts, 2003). This, in turn, provides a basis through which insights into practice can be gained; knowledge can be constructed; dominant perceptions can be challenged; and barriers, for instance to forming a collective identity, building an understanding of roles and responsibilities and gaining a greater understanding of children's experiences, can be built upon and developed (Ang, et al., 2017).

CPD also has a more subtle purpose, defined by Siraj, et al., (2017) as the ways in which CPD can 'affect' (p. 23) those who engage. The Fostering Effective Early Learning study (FEEL) (Siraj, et al., 2017) is ongoing in Australia across ECEC settings, with the purpose of exploring the effect of engagement in CPD on the quality of practice. They framed their study by considering three domains of CPD: content; delivery; and affect. Each domain comprises key features, for example, the latter incorporates 'motivation; confidence; developing professional relationships; supporting personal characteristics' (p. 23).

CPD is often discussed in terms of the effect it can have, to improve and develop practice. However, the way in which it affects those involved is also a key consideration in the development of an appropriate model of CPD. Studies which have gathered the views of childminders and early years practitioners, or worked directly with them, often report on: the development of the social dimensions of CPD to support relationships (Lanigan, 2011); create support networks (Otero & Melhuish, 2015); build confidence (Owen, 2007); promote positive attitudes toward CPD (Carter & Fewster, 2013), and on the way in which CPD 're-inspired' them (Cotton, 2013, p. 26).

3.5.3 Knowledge Acquisition and Construction

Although childminders are not required to hold any formal early childhood qualifications, Otero and Melhuish (2015) found that over 58% of their participants were qualified to level 3 and a further 21% held a level 6 degree qualification. Just 4% of the 99 childminders who took part in their study did not have a relevant childcare qualification. However, in early childhood there are questions around what constitutes quality (Elwick, et al., 2018) and there is 'uncertainty as to what those working in ECEC are expected to know' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 75).

Cherrington and Thornton (2013) identified eight features of quality professional development, in which the importance of theoretical knowledge and 'practitioners' own

involvement in investigating pedagogy' (p. 120) feature as a vital combination. The need to explore and implement theory into practice collaboratively, in order to reflect and develop current understandings, is clear throughout such literature. In contrast with formal qualifications, which deliver pre-disposed notions and knowledge of early years and education, much of the research highlights the necessity for CPD activities to be reconceptualised and take the form of enquiry projects (Minott, 2010 and Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013), constructing knowledge based on daily practice in settings, rather than simply acquiring exisitng knowledge. As an example of possibility, Lazzari et al (2013) report that the Italian context of CPD has moved away from the 'acquisition of technical knowledge and predetermined procedures' (p. 136), instead, focusing on creating new pedagogical knowledge through inquiring into everyday practice.

Particularly in the case of childminders, where day to day practice is invisible within a private home environment, and knowledge is deemed implicit (Jones & Osgood, 2007), childminders' active engagement in CPD, has the potential to add examples of knowledge and understanding to the developing literature base of the early childhood education and care sector. Similarly, Swim and Isik-Ecran (2013) employed a social constructivist approach when reviewing features of professional development, placing an emphasis on knowledge that is able to be created through practice, based on the culture of the setting in order to challenge existing understandings.

The research of Hordern (2012; 2016) provides a reminder of the importance of considering quality when co-creating knowledge through this type of approach. He suggests that collaborative professional development across different settings, allows for greater control over the production of knowledge, as well as allowing practitioners to 'maximise their collective development and continue to improve practice' (Hordern, 2012, p. 115). Whilst in later research, Hordern (2016) adds that the concept of mutuality and

facilitation of CPD without academic or professional support endangers the construction of ‘inherently fallible… rogue theories’ (p. 513) rather than developing robust knowledge contributions. Therefore, the role of the facilitator of CPD opportunities also needs to be explored.

3.5.4 Facilitated

In order to take a more autonomous approach to CPD and establish a move towards enquiry based projects, effective facilitation is required to support this process (Hordern, 2016). Moreover, if the early years sector as a whole is to navigate away from the already established profession of primary school teaching, and childminders are to build a shared, wider understanding of their role, Minott (2010) suggests they need to take ownership of their own knowledge and professional development opportunities. Current CPD activities, such as standalone training sessions, incorporate barriers; comprising context specific, standardised knowledge held by those delivering the training sessions; cost; and often require time spent away from everyday practice (Vincent & Braun, 2011).

From 2007, the responsibility for the implementation of change and to lead professional development within the ECEC sector, was assigned to Early Years Professionals (EYPs), now titled Early Years Teachers (EYTs) (Murray, 2013). To achieve this status, individuals were required to hold a degree level qualification and evidence their leadership skills, through an assessment process that included a portfolio of evidence, mapped against the early years professional standards. EYPs were described as ‘agents of change’ (CWDC, 2007, p. 1), and ‘leaders of learning’ (Hallet, 2013b, p. 322). Their inclusion within the government policy agenda, to drive forward the notion of a graduate led workforce, had the potential to promote the leading and facilitation of CPD from within the workforce.

Since the implementation of the graduate status, EYPs have experienced a wealth of issues, mainly due to the lack of equivalency to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) afforded to the EYT and EYP status (Lumsden, 2010). Consequently, they continue to experience disparity of recognition for their leadership role and remain on a low wage in comparison to their QTS counterparts. In addition, their small numbers led to them leading practice within settings, on their own, and without support (Hevey, 2010). These factors have led to a lack of interest from practitioners in obtaining EYTS, across the varying types of early childhood settings, the highest percentage of practitioners holding the status is recorded at 30% (Bonetti, 2018). Furthermore, out of a total of 46,600 childminders across England in 2018, just 99 of these held EYP/EYT status (Bonetti, 2018). Therefore, the task for each of them to lead appropriate CPD opportunities for the entire childminding workforce is vast.

Upskilling childminders to take on the role of facilitating more appropriate CPD activities, could therefore become a focus of future models. Although not all childminders in England, may have the levels of qualifications deemed necessary by government policy to lead practice, this is not to say they do not hold the expertise to be able, or aspire to do so. Happo et al., (2013, p. 279) believe 'development into an expert is an individual process and each professional needs to find their own path of development'. Moreover, a basic internet job search demonstrates that the most common providers of CPD, such as Local Authority Early Years Advisors, are not required to hold graduate level qualifications (Indeed, 2019). Instead, they are positioned as holding the expertise required to train the workforce, through their experience in practice, rather than their level of qualification.

3.5.5 Relevant

Early years practitioners are reported to feel frustrated and despondent with current forms of CPD (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015), yet Hordern (2012) suggests the potential for improvement in the approach to future CPD provision, if it is relevant. Ingleby and Hedges (2012) establish the importance of CPD opportunities being able to respond to practitioners' needs, rather than being pre-determined by government policy or outside influence. Yet, childminders needs have not been established through research. Dispositional development, a concept formed by Swim and Isik-Ecran (2013), promotes current beliefs and habits as the starting point of questioning for professional development, as opposed to practitioners choosing from a disconnected, pre-arranged list of CPD topics, which are delivered over the course of a few hours. Through approaches such as these, childminders could gain the skill of identifying their own professional development needs, which Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) consider is just as important as the act of engaging in CPD. Further, an understanding of the importance and necessity to continually develop, regardless of qualification or position within the setting, is paramount to improving quality and creating an empowered workforce (Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013).

Cherrington and Thornton (2013) suggest that in order for CPD to be effective, it needs to be matched to the specific needs of those for whom it is required, therefore, enabling CPD to promote engagement from practitioners, and to allow learning to be applied constructively and purposefully to practice. The importance of considering the relevance of CPD for the individual, can be seen through historical accounts of childminders disengagement. For example, reports by Jackson and Jackson (1979) and Ferri (1992) of earlier attempts to teach childminders mothering skills, which they deemed to already know; or O'Connell's (2011) study in which the childminders reported negatively that CPD

was being delivered with the expectation that they should change their practice, to conform to group-based ways of working. Thus, in order to be relevant, CPD needs to be a collaborative process, informed from within the workforce (Evetts, 2011).

3.5.6 Collaborative

Crowley (2014) remarks on the shift from an original emphasis on 'personal responsibility' (p. 45) for engaging in CPD, which is how it is suggested in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a), to the increasingly prevalent notion of establishing communities of practice. Originally a concept defined by Wenger (1998), as creating a learning community within a setting, communities of practice are identified by Kennedy (2005) as a distinct model of CPD. For sections of the workforce such as childminders, who work in isolation, forming communities of practice can present a challenge. However, Laningan (2011) found that the opportunity to take part in CPD that involved networking and wider collaboration, was the most popular reason why practitioners, who worked on their own, chose to participate in CPD activities.

Hordern (2012) identified the necessity to work collaboratively in settings, where possible, and across networks, in order to influence the creation and evolution of sector specific knowledge. This idea builds on that of Jackson and Temperley (2007), who place an importance on collaborative learning outside of the immediate community, recommending that it should be a requirement for settings to form wider networks of 'purposeful collaboration' (p. 46), which, supported by Swim and Isik-Ecran (2013, p. 182), could also result in more 'purposeful… practice'. Considering that practitioners within the wider ECEC workforce, often report their discontentment with externally provided CPD courses (Lanigan, 2011, Vincent & Braun, 2011 and Lightfoot & Frost, 2015), a reconstruction of appropriate CPD using these concepts of collaboration and community

involvement, is emerging throughout literature, towards enquiry based projects that are no longer divorced from daily practice (Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013).

However, Ingleby and Hedges (2012) challenge that the autonomous nature of communities of practice are unable to be fully realised in view of the larger politically controlled social constructs in which they reside. Although existing and potential communities of practice are, and will be, situated in a complex backdrop of regulated education and care, Simpson (2010) argues there is an alternative view of professionalism in the early years sector. One which is not socially and politically determined, but which involves practitioners working within these constraints collaboratively and autonomously, during which time they form their own pedagogic style, creating and taking ownership of their distinctive professional knowledge and practices.

Research, such as that of Ingleby and Hedges (2012) and Ingleby (2015), offer additional insights, broadening the concept of CPD as needing to be facilitated, not just from within the workforce, but also with other stakeholders and policy makers. They recognise that further fragmentation of an already fragile workforce will occur, if CPD programmes are not shaped by all those involved in the wider early childhood sector (Ingleby, 2015). This notion allows for new knowledge to be shared more widely, than simply within the specific community of practice in which it was created, thus, promoting a two way sharing of knowledge and practice between the workforce and policy makers. In addition, encompassing the potential to work with external training providers, to gain greater autonomy over the structure and content of CPD activities (Hordern, 2012).

Crowley (2014) extends this concept of collaborative working to create ‘communities of discovery’ (Crowley, 2014, p. 17), introducing the notion that in order to re-contextualise knowledge, the early years sector needs to become more advanced in its collaborative approach to CPD discovering and creating their own knowledge. Lightfoot and Frost

(2015, p. 415) support the 'orientation… towards innovation and agential activity' stating that the drivers for professional development should not be policy changes or specific events, but should result from practitioners own 'principles and moral purposes' (p. 415). In addition, Brock (2012) itemises autonomy as one of the seven dimensions of professionalism, agreeing that practitioners who are confident in their values and beliefs will not be constricted by policy development, within the professional development processes.

3.5.7 Reflective

Reflective practice is a key feature of CPD 'central to ensuring high standards of quality provision' (Bleach, 2014, p. 186), and identified by Brock (2015) to increase practitioners' sense of both personal and professional development. Further, Hallett (2013a) recognises reflection as an important feature, to enable practitioners to keep up to date in an 'evolving and changing' (p. 24) sector, to which Colmer (2015) agrees, believing that simply implementing policy without time for interpreting, reflecting and evaluating lends itself to a transmissive and prescriptive pedagogical approach.

However, whilst Hevey (2010, p. 159) states that reflection has 'become accepted at all levels' and is the most important element of professional development regardless of the context or sector, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017a) does not cite reflective practice at all in the guidance document. Instead, Ofsted required all settings to complete a Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) (Ofsted, 2013) which subsequently formed an element of the setting inspection. The SEF asked practitioners to reflect on six aspects of their practice: effectiveness of leadership and management; quality of teaching, learning and assessment; personal development; behaviour and welfare; outcomes for children; and the overall effectiveness of the early years provision. Nonetheless, the SEF was

withdrawn in April 2018 to reduce the burden of paperwork for practitioners (Nursery World, 2018).

Professional development opportunities, therefore, need to incorporate time for reflection, which Cotton (2013) suggests could also facilitate further opportunities for this process to be shared, thus allowing 'practitioners to make explicit their beliefs about learning and to constantly review these' (p. 20), as well as enabling deeper learning to occur that fosters further questioning of practice and construction of knowledge (Cotton, 2013).

3.6 Chapter Summary

CPD has the potential to develop the knowledge and skills of childminders working with children in the early years (Siraj, et al., 2017). Further, as childminders are not required to hold any formal qualifications, CPD also has the potential to fill gaps between practice and theory and enable childminders to keep up to date in an ever changing policy landscape. Moreover, as demonstrated through this review of the literature, CPD based upon a model of enquiry (Kennedy, 2005), is a means by which communities of practice and support networks can be constructed to strengthen a workforce that operates in isolation (Hordern, 2012; Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013).

I have demonstrated, through this chapter, that professional development is recognised as a creditable means through which knowledge and practical skills can be developed, and in a way which can value the varied knowledge and experiences within the sector (OECD, 2018). Dyer (2018, p. 349) argues that the 'diverse and fragmented nature of the workforce… compounds rather than alleviates the difficulty in hearing a single, collective voice from practitioners'. Yet, within these debates, childminders are also beginning to be recognised as distinctive from early years group-based provision (Ang, et al., 2017), necessitating the need to define their own professional context and knowledge.

Campbell-Barr (2018, pp.85-86) emphasises that ‘exploring the knowledge-base is to develop a greater understanding of what it constitutes and how ECEC professionals give meaning to their daily practice’. This needs to be achieved *with* childminders as opposed to *on* them. Therefore, the next chapter explores appropriate ways in which this can be facilitated.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The childminders in Brooker's (2016) study, met as focus groups and described themselves and their work as 'just normal mums doing childminding' (p. 76). In an action research study, Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) believe that 'action researchers need make no apology for seeing their work as mundane' (p. 596), it is the everyday practice that forms the basis for research. In addition, I draw inspiration from Ellingson (2009) who describes 'qualitative methods [to] illuminate both the ordinary within the worlds of fabulous people and events, and also the fabulous elements of the ordinary, mundane lives' (p. 1). In this chapter, I explore the research approaches used in studies of childminders, and for early childhood professional development; situating my research within a social constructivist paradigm. I present my central research question and justify collaborative action research as a methodology through which I, and a group of childminders, explored the ways in which continuous professional development (CPD) could be developed to be more appropriate and to better meet their needs.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

My research question began to form when I worked as a childminder, in response to the increasing demands to engage in CPD. The requirements within the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) asked me to hold 'appropriate… training, skills and knowledge' (p. 21), yet the resources available, to support me in understanding and achieving these demands, were decreasing. The training opportunities I was accessing through my Local Authority were diminishing, and what was available had become repetitive. They were tailored to group-based settings, and those promoted for childminders revealed a lack of understanding of the key features that characterised childminding practice. I began attending these training

sessions simply as a means to network, and like the childminders in O'Connells' (2011) study, so that I could provide Ofsted with the evidence of CPD that they required.

During her study of training for childminders in the 1990s, Ferri (1992, p. 2) asked 'what should [training] consist of and how should it be delivered?' She found that it is the social context of childminding that needs to be understood, in order to transform the way in which training opportunities are developed, to be more appropriate for childminders. However, as demonstrated in chapter two, the social context of childminding remains problematic, under-researched, and has been deeply influenced by the political context in which childminders work. The concept of training, has since developed in the early childhood education and care sector (ECEC), as a type of activity situated within the broader notion of CPD, which I defined in chapter three (see 3.4.2. Continuous Professional Development) as utilised for different purposes, including: raising quality; providing support; promoting collaboration; and building a collective understanding of the identity and a knowledge base of childminding practice.

Research such as that of Gibson, et el., (1977); Jackson & Jackson (1979); Ferri (1992); Mooney, et al., (2001b); Owen (2007); and O'Connell, (2011) also placed an emphasis on opportunities for childminders to engage in CPD, identifying future activities as needing to be: accessible; relevant; collaborative; ongoing and affordable. I developed these understandings further, in the context of the broader ECEC sector, identifying that future CPD opportunities for childminders also need to take a reflective and enquiry-based approach, enable the sharing and construction of knowledge, and promote support networks (see Chapter Three: 3.5. Features of CPD). Following the advice of Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) to evaluate research questions, I believe a developed version of Ferri's (1992) original question remains significant for continued research, which I adopted as my central question:

In what ways could CPD be developed, to be more appropriate for childminders?

4.3 Philosophical Rationale

My choice to embark on an Educational Doctorate, was the first philosophical decision for my research, the very nature of which extends from a curiosity into an area of practice (Burgess, et al., 2006). Schön (1983) wrote 'the situations of practice are not problems to be solved but problematic situations characterised by uncertainty, disorder and indeterminacy' (pp. 15-16). Schön (1983) goes on to define these problematic situations as 'dynamic… that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. I call such situations messes' (p. 16).

In asking the question 'why am I doing this research?' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 5), I was able to recognise the notion of 'dynamic... complex… changing… mess' (Schön, 1983, p. 16) as the 'swampy lowland' (p. 42) of practice, representational of the application of tacit knowing and intuition to everyday challenges. I considered the EdD to be a meaningful way in which I could apply 'theory and research to problems of practice' (Kumar & Dawson, 2013, p. 167), in turn developing my own personal and professional learning, and continuing to work directly with a group of childminders. Through the application of research, we were able to explore, in more depth, the developing gap between the expectations of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) for childminders to engage with 'appropriate… training' (p. 21), and what was available in practice.

I had previously worked together, with my local group of childminders, to offer CPD opportunities. We began to build a network of support, and find our own solutions to the challenges we faced; our efforts did not require a research project in order to continue. However, in the words of Schön (1983, p. 49) 'often we cannot say what it is that we

know… our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit of our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing… our knowing is in our action'. Similarly, Mooney (2003, p. 119) reported that 'childminders struggled to define… their role'. Therefore, providing the process of CPD a greater focus through research, enabled a deeper exploration of the challenges associated with continuing professional development for childminders. In addition, it provided a means through which I learned to articulate the messy area (Cook, 2009) between the 'swampy lowland' (Schön, 1983, p. 42) of everyday challenges, and the 'high hard ground' (Schön, 1983, p. 42) of complex policy and 'research based theory and technique' (ibid).

4.4 Research Approaches

Ritchie, et al., (2014) emphasise the importance of situating a research project within the wider methodological debate, however, the way in which this is achieved can be a problematic situation in itself. Schön (1983) suggested that 'each view of professional practice represents a way of functioning in situations of indeterminacy and value conflict, but the multiplicity of conflicting views poses a predicament for the practitioner who must choose among multiple approaches to practice or devise his own way of combining them' (Schön, 1983, p. 17). I found this helpful in consideration of developing my practice of research. Therefore, in this section, I will explain and justify the choices I made in my research approach and determine my 'beliefs about what constitutes knowledge… [and] the processes through which we produce knowledge' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 36).

I found the literature examining and explaining research paradigms, methodologies and methods to be extensive and diverse: ranging from positivist, quantitative approaches, most often used in the natural sciences; through to interpretive, constructivist, and postmodern qualitative inquiries, employed largely in social science research. Denzin

and Lincoln (2013) identify these as encompassing differing philosophical groundings and are therefore in resistance to each other. Whereas, Ellingson (2013, p. 414) considers the terminology used across research to 'remain dramatically inconsistent', and is representative of the array of ontological and epistemological assumptions that further influence and frame the approach to each individual research study.

I built an understanding of general approaches to research; quantitative; qualitative; mixed methods; arts-based; and community-based participatory research (Leavy, 2017), which correspond with the view of Denzin and Lincoln (2013) that they are each characterised by different philosophical beliefs. Creswell and Creswell (2018) put forward four worldviews of approaches to research: quantitative, postpositivist; qualitative, constructivist; qualitative, transformative; and mixed methods, pragmatic. Identifying the debates within the paradigm wars between quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), further asserting that it is the research question which will denote the approach.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013) offered an understanding of the complexity of research approaches in the social sciences, categorising anything other than a positivist approach, as working within the complex field of qualitative research. From here, I was able to position my research approach within the qualitative, interpretive paradigms, of which Denzin and Lincoln (2013, p. 26) list 'four major interpretive paradigms: positivist and postpositivist; constructivist-interpretive; critical; and feminist-poststructural'. However, Ellingson (2009; 2013) considers that such methodological approaches are not mutually exclusive. Instead, she orders them along a qualitative continuum in three clusters: realist/positivist; social constructionist middle-ground; and artistic/interpretive, discussing the potential to move past dichotomous thinking. At one end of the continuum sits with absolute certainty, the positivist paradigm, assuming a singular objective truth (Lochmiller

& Lester, 2017). Representational of the traditional scientific form of research, positivist studies are quantitative in nature, testing theories and variables objectively, through measurable data, in turn creating generalisable and valid results (Creswell, 2014).

My doctoral research is positioned towards the latter two clusters. However, I have drawn from data provided by quantitative research, for example, to gain a statistical understanding of the workforce (Bonetti, 2018) and to gain information from early years statistical datasets, such as those collected and provided by Ofsted (2019c). Quantitative research is also employed within the early childhood and education sector, for example to build student profiles (Hoy & Adams, 2016). Whilst valuable for research and analysis of inspection data, or qualifications for example, positivist principles are very rarely, if ever, applied absolutely to qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

4.5 Qualitative Research

Denzin (2018) demonstrates a move away from dichotomous thinking, referring to the other end of the continuum where the artistic, interpretive methodologies reside, such as autoethnography, creatively and intimately 'feeling, moving…tracing and re-tracing memories' (Denzin, 2018, p. 207). Researchers using these methodologies, engage in creative analytic practice (Richardson, 2000), including for example, representations of empirical research 'encountering the unique lens of a person's (or groups) passionate rendering of reality' (Ellingson, 2013, p. 419), or reporting in a way that goes 'beyond words' (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 333). An example of research with childminders, which sits towards this end of the continuum, can be found in O'Connells' (2011) ethnographic research in which she 'reveals' (p. 779) insights into childminding practice through photos and narrative excerpts. Subsequently, I drew inspiration from examples such as these, to inform my own, and the childminders' engagement with an interpretive approach, to

the analysis of the data and my presentation of this within this thesis, discussed further in section 4.13.1 Crystallization.

It is the middle ground qualitative approaches, which dominate the field of early childhood research, such as: action research (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Bleach, 2013); surveys (Mooney, et al., 2001b; Ransom, 2013; Fauth, et al., 2010); focus groups (Brooker, 2016); and case studies (Cotton, 2013; Callanan, et al., 2017). Farrell, et al., (2016, p. 1) describe these as 'conceptually and methodologically complex', and Denzin and Lincoln (2013) believe this is the type of research that 'makes the world visible' (p. 6). Qualitative approaches are largely representative of the studies I have reviewed in chapters two and three, to inform my understanding of the context of my research. I engage with some of these examples further in the next section, to situate my research within existing methodological approaches in early childhood, and I continue to utilise the insights they provide, in analysis and discussion of my own findings.

4.6 Methodologies Used by Existing Studies in ECEC

Jackson (2013) recommends reviewing methodologies used by practised researchers, to support the novice researcher's own understanding of possibilities and positionality within existing research paradigms. Considering my established local network with childminders, and my lived experience of undertaking the role, I did not want to follow in the footsteps of the studies that carried out research *on* childminders through interviews and surveys (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Mooney, et al., 2001b; NCB, 2003; Moss, et al., 2011; NCB, 2013, Callanan, 2014; Otero & Melhuish, 2015), or by reviewing or deconstructing existing texts (Jones & Osgood, 2003; Ang, et al., 2017). These studies provided useful information and insights into childminders' views, and the context in which they work, yet, did not actively engage the childminders in the research process.

Instead, they suggested the importance for future research to work more closely *with* childminders (Otero and Melhuish, 2015; Ang et al., 2017).

I therefore, focused my exploration on the range of qualitative methodologies within studies, that had been undertaken with childminders, commencing with early accounts of projects and initiatives from Local Authorities (Gibson, et al., 1977); the first national survey, and subsequent action research with childminders in Britain (Jackson & Jackson, 1979); accounts from case studies (Ferri, 1992; Dawson et al., 2003; Greener, 2009); and work with childminders in focus groups as part of a larger government funded investigation (Brooker, 2016). Whilst they all provide valuable insights into childminding practice, there remains a distinction between the authors of these studies as outsider researchers, reporting on the childminders as respondents or participants.

These examples of studies were all undertaken by academics (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Greener, 2009; Brooker, 2016), and government or Local Authority funded research teams (Gibson, et al., 1977; Ferri, 1992; Dawson, et al., 2003), including O'Connell (2013) who registered as a childminder specifically for the purpose of her ethnographic research. However, through her approach, O'Connell (2010; 2011; 2013) was able to conduct fieldwork with childminders, reporting in two ways: on her observations of childminders; and with their voices and actions through quotes and photos. Similarly, Ferri (1992) engaged directly with the childminding community, for example, by 'attending existing training sessions, to enable her to 'understand… assess… explore and evaluate the contribution of training to how childminding is conducted' (Ferri, 1992, pp. 30-31). She was, therefore, also able to include the voices of the childminders from her case study, directly through excerpts from interviews, and examples of discussion during observations.

Childminders' voices have been identified as almost silent within literature (Ang, et al., 2017) and previously, Jones and Osgood (2007) suggested a move towards challenging notions of 'regulatory power' (p. 298) and promoting a 'sense of agency' (ibid) to support the move towards a 'new sociology of early childhood' (p. 289). Therefore, an emancipatory approach was a possible consideration for my research, which is thought to be suitable by Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) for a doctoral study, and an approach which can be achieved through action research, as it can 'provide an 'emphasis on emancipation or change in our society' (Creswell, 2014, p. 614).

Although I was seeking to explore change, there is an added emphasis on professional practice through the EdD (Burgess, et al., 2006; Olin, et al., 2016), and as such, I did not intend to take the position of a researcher stepping in to empower a marginalised workforce; the childminders have already shown they can speak for themselves, most notably through their grassroots formation of the National Childminding Association (NCMA) (O'Connell, 2013). Rather, my focus was on working with childminders to explore ways in which we could develop opportunities for a new model of CPD, through 'practical action research' (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996b, p. 4). This, instead, seeks to 'enhance the practice of education through the systematic study of a local problem' (Creswell, 2014, p. 611), and in a way which enabled us to co-create knowledge and develop an understanding of our own solutions together (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Therefore, I drew from examples of existing research such as that of Bleach (2013) who utilised action research as a tool for CPD, and Kennedy (2005; 2014) who suggests action research and collaborative enquiry based models of CPD as useful, to involve 'the participants themselves as researchers' (Kennedy, 2005, p. 245), to gain a greater understanding of practice.

4.7 Social Constructivism

I distinguished my research to sit within a social constructivist paradigm, which embraces the ontological belief that 'truth is a relative concept' (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, part 1). Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 177) define constructivists as 'antifoundational… a refusal to adopt any permanent, unvarying… standards by which truth can be universally known'. This idea is built upon by Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and later by Lincoln and Guba (2016), who add a description of the constructivist paradigm as assuming multiple realities (relativist ontology), in which 'knower and respondent co-create understandings' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 27) through a subjectivist epistemology.

In adopting a social constructivist approach, I recognise there are multiple ways of knowing (Moses & Knutsen, 2012), and draw from the ideas of Vygotsky (1978), Wenger (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1991), that this knowledge is constructed through social interactions and from within a community of knowledge and practice. Vygotsky (1978) is regarded as developing a social constructivist approach to learning (Conkbayir & Pascal, 2014), which places a focus on learning through active participation, and with acknowledgement of the social context of this process. In addition, the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) enabled deeper awareness of our multiple and changing positions across the different stages of the research (see 4.8 Positionality and Voice).

Childminders do not hold a clear, collective, professional identity (see 2.6 Discovering a Collective Identity); they are considered to employ a distinctive pedagogical approach to ECEC (Ang, et al., 2017), each building their self-employed childcare business on a foundation of diverse family values, mothering experience, and framed by the standards and requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a). Similarly, a social constructivist approach

to the research, enabled each individual to 'build an idiosyncratic version of reality based partly on identical experiences but shaped by individual experience… prior knowledge, [and] understanding' (Pritchard & Woollard, 2010, p. 5). Yet, also with consideration of learning as a social process, in which we engaged as a community of practice during the core action research, which 'consists of negotiating the meanings of our experiences… in social communities' (Wenger, 1998, p. 145)

Cotton (2013) describes a similar focus on the co-construction of meaning, through her project, in recognition of the 'local nature of [the] project and diversity of practitioners involved' (p. 18). This approach enabled knowledge to be created through shared practice, shared opportunities for discussion and reflection, and was supported by the building of professional relationships (Cotton, 2013). Cherrington and Thornton (2013) also align CPD with a constructivist approach to professional learning, and utilise an action learning approach to describe a 'continuous process of learning and reflecting, that happens with the support of a group of colleagues, working on real issues' (p. 125).

It is argued by Hordern (2012) and Basford (2019) that the early years workforce needs to take 'responsibility for processes of knowledge re-contextualisation… [and] participate more fully in… ongoing reform' (Hordern, 2012, p. 109), further suggesting a need for a 'shared conception of knowledge [that] enables articulation of professional practice' (p. 510). However, the knowledge base of the ECEC sector is thought by Campbell-Barr (2018) to be complex, resulting in 'uncertainty as to what those working in ECEC are expected to know' (p. 75). Campbell-Barr (2018) recognises 'there is a need to refocus on what the ECEC knowledge base is', through the consideration of multiple 'knowledges' (Campbell-Barr, 2019, p. 136) that inform ECEC professionals. Campbell-Barr explores (2019) sociological and philosophical viewpoints, underpinned by postmodernist perspectives, to problematise these professional knowledges in the ECEC sector.

Instead, proposing the need for a 'social production of knowledge' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 86), which includes consideration of 'three forms of knowledge: episteme (pure knowledge), techne (skills) and phronesis (practical wisdom)' (2019, p. 134).

The aim of a professional doctorate programme, through its very nature links 'professional practice, professional knowledge and research' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 2). Therefore, a social constructivist approach, supported a collaborative approach to the exploration of CPD, with the understanding that 'the most persuasive data comes from practitioners' (Basford, 2019, p. 782) and that it needs to 'articulate both what is understood by attitudes, morals and beliefs and question the meaning of theoretical knowledge' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 85). However, Ellingson (2009) provided a reminder that authorship of the knowledge created during our collaborative research, was undertaken as part of my role as the doctoral researcher, for the purpose of creating a thesis report of our experiences. Therefore, I differentiate between the independent stages of the doctorate, during which I take a constructivist approach and the collaborative stage, which enables a social constructivist approach (see 4.11. Thesis and Core Action Research). In addition, I gain understanding from the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to conceptualise 'the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership' (p. 36)

Methodologies, such as action research, which enable collaboration, are thought by Ellingson (2009), to 'involve… more than the usual amount of power sharing… situating participants as co-researchers' (p. 44) and she identifies that 'researchers cannot escape systems of power' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 34). Therefore, the ethics of positionality and voice needed to be considered.

4.8 Positionality and Voice

I had ceased childminding the year prior to embarking on the EdD, therefore, needed to explore my role within the research. I found the ability to move fluidly in and out of varying positions (academic, researcher, practitioner) was essential, yet also had the potential to impact on the authenticity of the participants' voices (Olin, et al., 2016). McNiff (2017) addresses the question of academics positioning themselves as practitioners, suggesting it is action research that enables a 'changing topography [which] has highlighted the need for all to regard themselves as practitioners and study their practice collaboratively, in a disciplined and scholarly way, and to make their accounts of practice public, so that others in their communities and elsewhere can learn and benefit' (McNiff, 2017, p. 24). I drew further understanding, from Milligan's (2016) reflections on positionality within her research that I took on different positionings, at different times within the research process. Thus, my 'practice' through this enquiry, was my involvement in the CPD process with the childminders.

Ampartzaki, et al., (2013) comment on the value placed on an academic researcher in studies of practice, due to the 'mediation between academic and practitioner knowledge' (p. 24) which occurs. However, like Milligan (2016), I often reflected during the research, on how I felt the childminders perceived my role, which highlighted the vulnerability of my dual position. For example, during the introductory session, one of the first evaluations referred to the study as being mine (see Chapter Six: 6.6.2.1. Gaining Knowledge and Understanding). I was therefore able to recognise and begin to challenge the power relations by gaining a better understanding of my positioning (Berger, 2015), and 'allow for more meaningful knowledge (co)construction' (Milligan, 2016, p. 242), through continued promotion of collaborative ownership of the research process.

My aim was to undertake research with childminders, that was 'contextual and localised' (Locke, et al., 2013, p. 118), and which focused on 'real-life issues concerned with practice' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 2). I was an active member of the group during specific phases of the research, yet there were also times when the childminders carried out their own research, documenting their observations of practice in writing and through the use of photos. Therefore, I drew from the ideas of Ampartzaki, et al., (2013) and McNiff (2017) to define my role as a 'practitioner academic' (p. 25); and the role of the childminders as 'practitioner researcher', exploring a model of CPD, through practical action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Creswell, 2014).

Similarly to Milligan (2016), both my own and the childminders' 'shifting identities were often characterised by different situations' (p. 236) and, in our emergent model of CPD, were characterised by different stages of the process (see 4.11. Thesis and Core Action Research Design). For example, as a result of my academic working role, I had sourced a space within the university, in which to hold the CPD sessions (academic); I took on the roles of trainer and facilitator during the workshop sessions (practitioner) which the childminders attended (practitioner). They then implemented their understandings from the workshop sessions and collected data, in the form of observations and photos (researcher). We then reflected, both on their data and on the research design (co-researcher), during the final session of each cycle. Throughout, these shifting identities remained underpinned by the invariable element of my role as a doctoral student (academic).

Within a social constructivist paradigm, the 'researcher's understanding [is] co-constructed with that of the participants through their mutual interaction with the research' (Constantino, 2012, p. 119), placing an emphasis on the voice of the childminders with, and alongside, my own. However, I was mindful that my reporting of the childminders'

voices in a thesis, 'no matter how well intentioned… remains fraught with significant challenges' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 37), in terms of ethical representation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) discuss the role of the researcher in action research as being more complex than simply insider or outsider. I recognised the childminders to hold an insider perspective on CPD and on their practice, of which I was no longer a 'complete member' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55), yet neither did I consider myself to be an outsider. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) refer to this status as 'the space inbetween' (p. 60) enabling 'appreciation for the fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience' (ibid). A notion illustrated throughout this thesis, in my changing use of terms such as 'I', 'we', 'our' and 'they', as I present and discuss the findings. It was our collaborative knowledge and experience of the enquiry, that I sought to capture, through ethical, collaborative and democratic processes; the latter defined by Avgitidou (2009, p. 586) as 'joint participation, shared decision-making, knowledge ownership and trust'.

I remained mindful of encouraging and valuing the voices of the childminders, during the research process (Rector-Aranda, 2014), for example, by including opportunities for discussion and evaluation within, and of, the research design. Yet, voice is a complex notion. I was reporting on the research in my capacity as a doctoral student, therefore, I held an ethical accountability and responsibility (Zeni, 2009) to be transparent and authentic in my representation of the participants voices. According to Winter (1996), this means 'that everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding the situation, and no one's point of view will be taken as the final understanding of what all the other points of view really mean' (Winter, 1996, p. 22). Ellingson (2009) offers the concept of crystallization as 'a way of addressing ethical concerns in representation' (p. 37) and I present and reflect upon my use of crystallization, as an approach to data analysis and representation in section 4.13.1 Crystallization.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

There is no statutory code of ethics in the early childhood sector, and whilst Freeman and Swick (2007, p. 169) recognise 'there is no handbook for the right answers', there are basic requirements for ethical early years practice, as well as supporting documents available to guide this practice. For example, childminders are required to register with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) in order to secure their understanding of ethical practice in relation to the storage and usage of data. They are further guided through the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) to uphold ethical considerations in their work, such as confidential record keeping, secure storage and sharing of information gained through observations and photos, and in their day to day work with children and families.

Organisations and charities that work with the early years sector, such as Early Education (2020a) and PACEY (2020) produce ethical guides, information, and advice for practice. For example, Early Education (2011) produced a code of ethics which 'should be used to guide professional behaviour and as principles to inform individual and collective decision making. It is not intended to provide prescriptive solutions to moral and ethical dilemmas' (p. 3), yet lists a number of ethical considerations in relation to stakeholders and the early childhood profession to inform practice. The suggestions in relation to colleagues were particularly useful to inform the framing of this research, which are listed as:

> 'Build collaborative relationships based on trust, respect and honesty; encourage colleagues to… take action in the presence of unethical behaviour; acknowledge the personal strengths, professional experience and diversity which other colleagues bring to work; share knowledge, experiences and resources with colleagues; use constructive methods to manage differences of opinion in the workplace.' (Early Education, 2011, p. 6)

Codes of ethics in research also underpin this enquiry; to this end I completed the required ethics courses as part of the EdD training programme, as well as the Anglia Ruskin University mandatory research ethics course. I utilised the ethical approval process to explore the details of the core action research, and I provide confirmation of my ethical application and approval in Appendix 1. In addition, I shared a summary of the research aim, and an overview of the ethical considerations involved in taking part in the research, with the childminders, through the creation of Participation Information Sheets. The first detailed the purpose of the survey; the requirements of the participants; confidentiality; and voluntary participation (Appendix 2). The second detailed the same areas of ethical consideration, yet this time in relation to participating in the core action research (Appendix 3).

My own understanding of ethical considerations within research, developed throughout the doctoral process. Whilst I was guided by ethical codes and guidelines, I also developed my ethical conscience through my own engagement with the research. Ritchie, et al., (2014) recognise this process as 'both anticipating and responding to ethical dilemmas; making decisions that are responsive to the needs of the participants… [and] having time to think through decisions; to reflect on personal ethical practice; to discuss with others including participants;… and above all to… consider possible options from all perspectives' (pp. 107-108).

The action researcher is described by Zeni (1998) as 'rarely working in isolation' (p. 11) therefore, necessitating deeper consideration of the collaborations of all those involved in the research. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) provide examples of ethical responsibilities in action research, resulting from these additional considerations, such as issues of anonymity and the open-ended approach of the action research. Having received overarching ethical approval from my institution, I undertook an additional step

in the action research process, of organising an introductory meeting. This provided the opportunity to address some of the additional ethical issues associated with action research (Khanlou & Peter, 2005), for example, by discussing the purpose and aims of the research with the childminder participants; negotiating how they might be involved; and answering any questions. Our collaborative approach to exploring the ethical issues of the core action research are discussed further in chapter six (see 6.4. CAR Ethical Considerations).

4.10 Action Research

The 'purpose of all research is to generate knowledge' (McNiff, 2017, p. 17), whereas, McNiff (2017) argues that it is action research which 'generates the kind of knowledge that contributes to sustainable, personal, [and] social…wellbeing' (p. 17). Action research was developed by Lewin (1948) through his exploration of social management as an alternative to scientific management (Aldeman, 1993), establishing that 'close integration of action, training and research hold tremendous possibilities' (Lewin, 1948, p. 149). Since this time, action research has become a broad term for an 'alphabet soup of practices' (Bradbury, 2015, p. 4), illustrated through the numerous examples within compendiums, such as the SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), and the SAGE Handbook of Action Research (Bradbury, 2015). In keeping with its emerging nature, Dick (2015) reports many different types of action research, each with their own methodological considerations.

Action research fits within a social constructivist paradigm (Carter & Fewster, 2013). It allowed for my understanding of CPD and the ways in which it can be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, 'to be co-constructed with that of the participants through [our] mutual interaction' (Constantino, 2012, p. 119). Somekh & Zeichner (2009)

and Cohen, et al., (2011) recognise the increased use, and development of action research, as a practical means for those in education to reflect on their everyday practices. They suggest that action research lends itself as an appropriate methodology through which to carry out research in the field of education. However, Herr and Anderson (2015) distinguish that, as the purpose of action research is largely to find and report local solutions to local problems, actual accounts of action research are scarce, compared to the amount of literature about action research.

Using action research as a form of professional development in the early years and education sector is not a new concept. Examples are present within the field of education (for example, Bednarz, 2002; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Bleicher, 2014), and within the early childhood sector of education; for instance, Ampartzaki, et al., (2013) describe a synergy between action research and the creation of communities of practice, through their exploration of museum programmes for young children. Bleach (2013; 2014) contributes an example of action research as a 'tool' (Bleach, 2013, p. 370) to support a CPD programme for participants, in early childhood care and education (ECCE) centres, in Ireland. She found the use of action research to be 'instrumental in helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice' (Bleach, 2013, p. 195), as well as supporting an increased sense of professional identity on the part of the practitioners. Bleach (2014) also notes that the action research approach had allowed for the practitioners to become 'directly involved… as co-constructors of the research process and CPD programme' (p. 376). In addition, Jackson and Jackson (1979) provide an early example of an action research study with a group of childminders, which demonstrates the potential for action research to be employed as a methodology with a group of childminders, who work in different settings.

The use of action research is also argued by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002), and Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) to be increasingly utilised by 'higher degree students… who want to combine work and study' (p. 413) and is 'an effective method for developing… skills [and] competencies' (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002, p. 177). In addition, Stringer (2014) advocates a move towards a practitioner-researcher approach to education which rejects 'the mindless application of standardised practices across all settings and contexts' (p. 2). He provides a reminder that action research is a systematic process, requiring the combination of both the action and research elements of the approach (Stringer, 2014). This notion was previously identified by Alderman (1993) that there is 'no action without research and no research without action' (p. 8). Yet, Somekh and Zeichner (2009) distinguish these two elements as being valued for different purposes. For example, in their experience, school teachers resonate with the action element of the approach, whereas higher education academics reside more in the research elements of the approach. This is epitomised by Somekh & Zeichner (2009) as the challenging way in which action research crosses paradigms and is itself continuing to emerge and develop in its definition and application, through local and specific examples.

Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) explain that 'different approaches to action research have developed in different places and at different times' (p. 38), putting forward their metaphorical understanding of action research as a family tree with two branches; action research for professional, or social change. I have situated my research on the former branch of the tree, which has the greater focus on developing practice, as opposed to the critical, emancipatory focus of action research for social change. I previously explained my focus on practical action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996b) (see 4.6. Methodologies Used by Existing Studies in ECEC), which takes a collaborative approach towards creating 'professional change' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 39).

Nevertheless, the metaphorical use of a tree, allows for growth and development of the research and the learning process, 'the fruits of which are the real and material changes' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 596).

In the context of this doctoral research, the practical problem has been identified as the appropriateness of CPD opportunities for childminders; the professional change is demonstrated, through the ways in which we were able to build upon our existing experiences and co-create our understanding of a model of CPD, based on the cyclical structure of action research. This is not to say that social change will not develop from my research, The childminders and I, have made recommendations which have the potential to inform social change (see Chapter Ten: 10.7. Recommendations for Practice), and which denote a conceivable continuation of this enquiry, through a second phase of core action research, with an increased focus on action research for social change (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009).

Hordern (2012) stressed the importance of practitioners in early childhood taking responsibility for their learning, further emphasising the significance of their participation in this process. In order to achieve this, Brydon-Miller, et al., (2017, p. 435) suggest action research as a 'powerful framework for drawing upon the knowledge and experience' of those working within education. A collaborative approach to developing practice, has been suggested since the 1970s (Gibson, et al., 1977; Jackson & Jackson, 1979). Moreover, a collaborative approach to action research, is thought by Stringer (2014), and also identified by the DfE (2017b) to support the development of creative practices in order to find local solutions to complex issues, arising, for example, as a result of ever changing policy, or a reduction of support resources.

4.10.1 Collaborative Action Research

Bradbury (2015) describes Lewin as having 'stumbled, through collaboration, into bringing observers… and research subjects... together to share, understand, and create new patterns of interaction' (p. 5). However, Alderman (1993) previously reported a much more systematic approach to the 'discussion of problems, followed by group discussions on how to proceed' (p. 9). The collaborative element of action research in its simplest form, is explained by Townsend (2014) as deriving from values placed on encouraging the members of a specific community to work together in researching, and achieving change in their social context.

The use of action research to facilitate a collaborative enquiry, with childminders and to explore professional development, fits within policy frameworks such as the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b), which states; 'we want to support employers and self-employed childminders to access good quality, affordable CPD. Bringing schools and childcare providers together to learn from each other can bring a range of benefits as a result of collaboration' (p. 29). However, the DfE (2017b) also goes on to acknowledge the continuing reduction of support services for the sector, making suggestions for internal training and collaborative networks as a means to engage in CPD, and in a way that has the potential to address challenges around cost and availability. Nevertheless, in response, the sector continues to highlight the increasing challenges:

> 'There is… significant under-investment in the sector's most important resource: its staff. The early years workforce remains underpaid and undervalued with insufficient access to continuing professional development. There is little in the way of resources or incentives to encourage staff to improve their qualifications. Those that do, have insufficient prospect of improving their pay and conditions as a result' (Merrick, 2020).

My exploration of collaborative action research, as a suitable methodology through which to explore CPD with childminders, instigated additional questions in terms of the collaborative approach. Would local childminders want to take part in the enquiry? What were their current views and experiences of CPD? Did they agree this was an area of provision which necessitated development? Sagor (1992) recommends that in collaborative action research the 'focus of the research is defined by the practitioners' (p. 9) through a process of problem formation. However, I had defined the focus of the research, prior to the collaborative phase of the EdD, based on my previous experience and, on my continuing networking and discussions with the childminders whom I had worked alongside.

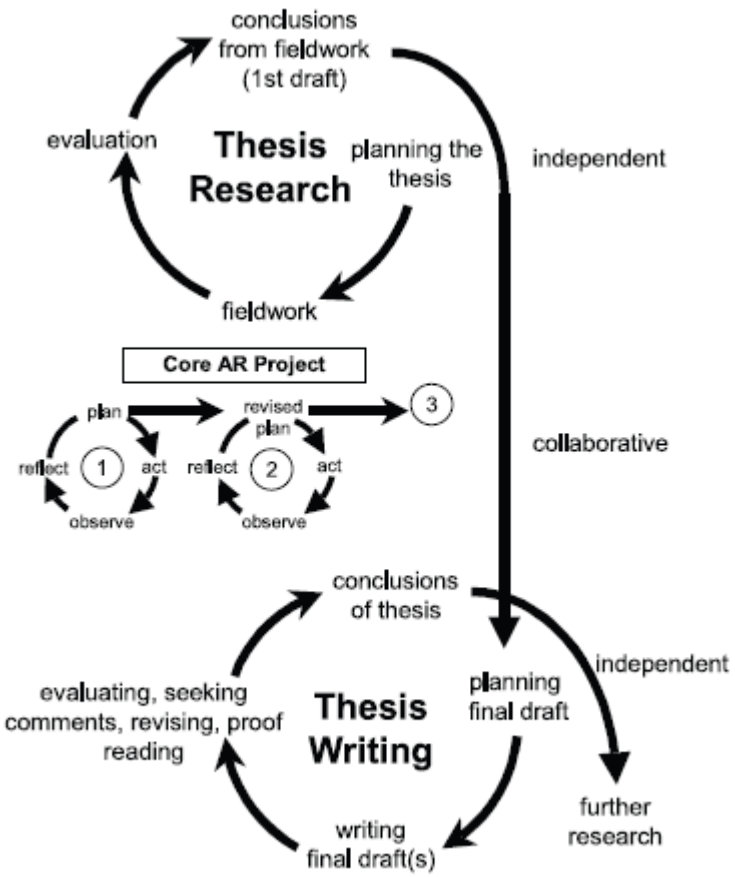
My interest fitted within gaps identified in policy documents (Nutbrown, 2012; DfE, 2017b; OECD, 2019), and continuing throughout literature and sector publications (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Ferri, 1992; Owen, 2007; Hordern, 2012; Cotton, 2013; Otero & Melhuish, 2015, Campbell-Barr, 2018; Basford, 2019; Merrick, 2020). However, due to the lack of a collective identity (Brooker, 2016), substantial gaps in knowledge of childminding (Ang, et al., 2017), and the isolated nature of the role (Jones & Osgood, 2007), I also acknowledged that asking questions outside of my own experiences was problematic.

Punch and Oancea (2014) comment on the renewed interest of action research since the 1990s and the creation of the EdD 'to implement effectively the concept of practitioner-researcher' (p. 46). However, it was at this stage in the research that I began to experience what Cook (2009) refers to as the mess which resides in action research. I needed to be able to differentiate between my experience of undertaking a professional doctorate, which in this case, included defining the problem; and the collaborative approach to the action research which focused on our collective understandings of the problem, through a community of knowledge and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Cook

(2009, p. 279) suggests that 'if accounts of research omit descriptions of the messy areas experienced by so many researchers, descriptions of research in practice remain incomplete and do not offer a true and honest picture of the research process'. In order to address this challenge, I found a solution to my first encounter with mess, in the work of Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002), who suggest the concept of thesis and core action research.

4.11 Thesis and Core Action Research Design

Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) provide a framework for an action research doctorate which resonated with my task of achieving the requirements of an EdD to produce the thesis as a 'pinnacle event' (Jacobs, 2009, p. 5), whilst also including an authentic account of the collaborative action research with the childminders. Helpfully, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) provide a framework which differentiates between the thesis action research (TAR) and the core action research (CAR), which is illustrated in their structure diagram shown below in Fig 4.1.

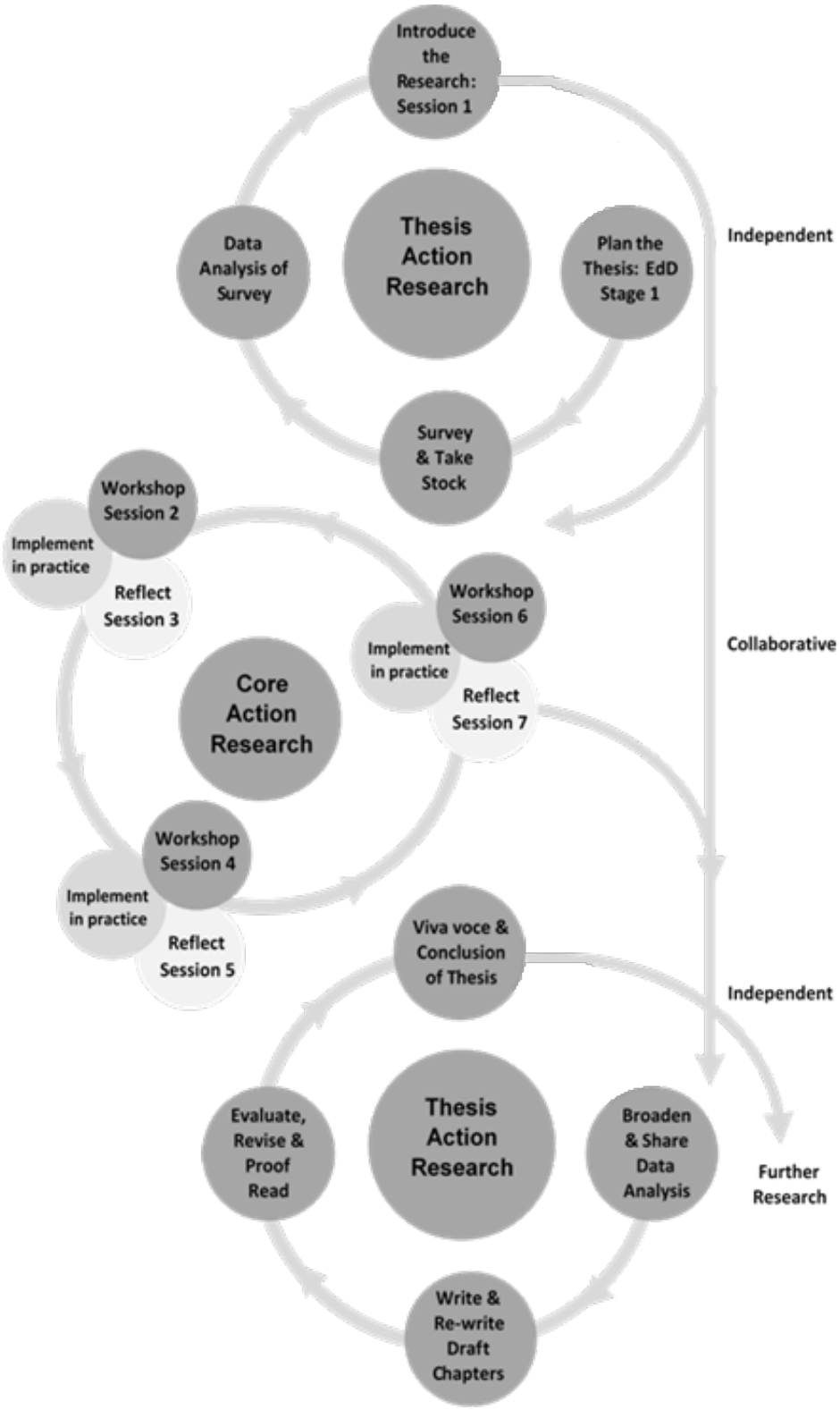


[Fig 4.1 Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002, p. 177) thesis and core action research

Through this framework Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) identify the thesis action research as a process occurring in two phases; the first includes planning and carrying out the core action research (depicted as the 'fieldwork' stage in the first phase), and the second phase comprises the independent act of writing up the research. Further, Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) later developed the definition of the thesis action research as product orientated, whilst the core action research is process orientated.

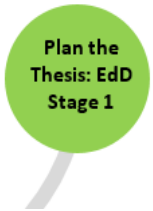
Bleach (2014) fosters the idea of action research centring upon the 'journey of working towards quality practice' (p. 187), echoing Hordern's (2012) view that it is the process of

professional development, in this case through the thesis and core action research, rather than the product which is of most value (in this case the thesis). Therefore, inspired by the potential to conceptualise my own framework in terms of thesis and core action research, I was able to differentiate between the independent and collaborative phases of my doctoral journey, as well as make visible the differing stages of the process, to create what Lewin (1948) termed my 'overall plan' (p. 145) of action research. From here, I was able to illustrate my conceptual framework; representative of the independent doctoral thesis stages and the collaborative core action research stage. Presented in its entirety in Fig 4.2, the individual stages are subsequently depicted in this thesis, in chapter five through to chapter nine, to illustrate the phases of the journey that I undertook in collaboration with the participating childminders and those that were my independent action research.



[Fig 4.2 Adapted from Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) TAR and CAR framework]

4.11.1 Thesis Action Research: Phase One



[Fig 4.3 TAR Phase One: stage one]

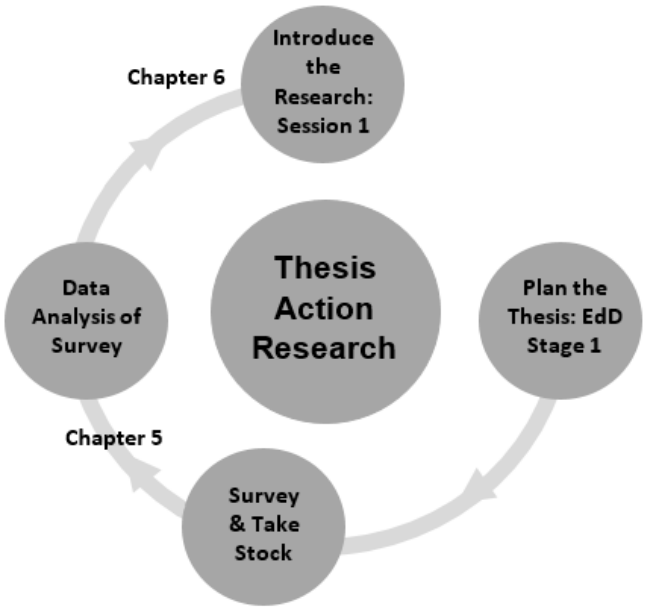
This methodology chapter is situated within the first phase of the thesis action research (TAR), which comprised the planning stage of the EdD (see Fig 4.3); that encompassed the literature review, initial methodological exploration, research proposal, and application for ethical approval. Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007, p. 417) recommend 'drawing on and integrating diverse ways of knowing and using different methodologies appropriately and creatively', as well as being explicit about this process, to promote the quality of an action research thesis. Thus, I have discerned my position to be within a social constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2016); utilising collaborative action research as a methodological approach to explore with childminders, the ways in which their CPD could be developed to be more appropriate; and with a focus on practical action research (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Creswell, 2014) for professional change (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009) along the qualitative continuum (Ellingson, 2013).

Through this section of the chapter, I introduce my adaptation of the TAR and CAR research design, the data collection methods employed, and my use of crystallization as an approach to understanding and presenting the multiple constructions of knowledge (Ellingson, 2009) from the core action research.

4.11.1.1 Taking Stock

Action research evolves as it is carried out through a systematic process (Stringer, 2014) and, although the focus of the core action research was to work collaboratively with childminders, McNiff (2017) suggests first taking stock of current practice by, for example, asking critical questions. Similarly, Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) recommend the collection of baseline data prior to carrying out action research, in order to better

understand the circumstances of the enquiry. As a result, I adapted the first TAR phase of the framework suggested by Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002). Rather than undertaking the core action research directly after completion of the first planning stage, I added three additional stages within this phase of the thesis action research. The first and second, to reach out to local childminders and take stock through an online survey; and the third to offer an introductory research meeting. These additional stages subsequently reflect my undertaking and analysis of the preliminary online survey, (presented in Chapter Five) and our first group meeting (presented in Chapter Six), illustrated below in Fig 4.4.



CAR]

4.11.1.2 Online Survey

Surveys allow quick and easy access (Creswell, 2014), in this case to a vast invisible workforce, and are a popular method for collecting data on childminders (CRC, 1975; Mooney et al., 2001; Dawson, et al., 2003; Callanan, 2014; DfE, 2017; Ofsted, 2020b). They largely provide a statistical insight into the workforce, such as recording the number of registered childminders, qualification levels, numbers of children cared for and working

hours. However, they can also be used to 'identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals' (Creswell, 2014, p. 402). Therefore, I utilised a survey as an opportunity to gather baseline data, which built upon current insights from the literature reviews in chapters two and three, and which added to my own experiences and understandings of CPD. In addition, from the survey, I was able to recruit a group of childminders with whom to work collaboratively (see Chapter Six: 6.2. Recruitment). Consequently, our first meeting informed the fourth and final stage of the first thesis action research phase, during which we met as a group for the first time. These two initial findings chapters (five and six) are also identified above in Fig 4.4.

To create the survey, I used a simple online programme called Survey Monkey and based thirteen questions on two groups of criteria. The first included the profiling characteristics of the childminders and their membership of groups or networks. This allowed me to situate the respondents collectively within existing understandings of childminders previously identified in chapter two (see 2.6. Discovering a Collective Identity). The second asked for views and information that were scarce within literature, including: the childminders' present CPD needs; their current experiences of CPD activities; their views on the quality, benefits and challenges of CPD; and finally an overview of their views in relation to key features of CPD (see Chapter Three: 3.5. Features of CPD).

4.11.1.3 Sample Group

Ofsted (2018) recorded a total of 40,900 childminders registered in the UK during 2017, and, according to the Local Authority (Essex County Council, 2018a), my local area comprised 204 childminders within a 10 mile radius of the city centre, at the time of undertaking the research. During my time as a childminder, I became a member of a local childminding group. Together we supported each other; provided cover for holidays; organised group activities for the children in our care, such as sports days and charity

fundraising events; shared knowledge and experience; and formed close friendships. As part of our engagement with the local community we created a Facebook page, which had 116 members at the time of my data collection. The page provided a place for local childminders to network, ask questions and share information.

Although I am no longer childminding, I retain my shared administrator responsibilities for the page, contributing and supporting members. Hence, it was through this online community that I sought current views from registered childminders, by sharing information about the research and a link to the online survey. A total of 45 childminders completed the survey; the findings from which are presented and discussed in chapter five. It was also from this pilot group that I gained interest from 25 childminders to participate in the core action research. In addition, it was the findings from the survey that provided a starting point, from which to facilitate initial discussions in the first core action research meeting, presented and discussed in chapter six.

4.11.2 Core Action Research: Phase Two

Moving into the core action research (CAR) phase, 16 of the initial 25 childminders were able to commit their time to a research enquiry. We worked collaboratively to undertake three individual cycles of core action research; presented respectively in chapters seven, eight and nine. Each chapter demonstrates the emergence of both the action and the research, over the course of the ten month enquiry into continuing professional development. In addition, each chapter comprises the findings from each cycle. Moreover, each cycle comprises two meetings and an implementation stage. The three CAR findings chapters are illustrated in Fig 4.5.

[Fig 4.5 CAR Chapter Seven: Forming a Framework; Chapter Eight: Distinctive

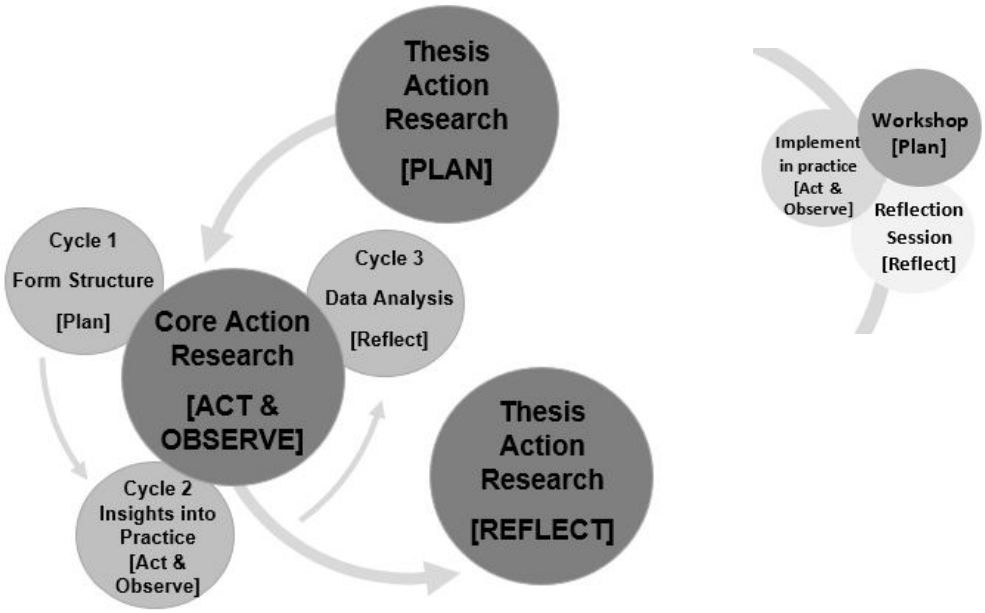
Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) present their core action research (previously in Fig 4.1) as a four stage process of plan, act, observe, and reflect. However through our core action research structure, a three stage process emerged; comprising of a planning session, then incorporating the action and observation during the same stage, then a reflection session; depicted in Fig 4.6

[Fig 4.6 Core action research cycle: plan; act and observe; and reflect]

Lewin (1948) describes the action research cycle as 'a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action' (p. 145), however each of these steps contain a number of elements. For example 'reconnaissance or fact-finding has four functions. First it should evaluate the action… Secondly, it gives the planners a chance to learn… Thirdly, this fact-finding should serve as a basis for correctly planning the next step… Finally, it serves as a basis for modifying the 'overall plan' (1948, p. 145). However, McTaggart (1996) provides a reminder that utilising the cycle does not in itself constitute undertaking action research, moreover, 'action research is not a 'method' or a 'procedure' for research but a series of commitments to observe and problematise through practice, a series of principles for conducting social enquiry' (McTaggart, 1996, p. 248).

The variance in models of action research is explored by Cohen, et al., (2011), and is believed by Stringer (2014, p. 7) to epitomise the 'number of ways in which action research is envisaged'. For example, Cohen, et al., (2011) present eight stage models, such as that of McNiff and Whitehead (2011), and four stage models set out by Sagor (2011) and Zuber-Skerritt (1996a). Stringer (2014) puts forward a three stage action research spiral of look, think, act; whereas Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) put forward four broad stages in the action research cycle of: choosing to change; planning for a change; creating change and sharing the lessons. All of these models incorporate typical action research elements which McNiff (2017, p. 12) describes as an 'action-reflection' cycle, comprising the key elements of; observe, reflect, act, evaluate and modify. Our core action research cycles incorporated these elements within three overarching key stages; plan, act and observe, and reflect. For example, the action stage included action and observation, whilst the reflection stage included reflection and evaluation on practice and on the research. Moreover, the conceptualisation of the thesis and core action

research resulted in cyclical layers of action research emerging through the overall process. Below, Fig 4.7 depicts the 'overall plan' (Lewin, 1948, p. 145), and illustrates the layered cycles of the action research:



[Fig 4.7 Thesis and core action research processes: plan, act and observe, and reflect]

The first overarching cycle comprises:

- TAR phase 1: plan,
- CAR phase 2: act and observe,
- TAR phase 3: reflect.

During CAR phase two, we carried out three cycles of core action research forming the second layer:

- Cycle 1, form structure: plan
- Cycle 2, insights into practice: act and observe
- Cycle 3, data analysis: reflect

Finally, each of these CAR cycles also comprised three individual action research cycles as previously demonstrated in Fig 4.6 of:

- Workshop: plan
- Implement into practice: act and observe
- Reflection session: reflect

[Fig 4.8 TAR stage two]

Nonetheless, these structure diagrams are only now able to be constructed in hindsight, through the TAR phase three stage of writing up the thesis (Fig 4.8). Nyanjom (2018, p. 626) 'argues that it is essential to go through the messy aspects of action research on the journey towards reaching the ordered and tidy presentations of research outcomes'. Therefore, through the findings chapters that follow, I 'delve into the messy areas' (Cook, 2009, p. 289) of the independent and collaborative elements of the research, and 'unravel those processes that are tacit and less conscious' (Nyanjom, 2018, p. 638), and which capture the artistry of collecting, analysing and representing qualitative data (Ellingson, 2009).

4.12 Research Methods

Commonly, studies of childminders have employed research methods such as surveys and interviews (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; NCB 2003; Otero & Melhuish, 2015), utilising traditional forms of data reporting, for instance quantitative charts and tables, or qualitative examples of written text. In addition, these are listed by Creswell and Creswell (2018) to include quotes, dialogue or analogies. Childminding studies which utilised an approach further towards the qualitative end of the continuum (Ellingson, 2009), such as O'Connell (2011), included 'a small survey, interview, limited photography, monitoring of

online childminding fora, and the collection of ephemera' (p. 785) to report on the meanings childminders brought to their work, and the values they hold.

The selection and use of multiple research methods, in action research, is thought by Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) to build rigour, as it enables a more comprehensive sense of the research. Whereas, Ritchie, et al., (2014, p. 53) consider that 'methods in themselves have no intrinsic value', instead it is the research question which directs the data collection methods. My research question aimed to explore ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, therefore, suggested the need for open-ended, exploratory methods of data collection. Further, Somekh and Zeichner (2009) describe action research as 'a methodology grounded in the values and culture of its participant-researchers' (p. 6), thus promoting the childminders' involvement into how the research was designed, carried out and documented, as well as in the evaluation and reflection upon how it was progressing.

In action research, there is also a differentiation between generated data (Ritchie, et al., 2014), and naturally occurring data, which Silverman (2014) recognises to 'derive from situations which exist independently of the researcher's intervention' (p. 315). An example can be found in the research of Bleach (2013), who describes a series of research methods utilised throughout her action research, including 'mixed, flexible, dialogic teaching' (p. 373), on-site visits, training days, follow up visits, evaluation forms, participant observations and feedback from stakeholders. Mukherji and Albon (2015, p. 122) argue that action research 'should not become overly preoccupied with the technical aspects of research methods'. Instead, McNiff (2002) states that an authentic action research study reports on data collected from the research, as well as the researchers' own professional learning 'as a zig zag process of continual review and re-adjustment' (McNiff, 2002, p. 3).

It was therefore, at this stage in the research process, that I encountered another messy area (Cook, 2009). I had planned to undertake collaborative action research with childminders, to explore the question of the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. However, 'unlike other researchers, an action researcher cannot always be sure where their research will take them' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 82), which meant that I was not able to plan and identify research methods in advance, as would be usual through other methodological approaches. Instead, I had sought and been granted fairly broad ethical approval to form a collaborative working group and undertake action research in a specific local context. My intention was to involve the childminders in the planning and undertaking of the core action research, from the point of registering their interest at the end of the online survey and attending the introductory meeting. Subsequently, I identified methods of data collection to capture the discussions during our first meeting, yet with foresight that the research would require a flexible and collaborative approach to data collection 'on an opportunistic basis' (McNiff, 2017, p. 150) from that point forward.

McNiff (2017) provided reassurance at this stage that 'it is not unusual to feel unclear about where to go or what to do next' (p. 117). Instead, I explored the range of qualitative data collection methods, summarised by Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) into two categories of observational and interactional sources of data, and by Creswell (2014) into four types of data: observations; interviews and questionnaires; documents; and audiovisual materials. Winter (1996) defines data gathering in action research as involving 'information that will tell us more than, as practitioners, we usually know – for example, making systematic records' (p.15). Similarly, the nature of the research question and the collaborative approach, was designed to gather the views of childminders and reveal our 'knowing-in-action (Schön, 1987); for which we explored

methods of data collection designed to capture the voices of the childminders and my own, by 'observing and reflecting on our actions, to make a description of the tacit knowing implicit in them' (Schön, 1987, p. 25).

4.12.1 Documents: Reflection Tree and Evaluation

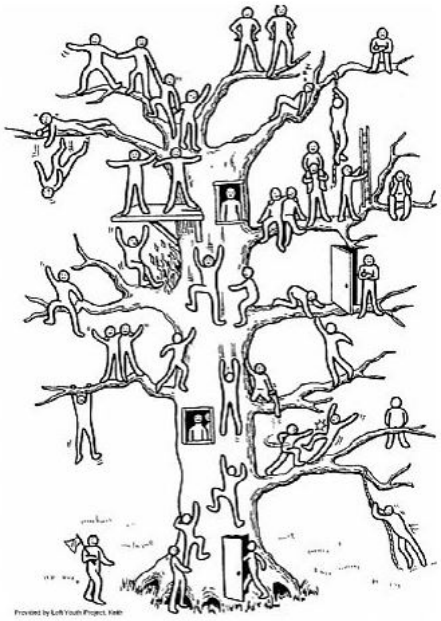
I introduced a consistent method of data collection to capture the core action research in the form of a reflection tree and evaluation template. This template provided a systematic method through which to document self-reflection and evaluate the developing core action research. In addition, it was a method of data collection with which the childminders were familiar, as they are used in various formats by the Local Authority, to evaluate the CPD sessions they deliver. Milligan (2016) shared the ways in which dual positionality within the research project influenced elements of her research, such as the data collection. She acknowledged the 'methods [she] used to be participative because they involved some shift in power dynamics… to guide the data collection' (p. 238) rather than 'a fully participatory approach… [to] include the development of the research questions and data collection tools' (ibid).

The reflection and evaluation form, is an example of a method of data collection that I created and shared with the childminders for review, to which they agreed; subsequently, it was used to document and guide the research. Similarly, the childminders chose their own forms of data collection, during the implementation stages of the core action research, utilising observations and photos, which they then shared to guide our reflective discussions. The reflection and evaluation template, as a method of data collection, does not easily fit into observational or interactional categories (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009). It involved open-ended questions, as used for example in questionnaires, however, it would also fit into the generic category of 'documents',

described by Creswell (2014, p. 245) as ‘ready for analysis without the necessary transcription that is required with observational or interview data’.

The reflection tree was designed by Pip Wilson (2019) for his youth and community work (Fig 4.9), the tree is home to what Wilson (2019) has termed ‘The Blobs’. Portrayed as gender neutral characters, they support reflection, by providing a visual character as a starting point from which to indicate emotions. Each character is strategically placed on the tree in a certain position either with others or on their own. The template was adapted for teaching purposes and shared with me as an engagement and reflection tool, when I studied for a Level 3 Award in Education and Training, and I have since utilised it to facilitate student reflection within my current work role.

Alongside the tree, I added a comment box, asking the childminders to shade the blob that they thought would best represent them in terms of engaging in the session, using the comment box to reflect and explain why they chose that person. The reverse of the template then provided space for evaluative comments, under five broad headings derived from the survey responses in chapter five (see 5.5.3. A Positive Difference): discussions with colleagues; gaining knowledge and practical ideas; their own development; and with an open-ended opportunity to add any other reflections (Fig 4.10).



Reflection

Have a look at the reflection tree and shade the person that best represents you in terms of engaging in today's CPD session.

Please explain why you chose that person

[Fig 4.9 Reflection Tree]

Please comment on the following elements of today's CPD session:

Gaining new knowledge/understanding
Discussions with colleagues
Ideas to take back to your setting
Your own development
Any other reflections

[Fig 4.10 Evaluation Template]

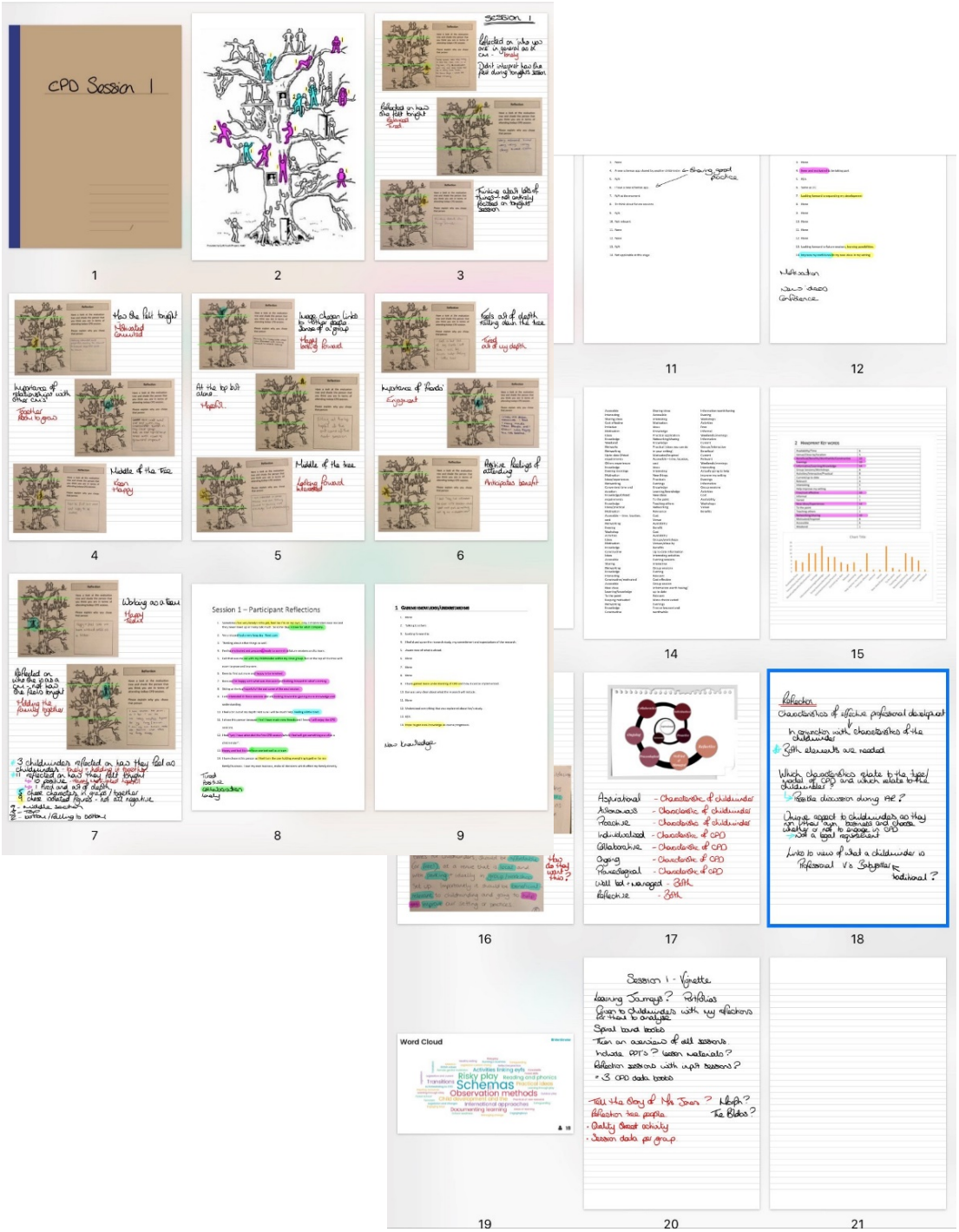
Used as a tool for reflection by the childminders throughout the core action research, the blobs also provided a visual accompaniment to their voices within the thesis (for example; see Chapter Six: 6.6. Childminder Reflections). I found they took on creative purpose for reporting; providing illustration for the chapter headings and on the findings pages alongside the reflective excerpts, as a means of presenting data in an authentic way, and encroaching on the art/impressionist presentation of qualitative data across Ellingson's (2009) continuum. I could have coded the blobs, by assigning letters to each blob for reference and reporting (Creswell, 2014), however, I gained confidence from Oliver's (2014) advice that 'it is possible to develop new and innovative ways to include data in the thesis. The main requirement being that the presentation should reflect as accurately and validly as possible the original data at the point of collection' (p. 170). Moreover, Ellingson (2009) proposes that 'we can blur the boundaries between art and reporting' to enhance the aesthetic value of a report 'serving to make it more beautiful while simultaneously furthering its primary goal of effectively communicating meaning' (p. 154).

4.12.2 Emerging Data Collection Methods

Additional methods of creating and documenting our experiences were identified across the action research cycles, including photos, observations in practice, anecdotal notes, reflective journaling, and reflective writing. Qualitative research is characterised by the documenting of interactions, experiences and social processes, which Flick (2018) understands to necessitate methods of data collection that are appropriate to the field, and that work to address issues of 'transforming complex social situations into texts' (Flick, 2018, p. 5). The methods used to collect data during the core action research were representative of the field of early years in which the CAR was being undertaken, by the very nature of being chosen, in part, by the childminders who formed the research group.

The childminders chose their own methods of documenting and reflecting on their practice, by contributing photos and observations (for example; see Chapter Seven: 7.4.1. Examples of Practice), they offered written suggestions through reflective activities to inform the emerging cycles of CPD (for example; 7.5 Reflection on Research: Session Three), and documented their responses during workshop discussions and activities. I also added my own interpretations, reflections, and notes through reflective journaling, and collated and stored the data, throughout the CAR process.

The session-based approach to the core action research had enabled collection of the varied methods of data, which I stored and categorised by session. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p. 173) suggest transforming primary data 'into a form that can be organised, reorganised and reduced', then skimming to complete three tasks; building an overall picture, adding notes and thoughts, and finally categorising and connecting (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009). I was able to achieve these processes in an efficient manner, during the core action research, by utilising the digital advantages of the Goodnotes App on the iPad Pro. The examples in Fig 4.11, illustrate the economical coding techniques used such as highlighting, which are described by Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p. 175) as coding 'on the run', while data in the action research data was still being collected.



During the core action research the childminders reflected upon and evaluated the process of the research at the end of each cycle, through critical discussion and we

identified ways in which our approach could be developed to inform the next cycle (for example; see Chapter Seven: 7.5. Reflection on Research: Session Three). It was during the final session of the core action research (see Chapter Nine: 9.4. Reflection on Research: Session Seven), that we then worked together to review and analyse all of the data that had been generated over the course of the core action research.

In similarity to our changing roles, the process of creating, collecting and collating documents that formed the data, was a shared process at different times and for different reasons. Our discussions and shared decisions occurred naturally throughout the sessions, and it was these anecdotal occurrences, that were difficult to capture. Audio or video recording the sessions, would have allowed a method of capturing the discussions 'more comprehensively than any other medium' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 163). However, this would also have worked against our intentions to create a relaxed environment in which the childminders and I felt comfortable to discuss and reflect openly and confidently.

Creswell (2014) orders data collection in action research into three dimensions: 'experiencing; enquiring; examining' (p. 622). Data which is collected through 'experience' includes, observations and field notes; 'enquiring' data is produced as a result of asking specific questions; and data collected as a result of 'examining' includes records and documents such as journals and audio or video recording. Due to the systematic nature of action research, I was able to envisage opportunities, through our developing cyclical approach within the core action research, where 'experience' data might be captured that would otherwise have remained anecdotal. For instance, the final part of each reflection session was allocated to reflecting on our research into CPD. I was able to capture these reflective discussions by providing additional resources (for example post it notes; see

Chapter Seven: 7.5. Reflection on Research: Session Three) through which to record summaries of our discussions in written format.

4.13 Data Analysis

Bleach (2013) details the comments of her participants as having 'mentioned' (p. 374) their responses, Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) discuss the feelings of their participants, and Lightfoot and Frost (2015) transcribed their qualitative data to identify emerging themes. This small sample of studies demonstrate the 'depth and richness' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 62) of qualitative data, which Punch and Oancea, (2014) emphasise need to be interpreted in a 'rigorous and scholarly' (p. 219) manner.

The transparency of the way in which qualitative data is analysed, is also a key factor in action research according to Punch and Oancea (2014), to make visible the evolving nature of action research, and consequently the evolving nature of the data collection and analysis (Taylor, 2010). The fundamental features of data analysis are stipulated by Punch and Oancea (2014) as the need to be 'systematic and disciplined' (p. 220), for which Creswell (2014) suggests six steps of; collecting, preparing, reading, coding, describing and theming. Further, Mukherji and Albon (2015) emphasise the need to allow an inductive approach towards the emergence of data, which Ritchie, et al., (2014, p. 7) explain as 'building knowledge from the bottom up through observations of the world' and 'with no clear, preconceived view about whether or in what way that data will answer their research question' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 154).

Richardson (2000) identifies building metaphors, commonly utilised throughout the language of research, such as 'foundation, structure, construction' (p. 940), which Richardson (2000) deems to be rigid, and therefore less able to signify emergence of data collection or analysis. I found building metaphors to be useful, particularly with

regards to framing, building, constructing and co-creating knowledge and our understanding during the research process. Yet, I also resonated with the fluidity of our roles, and the emerging, developing process of the action research. It is possible that the joining of these opposing concepts can occur in action research, as it is a 'dynamic process involving a spiral of activities' (Creswell, 2014, p. 619). Inspired by Richardson's (2000, p. 941) question of 'where better to develop your sense of self, your voice, than in the process of doing your research?' and through her belief of 'writing as a process of discovery' (p. 936), I thereby introduce my constructivist approach to the analysis and representation of the data during the thesis action research, through the emergent, inductive framework of crystallized, layered accounts of qualitative analysis (Richardson, 2000; Ellingson, 2009; 2013).

4.13.1 Crystallization

Crystallization is mentioned by Ingleby (2017, p. 4) to 'enrich qualitative research processes' in his exploratory study of policy and practice. Yet, Ingleby continued to triangulate the findings from his research, a strategy commonly used in qualitative data analysis to authenticate findings (Creswell, 2014). McNiff (2017) explains triangulation in terms of intersecting lines on a map; by gathering multiple forms of data, from multiple sources, and including multiple opinions from different people, rigour is demonstrated in the analytical processes. Whereas, crystallization presumes 'an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach' (Richardson, 2000, p. 934), through the metaphor of a crystal, rather than the triangle.

Richardson (2000) describes the metaphor of a crystallized approach to data analysis as 'prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose' (p. 934). This concept enables data to be viewed from multiple perspectives and

is explained by Ellingson (2009, p. 5) as offering a 'valuable way of thinking through the links between…systematic analyses and creative genres of representation'. It is Ellingson's (2009) development of the concept of crystallization as an approach to both data analysis and representation that inspired me to think 'creatively and productively about research processes and representational choices' (p. 24) throughout the action research process.

Ellingson's (2009) exploration of crystallization builds on Richardson's (2000) original concept, in which she likened the process of data analysis to the multi-dimensionalities of a crystal rather than the two-dimensional triangle. Triangulation of data is used to corroborate findings through multiple data sources (McNiff, 2017), whereas crystallization involves making meaning from data through 'multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 15). In depth understandings are constructed, layered and experienced in different ways, viewed at different angles, then mulled over until they express another insight or offer another path down which to journey.

Richardson (2000) focused primarily on deconstructing conventional methods of analysing data and utilising the notion of crystallization to situate all knowledge as inherently partial, based in postmodernist and poststructuralist paradigms. Whilst Ellingsons' (2009) work challenges the methodological divide between the dichotomies of art and science on the qualitative continuum, situated in a social constructionist paradigm, promoting 'innovative approaches to sense making and representation' (p. 7) through crystallized texts. More recently crystallization was recognised by Denzin and Lincoln (2013) in their collection of qualitative perspectives and methods to interpreting qualitative materials, in which Ellingson (2013) clarifies her approach to crystallization through five principles, which 'celebrate knowledge as inevitably situated, partial, constructed, multiple and embodied' (p. 432).

I have situated the thesis action research within the constructivist paradigm and the core action research within a social constructivist paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (2000) describe the position of a constructivist, with regards to voice, to be a 'passionate participant as facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction' (p. 166); with a focus on the nature of knowledge as 'understanding… and individual reconstructions' (p. 166); further, identifying 'trustworthiness and authenticity' (p. 166) as the more fitting criteria for quality, than 'conventional benchmarks of…validity, reliability and objectivity' (p. 166). Therefore, the constructivist/social constructivist approach across the phases of the TAR and CAR resonated with Ellingson's (2009) social constructionist framework for crystallization, which involves 'multigenre representations' (p. 5) of data. In addition, she suggests the meaning derived from authentic knowledge is continuously interpreted and reconstructed by those involved, either as researchers, participants or readers. She goes on to explain her view that 'meaning resides not *in* any one person, but *between* people who continually (re)negotiate it' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 32).

This thesis, for example, is just one genre of representation of the action research, which in itself is a culmination of many other forms of representation, already developed, created, and formed, through the data analysis process. Similarly, Rowley (2014) refers to data analysis as a journey requiring different approaches for different audiences, and my doctoral journey provided many such opportunities. For example, I participated in the Vitae Three Minute Thesis competition (Vitae, 2018), for which I was required to condense my research into a three minute verbal presentation, supported by a single, static PowerPoint slide (Appendix 4). I achieved this by telling the story of Mrs Jones. Her character embodied the childminders from the literature review; her story starting in the 1970s and developing through time, to represent the childminders' collective voice from our action research. I won at institutional level, next representing the university at

the regional stage of the competition and this process helped me to understand that data could be successfully presented in a scholarly way, yet through an artistic form.

When exploring approaches to qualitative analysis of data, crystallization offered a creative and artistic form with which to experiment through the TAR and with the childminders during the CAR. Demonstrated in Zuber-Skerritt and Perry's (2002) action research framework, the final thesis writing stage is an individual process. As such, the exploration of creative, yet equally rigorous, approaches to analysis and representation of the data, appealed to my goal of producing a thesis which conformed to doctoral requirements; yet, in such a way that allowed me to engage 'in serious play' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 80), and which made visible the representations of data that were created and crystallized, through the data analysis process, during both the TAR and CAR, prior to being refined into the final thesis.

4.13.1.1 Dendritic and Integrated Crystallization

Through this thesis, I report on the action research process, utilising the data reporting technique of 'integrated crystallization' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 97). Ellingson (2009) describes integrated crystallization as 'producing a written… text consisting of multiple genres that reflect… multiple points on the qualitative continuum' (p. 97), further bringing the multiple forms of dendritic data analysis and representation together.

Dendritic crystallization, is defined by Ellingson (2009, p. 126) as 'an ongoing and dispersed process of making meaning through multiple… genres, constituted in a series of separate but related representations based on a data set'. Dendritic crystallization explains the varying modes of data analysis and representation that took place through the course of this doctoral research, outside of the final thesis report, for example conference presentations and posters. They are conceptualized by Ellingson (2009) as

crystalline dendrites, which take the form of tree-like fractal patterns, branching off of the main stem. Spirals are also considered a fractal pattern, thus I was able to apply and adapt the metaphorical approach of crystallizing the data through dendritic 'spurs'; a more suitable fit with my use of a cyclical thesis and core action research spiral (an example is illustrated below in Fig 4.12).

[Fig 4.12 Dendritic spurs, depicting stages of data presentation]

As a result I was able to understand that, whilst these opportunities had the potential to be collaborative ventures, they were undertaken in my TAR role, as a doctoral student, including examples such as; conference presentations and posters. Through this approach, meaning making began from the collection of the survey data, and continued through various genres of representation, towards and beyond the thesis.

Ellingson (2009) provided some artistic examples of genres of data representation (poetry, narratives, fiction, video representation, live performance, stories, painting and sculpture), which I found helpful to support my understanding of the possibilities for creative representation. In addition, Ellingson (2009) lists useful questions that supported

my consideration of the ways in which the data could be reported, for example, 'with what genres are my participants most familiar and comfortable? What texts could I produce that would benefit my participants?' (p. 77). Subsequently, I made use of varying genres of data representation throughout the core and thesis action research; some ongoing and others employed at specific points. A particular example of dendritic crystallization, can be found in my creation of an edition of the Essential Childminder Magazine (extracts are shared in Appendix 5).

4.13.1.2 The Essential Childminder Magazine

During my previous role as a childminder I had worked together with members of our local childminding group to produce a monthly magazine for childminders called 'The Essential Childminder'. The magazine ran for three years, from July 2010 to October 2013, resulting in the publication of 40 editions. It was a form of media that some of the childminders in the CAR group were already familiar with, and one which allowed information to be presented both in writing and visually. Once all of the stages of the core action research had concluded, I compiled all of the data from each session, for example: the workshop materials; photographic insights into practice; our reflections on the research; and the comments produced during our final collaborative analysis of the data, into a special edition of the Essential Childminder Magazine.

Although a time consuming and lengthy process, this special edition of the magazine enabled me to 'keep the forest and the trees' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 129), whilst sharing my thoughts, interpretations and surface analysis of our collaborative approach to exploring the ways in which CPD could be more appropriate for childminders. I emailed a PDF version of the magazine out to all of the childminders in the CAR group and invited them to review the representation of the CAR and respond with any thoughts. The childminders'

responses are presented and discussed in chapter nine (see 9.5.1. Essential Childminder Magazine).

4.13.1.3 Conference Presentations and Posters

I had further opportunities to produce dendritic representations of the data, in the genre of PowerPoint and Prezi presentations and posters, at conferences such as: the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Conferences (Luff & Aaronricks, 2016; Aaronricks, 2018a; Aaronricks, 2018b; Aaronricks, 2019); the ARU Faculty Research Conference (Aaronricks, 2017a); and ARU Student Research Conference (Aaronricks, 2017b; Aaronricks, 2018c). Each of these instances of engaging with the data, required presenting it in a different format, at a different stage in the doctoral process and aimed at different audiences. The data was also (re)presented to meet the criteria for competing in the three minute thesis (Aaronricks, 2018d), as well as formulated into written papers for the EdD conditions of annual monitoring reviews and confirmation of candidature. Finally, but not conclusively, the data has been crystallized again through the process of presenting and discussing it in this thesis format, further acknowledging the concept of 'writing [as] a process of discovery' (Richardson, 2000, p. 936).

4.14 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced my research question, situated the research within a social constructivist paradigm, and demonstrated the conceptualisation of thesis and core action research to be a methodological approach that supports the dual positionality of independent and collaborative phases of the doctoral enquiry. I have demonstrated my understanding of data to be constructed, interpreted, crystallized and developed throughout the emerging cycles of the process.

In terms of presenting and reporting on the data in this thesis, I bring together the multiple genres of representation, into one integrated, coherent text (Ellingson, 2009). Consequently, the forthcoming findings chapters (from five through to nine), move 'back and forth between several genres… as a larger picture is constructed' (p. 104). Broadly: chapter five presents the quantitative and qualitative findings from the initial survey, utilising bar charts alongside narrative stories; chapter six introduces the design and collaborative ethical considerations of the core action research; then chapter seven, eight and nine present the core findings and discussion from three CAR cycles that include our reflections on practice and on the research.

Chapter 5

Taking Stock

5 Surveying and Taking Stock

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

My intention within the doctoral study was to work with childminders, to explore ways in which continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities could be developed to be more appropriate for their distinct needs. Collaborative action research provided a systematic means through which I could explore my research question with childminders (Stringer, 2014). Nevertheless, 'the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves… as well-formed structures… but as messy, indeterminate situations' (Schön, 1987, p. 4). I had identified that the voices of childminders were lacking from existing studies, however, I was yet to establish their current views on continuing professional development, and I had many critical questions (McNiff, 2017). Therefore, this chapter serves as an account of an interim period in my doctoral research, in which I drew from traditional methods of gathering information from the childminding community, to undertake an initial survey of local childminders' current experiences of continuous professional development.

I identify the design and distribution of the online survey in this chapter; situated within the first thesis action research cycle (Fig 5.1), previously introduced in chapter four (see 4.11. Thesis and Core Action Research Design). The survey functioned as a method through which I could explore the feasibility of undertaking action research with a group of local childminders, and a means by which to request expressions of interest from responding

[Fig 5.1 Thesis Action Research: Survey collection and data analysis]

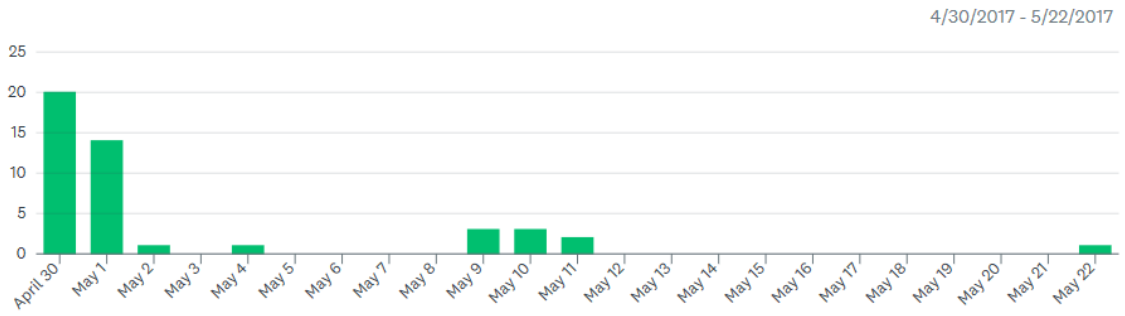
childminders, to take part in the core action research. I present the findings, which comprise quantitative forms of data such as profiling, and utilise reporting methods from across the qualitative continuum (Ellingson, 2013) to narrate the childminders' collective story (Richardson, 1990), interspersed with my analytical commentary.

5.2 Survey Design

In chapter four (see 4.11.1.2. Online Survey), I discussed my use of a survey as a suitable method through which to gather baseline data (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009). The survey template is shared in Appendix 6, which also depicts my use of different types of questions. A survey is defined by Creswell (2014) as an 'instrument for data collection' (p. 411), which needs to be constructed clearly and with ethical consideration of the information required for the research. Consequently, I drew from the advice of Creswell (2014) to support the design and review of the survey utilising closed and demographic questions to establish basic profiling information; open-ended questions to ask for views and experiences; and two matrix scales to indicate the frequency of engagement in CPD, and concurrence with a number of statements relating to features of CPD, drawn from the literature review (see Chapter Three: 3.5. Features of CPD).

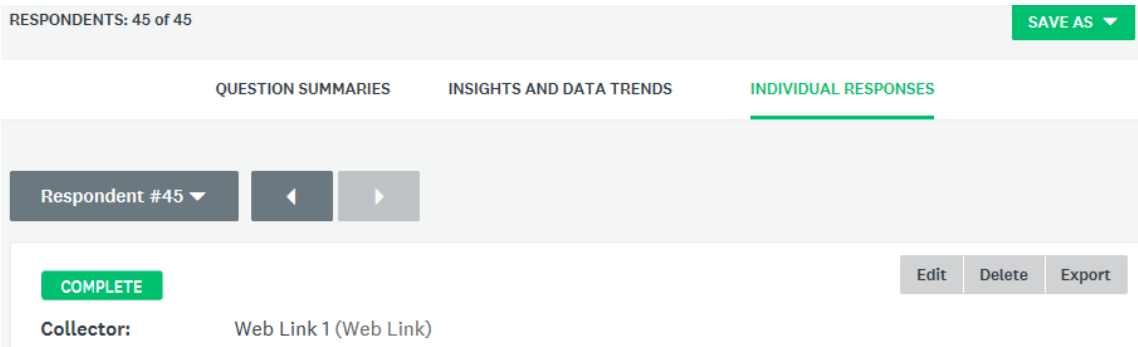
The survey was created, and the data collated and stored, through an online programme called Survey Monkey. The ethical regulations of data storage and sharing, at the time of undertaking the survey, were stipulated through the Data Protection Act (c.29). I have discussed the ethical considerations for the research in chapter four (see 4.9. Ethical Considerations), in addition, I upgraded my Survey Monkey account to enable added options, including the ability to export data via CSV, PDF, PPT, SPSS and XLS (Survey Monkey, 2020) and to enable me to customise the collector settings. As a result I was able to strengthen my ethical approach by deactivating the feature which stored IP

addresses, and enable the feature which allowed participants to go back, at any point in the survey and edit their responses, prior to submission. The online survey link was live for a period of one month (May 2017), and during this time a total of 45 childminders completed and submitted the survey. The table below (Fig 5.2) demonstrates the periods of completion, primarily when the link was first posted; after a mid-month prompt by 'bumping' my original post back up to the top of the Facebook page; and again when I posted a final reminder before closing the link.



[Fig 5.2 Volume of survey responses across a one month period,]

Data analysis options were also included in the online survey package, such as the ability to download individual responses, and the option to filter responses based on chosen criteria. Each response was automatically assigned a number by the survey monkey programme, which I utilised when drawing together the collective voice, and when identifying the individual and anomalous response amongst the collective (5.4.1 Anomalous Response), for instance the example in Fig 5.3 is coded as R45.



[Fig 5.3 Survey Monkey data analysis numbered by individual response]

Where appropriate, I have also included the summary of the question data, created by Survey Monkey in response to the type of question; for example bar graphs, frequency charts and tables of qualitative comments. The Survey Monkey program performed much of the initial administrative task of organising the responses, offering me a sound basis from which to begin my own engagement and analysis of the data.

5.3 Articulating the Collective Voice

Surveys are usually employed to sample a population, then generalised from the results (Creswell, 2014). However, as childminders hold common traits (Jones & Osgood, 2007, Brooker, 2016), but lack a common identity (Ang, et al., 2017), and the survey distribution is concentrated on a particular population; the results from my survey are not deemed to be generalisable. Instead, Ritchie, et al., (2014) describe surveys to be 'a rich source of data to support quite refined purposive sampling' (p. 124).

I introduce the childminders first, as an online group of 45 respondents to my initial survey (see 5.4 Introducing the Childminders), then as the smaller group of sixteen, who participated in the core action research (see 6.3 Participants). Oliver (2014) advises that in instances such as this, where it is not feasible to collect data from every childminder in England, 'the intention is normally that the sample is representative of the population'

(p.149). Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter two (see 2.2 Overview of Childminding Internationally and in England; 2.6 Discovering a Collective Identity), the childminding role and population is extremely diverse across England and internationally. Instead, in order to situate this group of childminders within a local area context in England, I provide demographic contextualisation in Appendix 7. This information works to typify the core action research group of childminders, within the more general context of England, drawing from sources such as the Local Authority census and economic data (Chelmsford City Council, 2021) and the Essex Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Summary (Derry & Langrish, 2019).

The survey served the purpose of allowing me to take stock (McNiff, 2017), providing a local perspective on childminders' current experiences of professional development opportunities. Initially, I was able to gain the 'big picture' of the data through 'economical' thematic analysis (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 174), and identify key themes from the childminders' responses. I collated this initial overview as a Prezi presentation, for discussion the following month (June 2017) at the introductory research meeting (see Chapter Six: 6.5. Research Design).

The final thesis writing stage is an individual process, and the intended audience are the readers rather than the participants (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). Consequently, I held value in authoring the childminders' voices through a crystallized process (Ellingson, 2009) that made visible how these interpretations had taken place, and that provided a space where their voices were authentically represented. Authenticity is argued by Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007) to be more fitting to an 'open-ended, collaborative, situation specific' (p. 423) action research study, than the terms validity or reliability. Further, Lincoln and Guba (2000) perceive voice as a 'multilayered problem' (p. 183), referring to Richardson's (1990; 2000) work as an example of ways in which 'a researcher

can overcome the tendency to write in the distanced and abstracted voice' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). Thus, in recognition of the privileged process of reporting the survey responses, and the contextual nature of the childminders views, I was inspired to draw understandings from Richardson's (1990) approach to articulating collective stories.

I understood the data collected through the survey to comprise 45 individual perspectives of CPD, which, when analysed 'utilising a layered format of representation' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 63) created a collective understanding. Further, Cohen, et al., (2011, p. 180) cite the term 'understanding' as being more appropriate than validity for qualitative research, attributing the importance of honesty from the researcher to be the determining factor. Similarly, for Taylor (2010) the term validity was replaced by trustworthiness, prompting me to focus on the true reporting of participants voices, as opposed to 'proving the truth of my work' (Taylor, 2010, p. 297).

As suggested by Ellingson (2009), consideration is paid in this chapter, not only to the transparency of the analytic process, but to the weaving together of a written text 'consisting of multiple genres that reflect (and straddle) multiple points of the qualitative continuum' (p. 97). After her successful appearance in the Three Minute Thesis (see Chapter Four: 4.13.1. Crystallization), I drew inspiration from my use of Mrs Jones, who had embodied our collective story of the core action research. I employed the assistance of three childminders, to represent the collective voices in this chapter; this time, narrating the responses of the childminders who completed the survey, embodied into three collective groups (see Chapter Five: 5.4. Introducing the Childminders). Further, Richardson (1990) guided my representation of data in this way, through her suggestions to utilise;

> ‘variety in format and voice… use one-line quotations, sometimes standing by themselves, sometimes in droves; mid-length quotations by themselves or mixed with one-liners; short phrases quoted within the body of the narrative; long(er) quotations broken into paragraphs…episodes, ministories embedded within the larger narrative… quotes with a variety of language patterns, images, slangs, and regionalisms makes texts both more alive and more credible’ (Richardson, 1990, p. 39).

Introducing the childminders, and presenting the findings from the survey in this way, worked to challenge my understanding of the ethics of representation, by reminding me that ‘knowledge is not produced by… disembodied voices’ (Ellingson, 2009, p. 36). Instead, I present the insights provided by the childminders as ‘fully embodied phenomena’ (ibid).

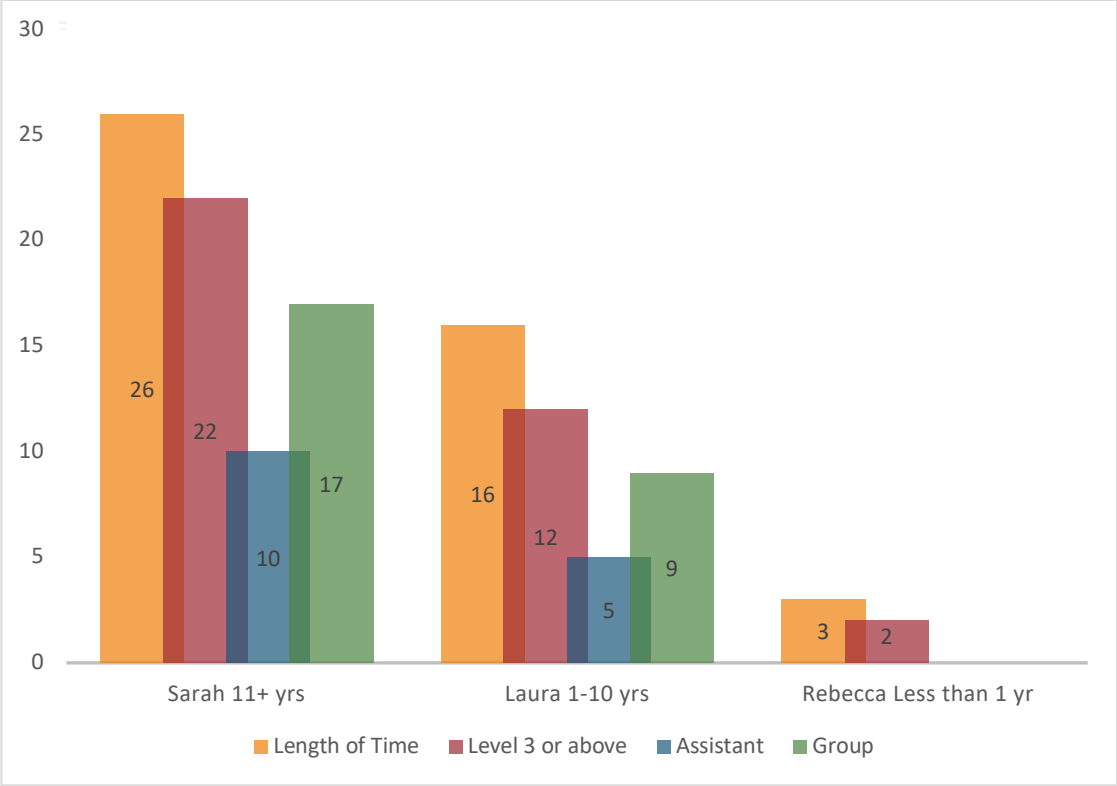
5.4 Introducing the Childminders

I categorised the 45 individual responses to the survey, into three collective groups of childminders, based upon the length of time they had been childminding. I had provided four options, within this first question, for the childminders to indicate the length of time they had been in the role: less than one year; one to five years; six to ten years; and eleven or more years (see Appendix 6: Question 1). Through the analytical process, I combined two of the time frames together, to create one collective group who had been childminding for between one and ten years. In doing so, I was able to capture the views of three childminders who were new to the role, having been registered for less than a year; sixteen childminders who had been in the role for one to ten years, since the implementation and transition to the EYFS (DCSF, 2008); and 26 childminders, who comprised just over half (58%) of the total number of respondents to the survey, that had

been childminding for eleven or more years and who, therefore, had experience of the childminding role prior to the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008).

Other surveys that have profiled childminders, such as, Otero and Melhuish (2015) and Kalitowski (2017), provided numerous options in answer to the question of the length of time their respondents had been working in the early years sector. For example, Otero and Melhuish (2015) offered six periods of time spanning from 'less than 1 year up to 5 years; 6 to 10 years; 11 to 15 years; 16 to 20 years; 21 to 30 years; more than 30 years' (p. 24). Kalitowski (2017) offers twelve periods of time spanning from less than 6 months through to more than 40 years. However, these two examples of surveys reached out to a wider simple population than my survey; Otero and Melhuish (2015) sampling 99 respondents, and Kalitowski (2017) receiving 1,888 responses.

I drew from a smaller population through the local Facebook group (n=116), from which Creswell (2014) indicated that I could anticipate a response rate of '50% or better' (p. 416). Therefore, I captured an insight into three groups of childminders, who I profiled as 'new' (less than a year); 'seasoned' as defined by one of the childminders in this group (R24) (one to ten years); and 'experienced' (eleven years or more). Responses to this and the other three profiling questions are collated and presented below in a bar chart (Fig 5.4). The responses to questions two, three, and four demonstrate the number of childminders in each group who are qualified to level 3 or above; the number that work with an assistant; and the number that belong to a childminding group.



[Fig 5.4 Profiling information: Q1. Experience, Q2. Qualifications, Q3. Assistants, and Q4. Group membership]

The profiling information is discussed by way of introduction to the three childminders who embody their collective group identities and narrate the collective voices: Sarah; Laura; and Rebecca. I selected the names by mapping the collective length of time they had been childminding (indicated through the survey response to question one), to the most popular girl's name of the decade, as recorded by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2020) in which they would most likely have been born. For example: I was 26 years old when I began childminding, after the birth of my second child, whereas Mayall and Petrie (1983) found the childminders in their study to be 'typically in their thirties' (p. 241); Jones and Osgood (2007) profiled childminders, across their review of research, as being more generally in their 30s; similarly, Kalitowski (2017) profiled her

respondents ‘under the age of 30… to work primarily in non-domestic settings, while those over 45 are significantly more likely to be childminders’ (p. 7).

The survey was carried out in 2017, and the ONS statistics were recorded during the fourth year of each decade, therefore: Sarah was the most popular girls name of the 1970s (experienced, aged 43); Laura, a popular name in the 1980s (seasoned, aged 33); and Rebecca, the most popular name in the 1990s (new, aged 23). Sarah embodies the group of 26 childminders who have been minding for eleven or more years, therefore, she holds a wealth of practical experience. She represents the 65% of the group, who are members of a childminding network and works primarily on her own (62% of this group do not work with an assistant).

Sarah also represents the 84% of childminders in her group who are qualified to level 3 or above. As a result, she does not fit neatly into categories established in previous studies, such as that of Fauth et al., (2011) who claimed that childminders who had been minding for the longest period of time, held low levels of qualifications and were less likely to be networked. In fact, 80% of the 45 childminders who completed this survey held at least a level 3 qualification; a higher representation than more recent studies demonstrate, such as Bonetti (2018), who reported that 69% of childminders are qualified to at least level 3. Sarah, therefore, voices the qualitative responses across all of the 26 childminders in her group.

She is joined by Laura, a ‘seasoned’ (R24) childminder, who is one of the 75% of level 3 qualified childminders in her group and, who represents the voices of the sixteen childminders who have been minding for between one to ten years. She is one of the 56% of childminders in her group who are members of a childminding network, and also works on her own (69% of childminders in this group do not work with an assistant).

Representing the third group of childminders, Rebecca embodies the voices of only three childminder respondents to the survey, who are new to the role; being registered as a childminder for less than a year. She has children of her own and networks with other childminders occasionally online, but is not yet part of a childminding group, and she does not work with an assistant. Rebecca represents the 67% of childminders in her group who are degree qualified, therefore, like Sarah, does not fit neatly into the categories defined by Fauth et al (2011), who discerned that highly qualified equated to highly networked. Whilst Rebecca is representational of just 8% of the childminding workforce who are degree qualified (Bonetti, 2018), she also exemplifies a very small percentage of the overall childminding sample population within this survey, further substantiating Bonetti's (2018) concern that the numbers of newly registering childminders are diminishing.

5.4.1 Anomalous Response

These three women provide the collective voice of their representative group, sharing their views and experiences of professional development, alongside my authorial narrative 'which is rarely... absent' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). They primarily speak for themselves, through 'strategic selection and arrangement of data excerpts so that a dialogue among them takes place' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 153), to create the narrative, whilst I also discern the anomalous response amongst the collective, so as to remain cautious against creating what Mazzei (2009, p. 11) terms a 'normative voice'.

Richardson (1990) argues 'collective stories are about people who are not collectively organised' (p. 25). Therefore, I drew from the developed ideas of Mazzei and Jackson (2012) who provide a caution against 'simplistic treatments of voice' (p. 745), highlighting 'the dangerous assumptions in trying to represent a single truth (seemingly articulated by a single voice)'. For Taylor (2010) this entailed the inclusion of 'alternative perspectives

so that [she] illuminated, rather than hid, counter-patterns' (p. 297). I have employed crystallization to bring together 'multiple contrasting, even conflicting' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 30) understandings, which enables space for the individual and anomalous response which 'problematize[s] those same claims' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 30). Through my initial analysis of the individual responses, I also identified that at least six of the respondents were not local childminders, these five childminders remain included and valued, for the alternative perspective they occasionally provide.

5.5 Discovering Collective Voices

When ordering the survey questions, I considered it important to establish whether Sarah, Laura and Rebecca engaged in CPD activities, prior to seeking their views on these experiences. Kalitowski (2017) who surveyed practitioners from a range of early years settings, found that 98% of her respondents had engaged in forms of CPD, thus I expected a largely positive response to this question.

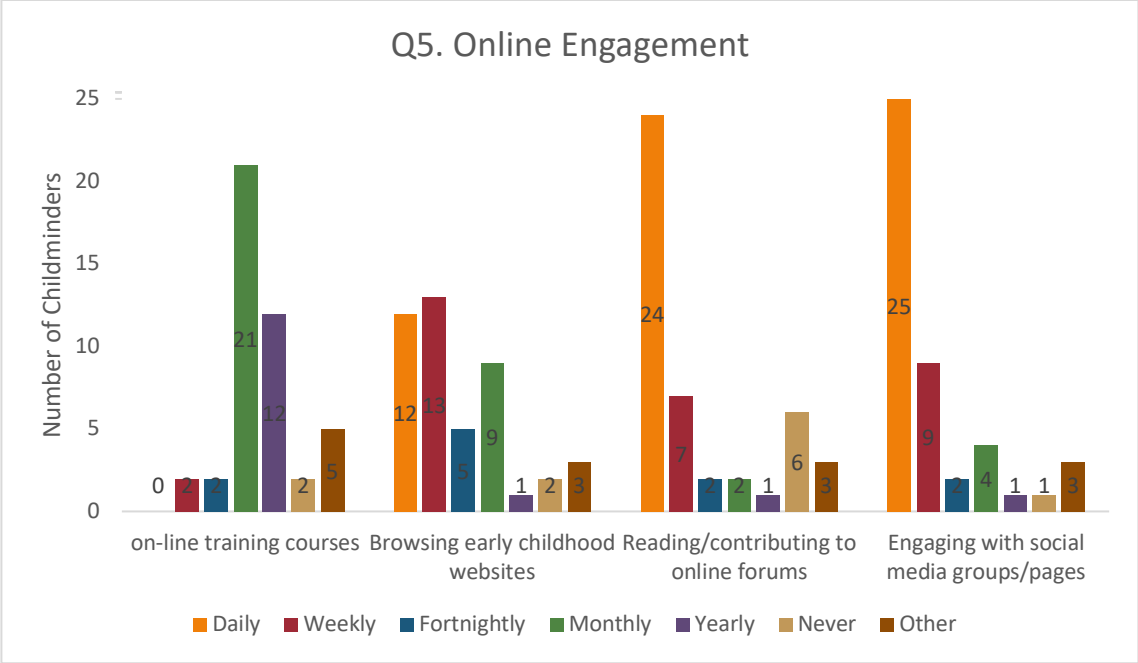
5.5.1 Engagement in CPD

All of the childminder respondents to my survey engaged in professional development activities in some form (no one skipped this question). I provided a broad list of types of CPD activities, drawn from my own experience and building from the questionnaire used in the SEED Study of Quality Childminder Provision in England, by Otero and Melhuish (2015). Through the matrix structuring of this question, I asked the childminders to indicate the frequency of their engagement in each type of activity, by checking one of the options: daily; weekly; fortnightly; monthly; yearly; or never. This provided an indication, both of the types of CPD the childminders engaged with, and the frequency of this engagement, per type of activity.

The final option of ‘other’ offered a space for the childminders to suggest additional activities, such as ‘webinars’ (R33), ‘meeting at toddler groups’ (R35), and ‘linking in with other settings’ (R21). Through the initial economical categorisation of the data (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009) the collective voices were separated into two discussions of; online and offline engagement.

5.5.1.1 Online Engagement

The childminders had accessed the survey by way of a web link, posted on the childminding Facebook page, therefore, unsurprisingly demonstrated a 100% online presence. Analysis of the individual responses to question five (n=45) indicate that every childminder engaged online in some way: either in forums; through social media networking; completing online training courses; or browsing early years websites. This is reflective of studies such as the SEED (Otero & Melhuish, 2015) in which 90% of childminders indicated that they used the internet to support their work. Although, Otero and Melhuish (2015) did not specifically acknowledge the use of the internet for training purposes.



[Fig 5.5 Question 5: Do you engage in any of the following professional development activities? Online Engagement]

Demonstrated in Fig 5.5, Sarah, Laura and Rebecca, can all be found online on a daily basis chatting in forums (53%) or via social media groups (55%), whilst the completion of online training courses is also popular, yet completed less often on a monthly basis (47%). They spend time browsing early childhood websites, although the phrasing of this option is quite vague and could refer to many different websites; reinforced through the more even spread of engagement on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. I did not ask the childminders, through this question, to specify which types of websites they accessed, whereas, examples are provided by Otero and Melhuish (2015) who categorised the answers by their specificity to childminding, for example, 'Ofsted, Foundation Years, PACEY' (p. 33), more general websites such as Activity Village and including social media pages such as Facebook.

I was interested in the individual childminder who indicated that they never engaged with online forums, social media pages or browsed early childhood websites, particularly as the survey had been accessed online via a social media page. Respondent 30 had indicated no to each of these options, identifying that she only used the internet to access monthly online training courses. This childminder also skipped eight of the fourteen survey questions; providing only the profiling information and answers to the two quantitative questions; 5 and 12. Newby (2010) details non-completion as a common problem in surveys, and it may be that this childminder did not have much time to devote to the survey, or was not willing to contribute in a qualitative sense.

I isolated comments relating to online engagement, from across the survey, which Sarah, Laura and Rebecca suggest as a useful means through which to access training, support each other, and share good practice:

> ***Rebecca:*** *Online development is widely accessible, whereas face to face opportunities are harder to come across.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *I have become a member of childcare.co.uk where courses are online and have been watching webinars both of which I can access from home. I have found them very helpful and have been able to implement more changes since I have been using online training.*
>
> ***Sarah****: I do online courses, I try to keep up to date with face to face/e-learning CPD and whenever it becomes available I will try to access it. I find a lot through Facebook. I have a list of relevant online courses that I am working my way through. To be honest, I draw so much inspiration, information, ideas and confidence from online groups that the whole perception of CPD is changing for me.*

Laura also provides a cautionary statement:

> ***Laura:*** *Online courses have a place and offer something, but online support groups tend to be moaning grounds where inaccurate messages get shared and spread. I would prefer more face to face opportunities.*

Further to Laura's call for face to face opportunities, Ingleby and Hedges (2012) identified a 'lack of confidence' (p. 533) in early years practitioners' IT literacy skills, thus an online presence does not necessarily equate to easy accessibility or IT literacy for all:

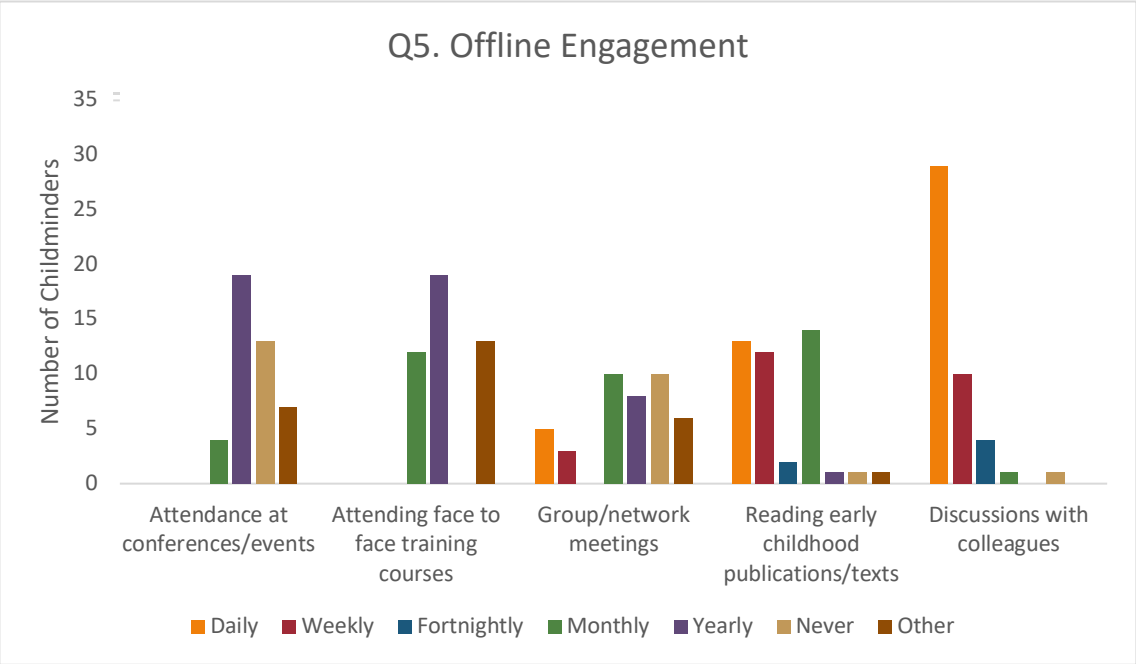
> ***Anomalous response:*** *Most courses etc. are booked over computer and I have difficulty because I'm not computer literate.*

Advancements in technology, such as the introduction of social media and on line learning platforms, provide a largely accessible means through which childminders can access training and support, including the potential to complete formal qualifications via distance learning deliveries. Two examples have been put forward in the survey of completion of an FdA in Childhood Studies (R15) and an MA in Early Childhood Studies (R32). Advancements in technology have also benefited my research, for example, by allowing my initial contact with this group of childminders to be more efficient than the recruitment methods utilised in earlier studies; such as that of Jackson and Jackson (1979) who began their December Dawnwatch, with instructions to 'get up before dawn, be in a working class area of any city you choose in Britain…watch for parents, toddlers, babies and backstreet childminders' (p. 12).

Whilst online activities are largely considered by these childminders as 'useful and convenient' (R14), there remains a desire for face to face training and an importance placed on interacting with others offline.

5.5.1.2 Offline Engagement

Childminders use their home settings as a base from which to work, in addition, they 'have the whole world to play in' (Barnetson, 2012, p. 11) which in turn provides opportunities to meet up and network. This is evidenced in Fig 5.6, as a daily occurrence by 64% of this group of childminders.



[Fig 5.6 Question 5: Do you engage in any of the following professional development activities? Offline Engagement]

Monthly face to face meetings and training courses are also deemed by the childminders to be beneficial, as demonstrated throughout the survey responses:

> ***Sarah:*** *Childminding can be lonely and it is good to meet new people and hear new ideas. We go to toddler groups, meet with minders daily, and go to network meetings, linking in with other settings to share good practice. It helps talking to other professional people with different ideas.*

***Laura**: I would like more opportunities for CPD with colleagues and peers. I meet with a childminder friend and discuss the children's development and how to bring the children on further.*

***Rebecca**: Online is ideal but you get so much more from face to face, building links with other childminders and hearing and sharing tips.*

Studies as early as that of Jackson and Jackson (1979), the work of Owen (2000; 2003; 2006; 2007) and more recently larger national studies such as that of Otero and Melhuish (2015) suggest local childminder networks as a useful source from which to create positive opportunities for professional development. However, formal networks, have diminished in line with the withdrawal of government investment (Callanan, 2014). Instead, the insights provided here by the childminders, support the importance they place on building informal relationships; 64% of the childminders engage in discussions with each other on a daily basis. In addition, they have created and engage with their own informal childminder networks, for example at toddler groups where they can build relationships with each other while they are working. Laura identifies that there is a need for more of these types of CPD opportunities.

5.5.2 The Affect of CPD

The childminders' accounts chronicle the ways in which they are positively affected by engaging in CPD, which they report to be: inspiring; motivating; confidence building; and that it fosters collaborations. In addition I acknowledge the anomalous responses that indicate a more neutral experience:

***Anomalous response:** No, it hasn't done so as yet. It rarely makes a difference.*

5.5.2.1 Inspired, Motivated, Confident and Collaborative

There was a clear sense of positivity towards current CPD experiences as the childminders discuss how it inspires and motivates them, that it works to build confidence and enables opportunities to build collaborative networks. Sarah and Laura recognise the benefits of CPD to support their business and work to address some of the barriers of operating in isolation, such as loneliness. Moreover, Sarah, recognises that she is in an experienced position to support others through this process:

> ***Sarah:*** *I find CPD very interesting, it boosts and inspires me. It has enabled me to be more reflective and to think more critically in how I offer my provision in all areas, and given me the confidence to implement the changes. I can help others through mutual support and the sharing of ideas, and it also gives me a good strong network to improve and generate business.*

> ***Laura:*** *I like the fact that I am in total control of my own development. It's less lonely. CPD makes me evaluate what I do and motivates me, I find it inspiring. It also gives me confidence that my practice is the best it can be.*

Rebecca, who is new to the role, has not experienced many CPD opportunities. The EYFS (DfE, 2017a) identifies that 'effective supervision provides support, coaching and training (p. 21), whereas Rebecca raises a concern that in her locality there is not a mentoring system in place for childminders.

> ***Rebecca:*** *There is a need for a mentoring system by the LA for new childminders.*

Swim and Isik-Ecran (2013) recognise the importance of 'belonging to a setting based group' (p. 415) in order to support practitioners to build connections and support 'action-

based initiatives' (ibid). However, childminders work in individual settings and Sarah is '*proud of who I am'*. The confidence to engage in CPD is also a challenge, therefore, consideration needs to be paid to the ways in which childminders might be supported to build these connections across settings. Sarah provides an insight that experience, does not always equate to confidence:

> ***Sarah:*** *At times I feel a little self-conscious of myself. I am getting better. I feel others are better than me, but my recent Ofsted gave me a boost, it's just a lack of confidence with me.*

These responses demonstrate that CPD does make a positive difference to childminders by inspiring, motivating and building their confidence. Through the survey I asked them to expand on why they considered CPD to be a necessary element of their childminding role.

5.5.3 A Positive Difference

Sarah, Laura and Rebecca provide insights into four additional ways in which CPD makes a positive difference to their practice, and consequently why they deem it to be a necessary activity. Firstly, representing the anomalous voice; one childminder demonstrates a performative view of CPD which corresponds to the conflict identified by O'Connell (2011) that:

> ***Anomalous response:*** *It's not really necessary but it looks good for Ofsted.*

I provide positive insights from the collective voices under the categories of: providing new ideas and knowledge; raising the quality of practice, in turn benefiting the children in their care; helping to keep up to date; and finally supporting the development of a professional identity.

5.5.3.1 New Ideas and Broadens Knowledge

All three groups of childminders place a value on learning new ideas and broadening their own knowledge through CPD:

> ***Sarah:*** *I have a greater understanding of child development theories, there is always something new to learn or a different perspective to think about. You never stop learning in this job. It can provide new ways of doing things, and it can extend my knowledge of childcare issues. I like being able to make links with what I do and why I do it, I believe everyone should always be striving to improve.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *CPD keeps us in the mindset of learning and prevents old habits that may not be particularly good to fall into. It gives me new and interesting ideas, keeps us informed and creative, as well as broadening knowledge on different subjects. CPD also consolidates learning and gives me a better understanding on how best to do my job.*
>
> ***Rebecca:*** *It's essential to improve your own skills and knowledge.*

The childminders' enthusiasm towards discovering new ways of working, and more generally their willingness to engage in professional development, indicates a motivation to learn and engage with CPD opportunities.

5.5.3.2 Raises Quality and Benefits Children

The childminders in Ferri's (1992) study resisted against being trained in parenting values, and Ang, et al., (2017) identified the lack of insight into children and parents' experiences of childminding within current literature. Sarah and Laura identify a connection between

the importance of raising the quality of their provision by engaging in CPD, in order to better support the children and families they work with:

> ***Sarah:*** *It helps me identify areas for improvement, and expands my knowledge which benefits the children I care for. I can deliver new concepts to help engage their curiosity, and if I have a better understanding of something I can pass my knowledge to families and children.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *It's important to keep everything fresh. It allows me to introduce what I've learnt into my working practices, because things change and also the children change. If I get a new child with certain development needs I want to know how best to support that child and better the learning outcomes for children.*
>
> ***Sarah:*** *Techniques and new facts benefit the children and help us support parents. Older childminders draw from their own experiences. New parents have much different advice given to them now than we had in our anti-natal classes. There are always improvements and changes that can be made to benefit the children. What works well with this group of children may not work well with the group next year, or the year after. It is vital that I adapt and change to meet the needs of individual children.*

Children's experiences were not sought through this research, yet the childminders demonstrate their understanding that CPD directly impacts upon the quality of care and education offered to the children. In addition, they believe their own learning from CPD improves the support and advice they can then offer to the parents with which they work. Similar understandings can be found in studies such as SEED (Callanan, 2014), in which one of the childminder participants added her view that 'you're not just taking on the child

you’re taking on the family’ (p. 34). Childminders build very close relationships with the parents of the children in their care (O’Connell, 2011; Brooker, 2016), and whilst their primary responsibility is to care for the child, they also act as a key element of a parents support system.

5.5.3.3 Keep up to Date

The early childhood sector is fast paced and ever changing (Hallet, 2013a). Childminders hold the sole responsibility, within their self-employed business, to keep up to date with changing legislation, practice and guidance, and they comment below on the importance of the currency of CPD in supporting them in this process.

> ***Sarah:*** *Things are changing all the time so it’s good to keep up to date with info, any changes, current practice and regulations. It is the only way to keep up, and to keep your practice relevant in the childcare world.*
>
> ***Laura****: It helps me keep up to date with new policy development and early years best practice, legislation, and current thinking on early education and development.*
>
> ***Rebecca:*** *Plus to keep up to date with all current legal guidelines.*

The discussion by Sarah, Laura and Rebecca, establishes that childminding is a multifaceted role, requiring the skills to provide a high quality level of care and education, yet also supporting the idea of childminding as a business entrepreneurship (Bond & Kersey, 2002; Greener, 2009). Childminders are Paediatric First Aiders, Safeguarding Officers, the key person, the accountant, setting manager and policy maker, to name but a few. Consequently, they place an emphasis on their responsibility to keep up to date with policy and legislative developments.

5.5.3.4 Professional Identity

Sarah and Rebecca also share their views that engaging in CPD supports the development of their professional identity, of which Rebecca expresses a need to be *'taken seriously'*. In addition, Sarah highlights the ongoing complexity toward a collective and more widely recognised professional identity, which she states remains based upon qualification levels and the creation of an established knowledge base (Campbell-Barr, 2018) for the early years sector:

> ***Sarah:*** *To be seen as professional one has to act like one and develop their self on a personal level. There is still in some quarters an attitude that childminders are unqualified and untrained – despite the statistical evidence to the contrary – and possessing a secure knowledge and qualification base helps counter that. This is important that our voice needs to be heard both on our own behalf and that of the children we educate and care for.*
>
> ***Rebecca:*** *We are a profession and to be taken seriously we need to engage in CPD.*

The effect of CPD is demonstrated by these childminders as multifaceted: it develops their knowledge; helps them to keep up to date; raises quality, which in turn benefits the children and families with which they work; and it helps them to feel inspired, motivated and confident in their role.

Sarah, Laura and Rebecca broadly complement each other's views, demonstrating their understanding that CPD promotes a range of developments and improvements to their practice. They present a positive view, overall, of CPD as being beneficial and making a positive difference to their practice. These childminders, thereby, provide a differing perspective from those presented in earlier studies, such as that of Ferri (1992) and Moss

et al., (2001) who at the time did not believe childminders valued training. The positive accounts from the survey establish this group of childminders as proactive and motivated in their approach to CPD.

5.5.4 Challenges to CPD

Whilst the childminders reported many positive elements of their experiences of CPD they were also given the opportunity, to identify any challenges. I interpreted these as articulated by way of four key themes: time; cost; experience and relevance; and locality.

5.5.4.1 Time

The childminders first explain the challenges associated with current CPD training opportunities which are organised during through the working week. They indicate their preference for weekend or evening opportunities, yet with a reminder that this is also valued family time, thus remains challenging:

> ***Sarah:*** *A lot of courses offered to early years are during the daytime in the week, this suits nurseries but not childminders who work alone and cannot close their setting. Nurseries have other staff to cover roles when they are on courses. Childminders cannot close for a day as it impacts on parents and children and also loss of earnings. I can only really access training on a Saturday, but having a young family it's not always possible to attend. Weekends or evenings are more accessible for me. Cluster meetings have limited spaces so I can't always gain a place. Two of us joined the LA's EYT/EYP networking group, but although we found it interesting and valuable we were simply unable to continue the daytime only meetings.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *Timing is sometimes tricky but also after a 10 hour day it's exhausting to go out and join a course I have a husband who works shifts, I have two*

young children I also work six days a week, 12 hours a day. There is a severe lack of accessible face to face training opportunities at times and distance convenient to attend. I struggle with events being held midweek and also with childcare for my own children. Unlike other jobs where training is undertaken during working hours we have to do everything after work so it's hard to fit in

***Rebecca**: Timings are the main issue. Finding time alongside working and looking after my own three children, online development is widely accessible whereas face to face opportunities are harder to come across.*

Comparisons were made between other early years roles including nurseries, as being able to access training during working hours, whereas childminders who work on their own would have to close their business, in turn facilitating a loss of income. Unlike in group settings, there are no colleagues to take over responsibility for the children, and the registration to provide childcare lies with the childminder, not any assistants. The childcare setting is also the childminders' home, and therefore denotes the childminder needs to be present in order for the childcare setting to be in use. Weekends or evenings are therefore suggested by the childminders to be more feasible, nevertheless, involving similar challenges on time, which is then spent away from their own families.

Jackson and Jackson (1979) recommended making training for childminders accessible during working hours by employing strategies such as the provision of crèche facilities. However, due to the key person and safeguarding requirements of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a), and the contractual obligations between the childminder and the parent, childminders are not able to transfer the responsibility of care of the child to a crèche, for example, without parental permission. Subsequently, separate contracts would need to be in place between the parent and the crèche. Consequently, challenges with time as

identified in this section, call for a reimagining of CPD opportunities, which could be more integrated into the childminders' working day.

5.5.4.2 Cost

Cost was identified by Sarah and Laura as a challenge, particularly as CPD used to be offered for free by Local Authorities, when they had the funding available to do so:

> ***Sarah:*** *Nothing is free anymore and there are no bursaries available from my LA, it's very difficult to find affordable and convenient opportunities for face to face or conferences.*

> ***Laura:*** *The council stuff is too expensive, there is a severe lack of funding from the local authority and the private training can be expensive, such as conferences. I have only found a number of websites offering free training thanks to my assistant working in a preschool. I feel it is not widely advertised.*

Fees for training vary significantly between independently organised opportunities and Local Authority courses. For example, the standard registration price for a one day conference organised by Nursery World (2020a) is currently £329 per person, whereas a 90 minute Local Authority training session, focused on Engaging Parents in Home Learning, is charged at £25 per person (Essex County Council, 2020).

5.5.4.3 Experience and Relevance

Challenges associated with experience were defined as twofold: the need for practical experience of childminding to be held by the trainer; and the current provision of repetitive training opportunities, particularly for those childminders, like Sarah who have been

childminding for a long period of time. Instead, they call for training which is more relevant to childminding:

> ***Sarah:*** *Because I have been childminding for so long, I have already done most of the courses that my local authority provide so I am having to look elsewhere.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *There is also a lack of trainers who have the practical experience, knowledge and insight to deliver quality training. Training tends to be very patronising and repeats the same themes.*

Sarah and Laura offer their opinions of the relevance of existing CPD opportunities; encompassing a focus on the repetition of topics, the level of difficulty, and specificity of the content to childminding.

> ***Sarah****: Lots of the same old courses are rolled out which cater for new childminders, but not so much for childminders that have been in the role for many years. The subjects the evenings are based around are not always that informative, there are very few that are worth attending. Having reached the level I have with my studying it is becoming difficult to find training which offers something new and challenging. Most of them I have done in the last 30+ years, and the contents hardly change.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *There is a lack of childminder specific courses… I find sharing practice with other childminders invaluable.*

Sarah, representing the childminders who have been minding for the longest length of time, felt she needed new opportunities that would challenge her at her level of experience. Whilst Laura, found CPD opportunities specifically for childminders to be

lacking in availability. Differences between domestic settings such as childminding and non-domestic settings such as nurseries have been a source of contention throughout literature (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Brooker, 2016). Nonetheless, a developing recognition of childminders employing a domestic (O'Connell, 2011) and distinctive pedagogy (Ang, et al., 2017) supports recommendations within the literature, for future CPD opportunities to be more appropriate in terms of relevance, specifically to childminding (Gibson, et al., 1977; Owen, 2007; O'Connell, 2011).

Rebecca did not comment on the relevance of CPD, having been registered for less than a year, she is *'struggling to get information from my FIS* [Family Information Service]'*,* providing a reminder of the need for a mentor during the early stages of becoming a childminder.

5.5.4.4 Accessibility

Local provision of face to face opportunities are also described as key features of CPD.

> ***Sarah:*** *CPD is not local enough. There doesn't seem to be any around unless you do CPD online.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *The fantastic support services in our area have just been stopped so it's just what we can find ourselves. There are very limited opportunities for childminders.*

As explored in chapter two (see 2.7. Support Networks), the ECEC sector enjoyed a time of prosperity under the Labour government (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016), during which time CPD opportunities including, Local Authority training courses, network events, and conferences, were able to be offered for free or at a minimal cost. Changes in government

and resulting funding cuts have since impacted on the cost and availability of these training opportunities.

Nonetheless, there is disparity in provision and therefore disparity in opinion. The childminder previously identified as based in Bristol (R27) commented more positively:

> ***Anomalous Response:*** *Bristol City Council does an excellent job… they are either free or very affordable and organised in accessible locations at times childminders are not working.*

Collectively, the childminders also indicate some positive experiences from their Local Authority provision.

> ***Sarah:*** *The local council provide free training and on line training, we can also access CPD from all sorts of areas.*
>
> ***Rebecca:*** *For example online development is widely accessible.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *We have a very good LA, who put on lots of relevant courses.*

The response from the childminder in Bristol is an example of why the collective voices in this survey do not provide a generalisable insight into the experiences of CPD. Newby (2010) describes 'sampling issues' (p. 329) as a disadvantage of online surveys, however in this instance, it has provided an insight into the possibility of alternative solutions to current challenges.

5.5.5 Positive Views on the Quality of Existing Provision

In order to take stock of current experiences, and draw out existing examples of what works, I asked the childminders to comment on the quality of the CPD activities in which they had already engaged. Initial review of the answers to this question, indicated mixed

experiences; Sarah, Laura and Rebecca presenting both positive and negative insights into quality:

Through the accounts of their positive experiences, the childminders provide examples of the types of activities in which they engage, as well as the quality:

> ***Sarah:*** *Over the years the courses have varied greatly, some have been incredible. To have a speaker that engages really well with the group and makes you think long after leaving the classroom is key, and I come away feeling positive. The best CPD I have attended has been more interactive with tasks to perform such as forest skills. My partner and I have closed for the day to attend masterclasses at the Nursery World show… absolutely excellent weekends, we learned so much.*
>
> ***Laura:*** *I have always been pleased with the standard of training given by Essex County Council. Most courses have been excellent, fantastic quality and always well presented. I have learned an awful lot and enjoy learning new things during each activity. I am extremely fortunate that my local childminding group is a brilliant source of support, information and advice which can be trusted.*
>
> ***Rebecca:*** *Basic but adequate. As a new childminder I haven't participated in a lot yet but my recent first aid training was excellent.*

Sarah discusses the opportunities she has had to interact and engage during CPD activities, as indicators of quality, utilising terms such as 'good' and 'excellent' to indicate the quality of her experiences. The types of CPD activities put forward as being of good quality across the responses were varied, including attendance at national events as well

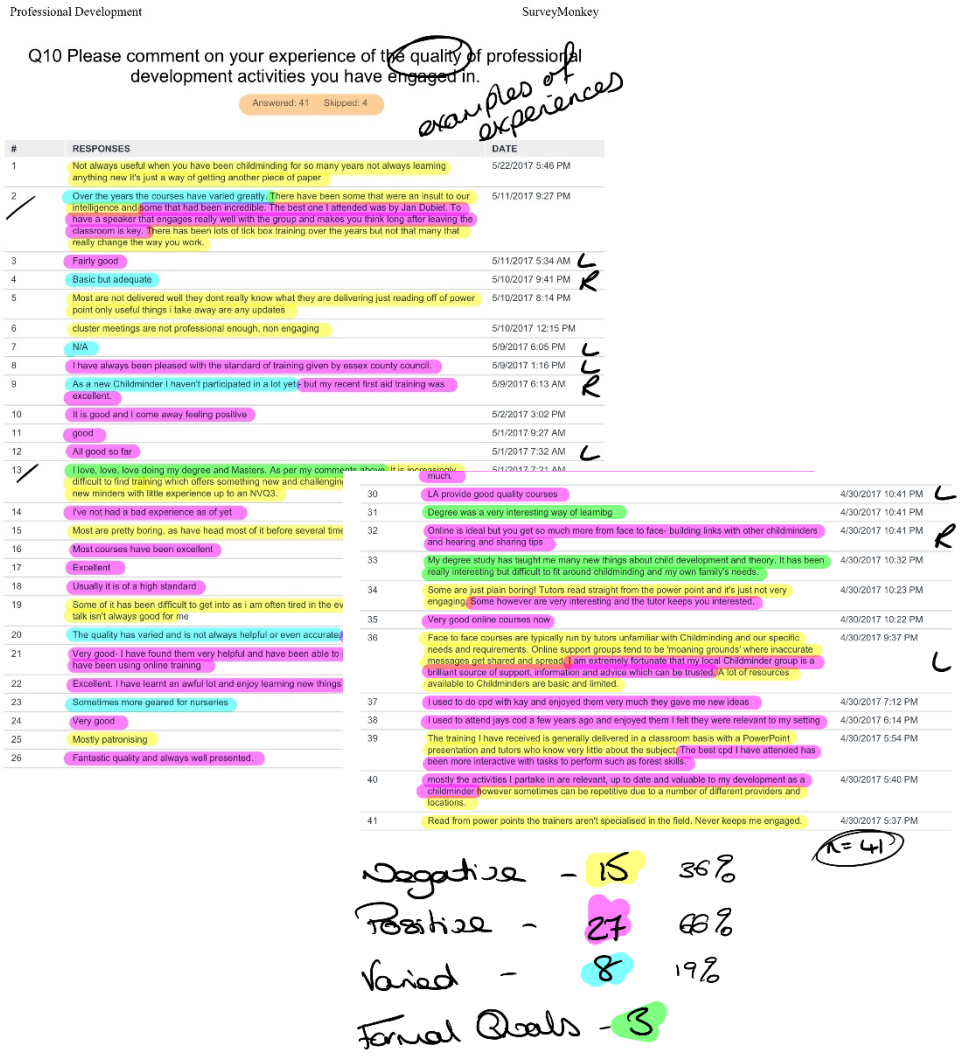
as Local Authority training, and more informal engagement with local childminding groups. For Rebecca, the focus of CPD was on her experience of the compulsory requirement to complete Paediatric First Aid training.

Sarah also included her experience of continuing her formal studies as being an enjoyable experience:

> ***Sarah:*** *I love, love, love doing my degree and Masters. My degree study has taught me many new things about child development and theory.*

5.5.6 Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision

Across the survey responses, the positive views were preceded, or immediately followed, by a negative comment, thus I found it difficult to gain an initial overarching understanding of quality. To address this and deepen my understanding, I illustrate in Fig 5.7 how I analysed the qualitative questions in the survey further; in this example, by colour coding the positive (purple) and negative (yellow) comments, having already identified them by collective group (Sarah represented by a blank margin, L for Laura and R for Rebecca), thus, allowing me to discover the variation in experiences.



Professional Development SurveyMonkey

Q10 Please comment on your experience of the quality of professional development activities you have engaged in.

Answered: 41 Skipped: 4

examples of experiences

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Not always useful when you have been childminding for so many years not always learning anything new it's just a way of getting another piece of paper	5/22/2017 5:46 PM
2	Over the years the courses have varied greatly. There have been some that were an insult to our intelligence and some that had been incredible. The best one I attended was by Jan Dubiel. To have a speaker that engages really well with the group and makes you think long after leaving the classroom is key. There has been lots of tick box training over the years but not that many that really change the way you work.	5/11/2017 9:27 PM
3	Fairly good	5/11/2017 5:34 AM
4	Basic but adequate	5/10/2017 9:41 PM
5	Most are not delivered well they dont really know what they are delivering just reading off of power point only useful things i take away are any updates	5/10/2017 8:14 PM
6	cluster meetings are not professional enough, non engaging	5/10/2017 12:15 PM
7	N/A	5/9/2017 6:05 PM
8	I have always been pleased with the standard of training given by essex county council.	5/9/2017 1:16 PM
9	As a new Childminder I haven't participated in a lot yet- but my recent first aid training was excellent.	5/9/2017 6:13 AM
10	It is good and I come away feeling positive	5/2/2017 3:02 PM
11	good	5/1/2017 9:27 AM
12	All good so far	5/1/2017 7:32 AM
13	I love, love, love doing my degree and Masters. As per my comments above. It is increasingly difficult to find training which offers something new and challenging new minders with little experience up to an NVQ3.	5/1/2017 7:21 AM
14	I've not had a bad experience as of yet	
15	Most are pretty boring, as have head most of it before several time	
16	Most courses have been excellent	
17	Excellent	
18	Usually it is of a high standard	
19	Some of it has been difficult to get into as i am often tired in the ev talk isn't always good for me	
20	The quality has varied and is not always helpful or even accurate	
21	Very good- I have found them very helpful and have been able to have been using online training	
22	Excellent. I have learnt an awful lot and enjoy learning new things	
23	Sometimes more geared for nurseries	
24	Very good	
25	Mostly patronising	
26	Fantastic quality and always well presented.	
	much.	
30	LA provide good quality courses	4/30/2017 10:41 PM
31	Degree was a very interesting way of learning	4/30/2017 10:41 PM
32	Online is ideal but you get so much more from face to face- building links with other childminders and hearing and sharing tips	4/30/2017 10:41 PM
33	My degree study has taught me many new things about child development and theory. It has been really interesting but difficult to fit around childminding and my own family's needs.	4/30/2017 10:32 PM
34	Some are just plain boring! Tutors read straight from the power point and it's just not very engaging. Some however are very interesting and the tutor keeps you interested.	4/30/2017 10:23 PM
35	Very good online courses now	4/30/2017 10:22 PM
36	Face to face courses are typically run by tutors unfamiliar with Childminding and our specific needs and requirements. Online support groups tend to be 'moaning grounds' where inaccurate messages get shared and spread. I am extremely fortunate that my local Childminder group is a brilliant source of support, information and advice which can be trusted. A lot of resources available to Childminders are basic and limited.	4/30/2017 9:37 PM
37	I used to do cpd with kay and enjoyed them very much they gave me new ideas	4/30/2017 7:12 PM
38	I used to attend jays cod a few years ago and enjoyed them I felt they were relevant to my setting	4/30/2017 6:14 PM
39	The training I have received is generally delivered in a classroom basis with a PowerPoint presentation and tutors who know very little about the subject. The best cpd I have attended has been more interactive with tasks to perform such as forest skills.	4/30/2017 5:54 PM
40	mostly the activities I partake in are relevant, up to date and valuable to my development as a childminder however sometimes can be repetitive due to a number of different providers and locations.	4/30/2017 5:40 PM
41	Read from power points the trainers aren't specialised in the field. Never keeps me engaged.	4/30/2017 5:37 PM

N = 41

Negative - 15 36%

Positive - 27 66%

Varied - 8 19%

Formal Quals - 3

[Fig 5.7 Example of qualitative and quantitative analysis strategies]

For example, just over half of the responses to question ten included a positive comment (66%), whilst 36% of the comments held a full or partial negative view towards the quality of CPD experiences. Further, 19% of the childminders indicated variation in quality through more neutral and balanced statements (highlighted in blue). Consequently, insight into the negative is issues surrounding the quality of current CPD experiences is explained by Sarah and Laura:

Sarah: *Over the years the quality has varied greatly. There have been some that are an insult to our intelligence… there's been lots of tick box training, but not many that change the way you work. Most are not delivered well, they don't really know what they are delivering, tutors read straight from the PowerPoint and it's just not very engaging. The only useful things I take away are any updates. Some are just plain boring, I've heard most of it before, several times.*

Laura: *Some of it is difficult to get into as I am often tired in the evenings and listening to people talk isn't always good for me. Face to face courses are typically run by tutors unfamiliar with childminding and our specific needs and requirements.*

Sarah: *Cluster meetings are not professional enough and non-engaging. It is increasingly difficult to find training which offers something new and challenging. Most LA training is pitched at new minders with little experience up to an NVQ3, it's patronising, sometimes more geared for nurseries, and it never keeps me engaged.*

In future CPD opportunities, Sarah and Laura's statements demonstrate a need for consideration of: the suitability of the activity to suit childminders with diverse levels of qualifications and experience; as well as the relevance of the content to the distinctive pedagogy of childminding (O'Connell, 2011; Ang, et al., 2017); and the way in which CPD activities are structured to promote engagement.

A performative purpose of CPD (Kennedy, 2015) identified in chapter three (see 3.4.2. Continuous Professional Development), often entails the delivery of standardised knowledge irrespective of the differing pedagogies held by the trainees. Examples of

training that simply encompass the reading of the information from PowerPoint slides, demonstrate the use of standardised training materials, thereby supporting the previous insights from Ferri (1992) who experienced similar challenges; believing that for training to be effective, perceptions of childminding between the trainer and the trainee needed to be consistent. Moreover, Ingleby and Hedges (2012) suggest CPD should better respond to the needs of childminders. Therefore, I sought a greater understanding of what these needs might entail.

5.5.7 Professional Development Needs

I asked the childminders what they thought to be their current professional development needs. This is not a question put to childminders in previous surveys (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Mooney, et al., 2001b; NCB, 2003; Callanan, 2014; Otero & Melhuish, 2015). Suggestions were offered that identified a range of specific topics; statutory training courses; and formal qualifications such as a Foundation or Masters Degrees.

There was a range of 23 different suggestions put forward by 41 responding childminders which I organised into a table (Fig 5.8), to create a clear overview of the type of activity and the suggested topics.

Current professional development needs	Number of times suggested
Anything	8
Formal qualifications: Foundation degree, diploma, masters, level 3	7
None	5
Speech and Language/EAL	4
SEND	4
How children learn & play, practical ideas	3
Schemas	3
Screamers, behaviour management	2

30 hours funding	2
Statutory training: safeguarding	2
Planning	1
Next Steps, outcomes	1
EYFS	1
Attachment	1
Sensory programmes	1
Leadership and management	1
Process art	1
Outdoor activities	1
Online courses	1
Computer training	1
Running a business	1
Maths	1
Gross motor skills	1

[Fig 5.8 Question 11: What are your current professional development needs?]

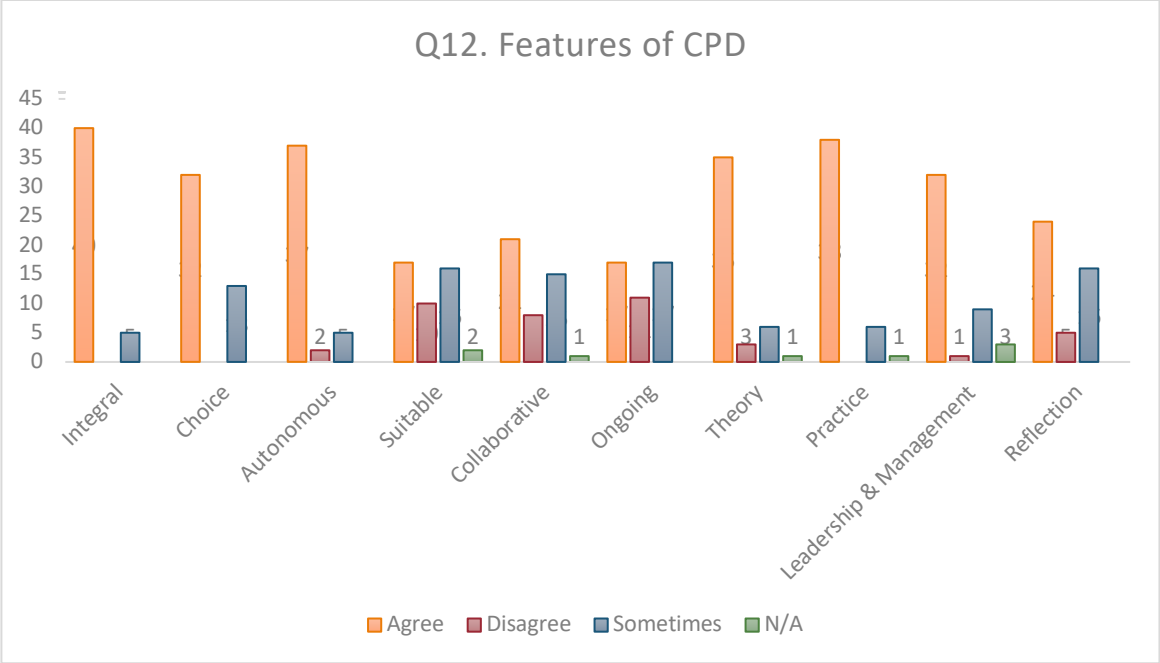
Previously, I explored Cherrington and Thornton's (2013) emphasis of the importance of childminders being involved in their own CPD opportunities (see Chapter Three: 3.4.2. Continuous Professional Development). They demonstrate their engagement with this process by suggesting a number of individual topics of focus, which indicate the breadth and diversity of their professional development needs.

The most frequent responses demonstrated that eight childminders were prepared to complete any CPD that was available; whilst in direct opposition five childminders responded that they did not have any professional development needs. In addition, formal qualifications were put forward as current professional development needs by seven childminders, further demonstrating the complexity of the umbrella term of CPD to incorporate formal and statutory courses.

5.5.8 Features of CPD

Common features of CPD had emerged through my review of the literature of early childhood professional development in chapter three. At this stage in the thesis action research, I was in the process of exploring and refining these ideas when I created the survey, for example; through conference presentations, continued reading, and through opportunities for supervisory feedback during phase 1 of the EdD programme. Through the survey, I therefore put forward a series of statements to the childminders, asking them to indicate their agreement or disagreement as to whether the statement was reflective of the CPD opportunities they current have access to (see Appendix 6: Question 12) in relation to the common features I had drawn out at that time. All 45 childminders gave an answer for every statement, apart from the question of autonomy which was unanswered by one childminder.

I have structured the childminders' responses as a bar graph (Fig 5.9) illustrating the overall collective responses. On reflection, in the second phase of the thesis action research, I believe the way I phrased these statements was 'overly wordy' (Creswell, 2014, p. 415). My discussion, across chapters two and three, since demonstrates a refined approach to the original ten features of CPD within this question, suggesting CPD as needing to be: an ongoing process; purposeful; to enable knowledge acquisition and construction; facilitated; relevant; collaborative; and reflective.



[Fig 5.9 Question 12: Indicating childminders views on features of current CPD activities]

The childminders' responses to these statements, at this stage in the research, contributed insights into their views of many features of CPD. There were three statements with which none of the childminders disagreed. To varying extents they all therefore believe;

1. Professional development is an *integral* part of my role as a childminder.
2. I can *choose* what professional development activities I want to complete.
3. Professional development opportunities enhance my knowledge of *practice*.

More than half of the childminders agreed that they have autonomy over their CPD choices, and that they develop their theoretical knowledge and leadership and management skills, through current experiences of CPD. Whereas, the four statements with which the greatest number of childminders disagreed indicated: a lack of opportunities for CPD to be ongoing; that CPD opportunities were suitable to meet their individual needs; CPD provided opportunities to work collaboratively with others; and that

there were opportunities to reflect upon practice within CPD activities. These features are therefore indicated through this survey to need further consideration in future opportunities for CPD.

Whilst I did not undertake follow up interviews to clarify specific answers (Creswell, 2014), I did provide the opportunity for further comments at the end of this question. The childminder who selected n/a did not comment, whereas Sarah provided an insight into the potential complexity of this question:

> ***Sarah:*** *Wasn't sure if these statements were referring to professional development as a whole or what I have on offer now. So the last few about enhancing knowledge and developing my skills etc. is what I could gain.*

Additional information was provided by Laura, to add, in summary, a request for *'more opportunities for CPD with my colleagues and peers'.* Sarah stated that *'there isn't much about for the seasoned practitioners, I've been in childcare for 30 years and childminding for the second time around'.* The final comment from Laura further identified the continued reduction in support for childminders due to a *'severe lack of ongoing guidance and direction from [the] local authority as to identifying CPD needs'.*

5.5.9 Additional Comments

Through the final question I invited the childminders to add any further comments in relation to CPD. Sarah and Laura provide further insight into the context in which this research was undertaken, including: reduced support from the Local Authority; varying attitudes towards CPD within the childminding community; and the importance placed by this group of childminders, on opportunities to network and develop:

Sarah: *Essex CC have taken our cluster meetings which provided some CPD, so it is down to individuals now to find their own CPD. I can see some childminders will not seek their own CPD as this will been seen by them as 'just more paperwork'. It is not only the content of the courses that is important but the networking with other childminders whilst training. Meeting other childminders and discussing issues is very important, as some work completely alone and really need support and reassurance.*

Laura: *I could do with more help understanding things like how funding works, how choices I make will affect my business in the future.*

Sarah: *CPD is vital to meet the needs of a constantly evolving childcare practice where the children develop and change. Unfortunately so many people do not feel that they should do more than is required, not just childminders but across the whole early years sector.*

Through her response, Sarah acknowledges the additional time and effort required to engage in CPD activities, nevertheless stressing the value that it not only helps to keep up to date in an evolving sector, but also enables access to much needed support. Laura compliments these views by explaining the continuing need for support and information through CPD opportunities.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Sarah, Laura and Rebecca offered an insight into their current experiences of CPD, presented as being: largely positive; inspiring and motivating their practice; allowing them to keep up to date with changes in the sector; providing them with new knowledge and practical ideas; enhancing the quality of their practice; and building their confidence and sense of professional identity. Yet the results also demonstrated a number of challenges,

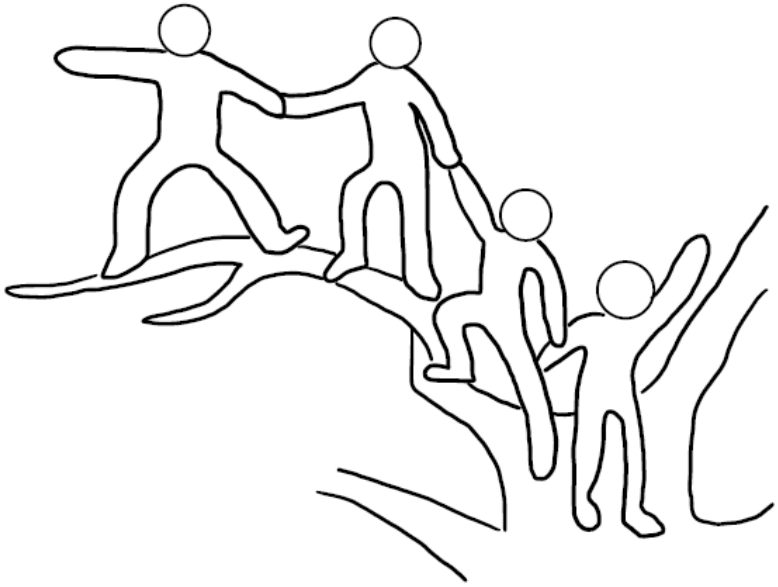
primarily with regards to the accessibility (time, cost and locality) and relevance of existing CPD opportunities.

Through the survey, the childminders put forward their CPD needs by naming topic based areas of interest, further identifying CPD to be integral to their role and allowing them to develop their practice and enhance their knowledge. However, there was disagreement that current CPD opportunities were appropriate for childminders, and their responses identified that what is available does not promote an ongoing, collaborative approach to professional development.

Once the childminders had submitted the survey, a final thank you message was sent by the Survey Monkey programme, through which I invited them to register their interest to take part in the core action research via email. As a result, 23 childminders replied, who I subsequently invited to attend an introductory meeting, aimed at providing further information about the research and offering the opportunity to form a core action research group. Sixteen childminders were able to commit to the core action research, fourteen of which were able to attend the introductory meeting, presented next in chapter six.

Chapter 6

The Introductory Meeting



6 Introducing the Core Action Research

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

'Enthusiasm and creativity' are thought by Sagor (1992, p. 60) to be hallmarks of collaborative action research. I have employed the concept of crystallized accounts (Ellingson, 2009) of our experiences, to provide an authentic sense of these features, which characterise our collaborations, throughout the forthcoming findings chapters. The childminders involved in the research were profiled in chapter five as; experienced, qualified to level 3 or above, working primarily on their own, and members of childminding groups. I presented insights into their positive and challenging experiences of continuous professional development (CPD), and established the need for CPD to be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. From the 45 childminders who completed the survey, 23 then registered their interest via email to attend an initial information meeting, fourteen of whom were able to attend.

This introductory meeting formed the final stage, of the first cycle, of the thesis action research (Fig 6.1); aimed at presenting the key messages from the survey, and to explore a collaborative vision for the forthcoming core action research. Our discussions and views in the form of qualitative data from group activities, reflections, and evaluations are presented in this chapter, and I introduce the key research considerations in preparation for the core action research, under five main headings; recruitment, participants, research design, ethical considerations, and reflections.

[Fig 6.1 Thesis Action Research: Cycle One: Final Stage]

6.2 Recruitment

Ritchie, et al., (2014, p. 124) believe surveys 'can offer an effective sample frame for a qualitative study', demonstrated in this example through the recruitment of sixteen childminders (35% of the survey respondents) to the core action research. Nonetheless, the complexity of establishing an appropriate time for us all to meet, resulted in only fourteen of these childminders being able to attend the first session.

Definitively, the core action research group comprised sixteen childminders (Fig 6.2), of which participation varied between eight and fourteen childminders throughout the ten month duration of the research, with no single session comprising all participants. One childminder stopped participating with no explanatory communication after the third meeting (starred), and one childminder officially withdrew after the fourth meeting due to time constraints (depicted in blue), resulting in a final group of fourteen childminders, for the remaining three sessions.

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7	Total Attended
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6
✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	5
✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		5
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	6
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	5
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	5
✓					✓	✓	3
	✓	✓		✓		✓	4
✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	5
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		5
✓		✓	✓				3
✓	✓	✓					3*
✓			✓	✓		✓	4
✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		5
14	12	11	12	9	8	10	

[Fig 6.2 Record of childminder participation in CPD sessions]

Time to participate in CPD opportunities was highlighted as a challenge to engagement, through the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4.1. Time). I had worked to address this by promoting a collaborative approach to the organisation of the core action research, by

asking the childminders through email, to suggest the best time to meet. Subsequently, seven sessions were held on the first Monday evening of the month, commencing in June 2017 and concluding in March 2018. Nevertheless, this did not suit all 23 original respondents and was not sustainable for all of the childminders, across the entirety of the core action research. Our collaborative approach, enabled ongoing changes to suit the childminders needs, for instance, we did not hold sessions during the school holiday period of August; in September when the children were settling back to school; or directly after Christmas in January.

6.3 PARTICIPANTS

I had yet to meet with the childminders having conversed only by email, although I knew from the names that I had existing affiliations with twelve of them. I knew six of the childminders very well from my previous membership to their local childminding group, therefore, I knew they were experienced childminders. Another six childminders I knew more generally, from my involvement within the local childminding community, such as attending toddler groups and networking at Local Authority cluster meetings; again providing me with the understanding that they had been childminding for a number of years. The remaining four childminders were completely unknown to me, therefore potentially new to the role, or simply having engaged in networks outside of my own previous experience.

Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p. 139) recognise that participants often have an existing history and can develop their group culture through four stages; 'forming' the group purpose and procedures; modifying the consensus through 'storming'; then 'norming' boundaries and expectations; which finally leads to 'performing', at which stage the group is 'fully productive' (p. 139). In addition, Lave and Wenger (1991) provided an

understanding that ‘a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice… the social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning’ (p. 98)

I had acknowledged the potential for issues around power dynamics and positionality (see Chapter Four: 4.8. Positionality and Voice), therefore, maintained a reflexive approach to the research, for example, through ongoing reflective journaling, to consciously ‘be attuned to one’s own reactions… and to the way in which the research account is constructed’ (Berger, 2015, p. 221). In addition, my aim at the first meeting, was to facilitate a collaborative approach to ‘forming… a common purpose’ (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 139), by working together to define the scope of the core action research, and agree the ethical boundaries and terms of the enquiry (Khanlou & Peter, 2005). ‘Groups reflect their members’ particular circumstances, and interests (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 138), and I was mindful that we were all embarking on the core action research together for the first time.

The childminders were ‘not objects to be investigated, they [were] equals’ (McNiff, 2017, p. 124), therefore, I was further influenced by Somekh’s (2006) warning to avoid the potential to create a sense of superiority in my role. Voice in action research ‘becomes more than just an innate way to express oneself; it is also a way to participate and engage in conversations around… change’ (Rector-Aranda, 2014, p. 807), which is explained by Olin, et al., (2016) to be dependent upon a level of equality in our collaborations as co-researchers. As a result, the initial meeting was crucial in establishing reciprocal relationships, for which Murray and McDowall Clark (2013) suggested a democratic approach to leading the process, in order to promote a sense of ‘mutuality’ (p. 298) when working together.

Mutuality of engagement is defined by Wenger (1998) as how we learn to 'engage in action with other people…develop certain expectations… treat each other and how to work together' (p. 152). At this early stage in the core action research, I drew further from the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, a concept developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) that utilises an apprentice model, in which 'the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of the community' (p. 29). I understood the childminders to hold a more peripheral position at this early stage of the research, which developed and evolved through 'changing participation in the division of labor' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95) during different stages of the research process.

The survey results in chapter five had demonstrated the willingness of this group of childminders, to engage and contribute their views for research. During this initial meeting, I took advice from Evetts (2003) and Dyer (2018) to promote confident and active engagement and necessitate support for those involved, for example, through the facilitation of group discussion and activity. Ingleby and Hedges (2012, p. 539) had found focus groups to 'facilitate a permissive, non-threatening environment… to generate rich discussions about CPD', which I therefore, aimed to achieve in this session.

6.3.1 Relationships

I had sourced a room at the university in which to hold the CAR and from the outset of the first session, the childminders sat in two distinct table groups; the group of childminders I knew, and the second group of those I knew less well, or not at all. 'Social dimensions are rarely considered… when designing training programmes' (Lanigan, 2011, p. 407), they do not usually include a focus on decision making or building relationships; largely employing a transmissive approach (Kennedy, 2005). However, in the format of an action research approach, decision making and relationship building are

just as much a focus as the topic at hand, particularly when seeking in the long term to build networks (Day & Townsend, 2009). Nevertheless, Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) believe this can be a 'delicate and awkward process' (p. 139), although one which is also 'one of the most important steps in beginning and continuing action research' (p. 143). Therefore, I facilitated an icebreaker activity to get to know each other, and to encourage the childminders to move out of their comfort groups.

6.3.2 Icebreaker

The childminders wrote three things about themselves on a piece of paper, scrunched it into a ball and threw it across the room like a snowball. Each childminder then picked up a 'snowball' and tried to find the person who wrote it. Although a simple activity to begin the session, one of the childminders' reflections at the end demonstrated it had a positive role in promoting the development of relationships:

> *Learnt new things in the ice breaker about people I thought I knew (RT3.4)*

I introduced myself and my aim for the doctoral research, to explore the concept of what constitutes appropriate CPD for childminders. I explained my intention to carry this out in a collaborative way, and offered my thoughts of why I felt such an enquiry was important and the requirement through the EYFS to undertake 'appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21). I introduced a discussion of what the childminders' role as participants and co-researchers would potentially involve, including elements such as creating and reviewing data, making decisions, expressing views, putting forward ideas and trying them out, reflecting, evaluating, and working together. I invited any questions and explained that I was seeking the involvement of childminders who wished to commit to working collaboratively, as co-researchers for an agreed duration of the core action research enquiry into appropriate CPD.

6.4 CAR Ethical Considerations

The childminders had the opportunity at this introductory meeting to take home and read the participant information sheet (Appendix 3) and consent form (Appendix 8), in order to decide if they would like to engage in the core action research, and to review the ethical principles included in the information. We utilised the time afforded through this first meeting to clarify practical expectations, such as the time of any future meetings, and they all signed and confirmed their consent.

I was mindful of the need to create a safe and confidential environment in which we would feel comfortable to engage with the research and that would enable us to consider the 'practical ethical issues' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 77) in a collaborative way. Consequently, to share responsibility for creating such an environment, we worked initially in small groups and then all together, to create a list of ethical statements with which we all agreed (Fig 6.3), and which addressed some of the ethical responsibilities specific to collaborative action research (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009).

Ethical Statements
We promise that what goes on in this room during all future sessions will be confidential
We promise to be respectful of other people's opinions
Give everyone a fair hearing
No politics unless we bring it up
No biscuit shaming!
Accept that we might disagree
No gossiping outside of the session

[Fig 6.3 Collaborative core action research group ethical statements]

Through the statements, which subsequently formed our group code of ethics, the childminders demonstrated their understanding of the importance of confidentiality and respect for others views. In addition, we addressed the likelihood that differences in

opinion would be offered and could be discussed and respected (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009).

6.5 Research Design

The current practical challenges to CPD, drawn from the collective voice in the survey (chapter five), were shared as; relevance and the accessibility of CPD, which in turn, includes the features of; time, cost, and locality. Discussion ensued and the childminders verbally added further specific examples of their CPD experiences, and in agreement with these challenges.

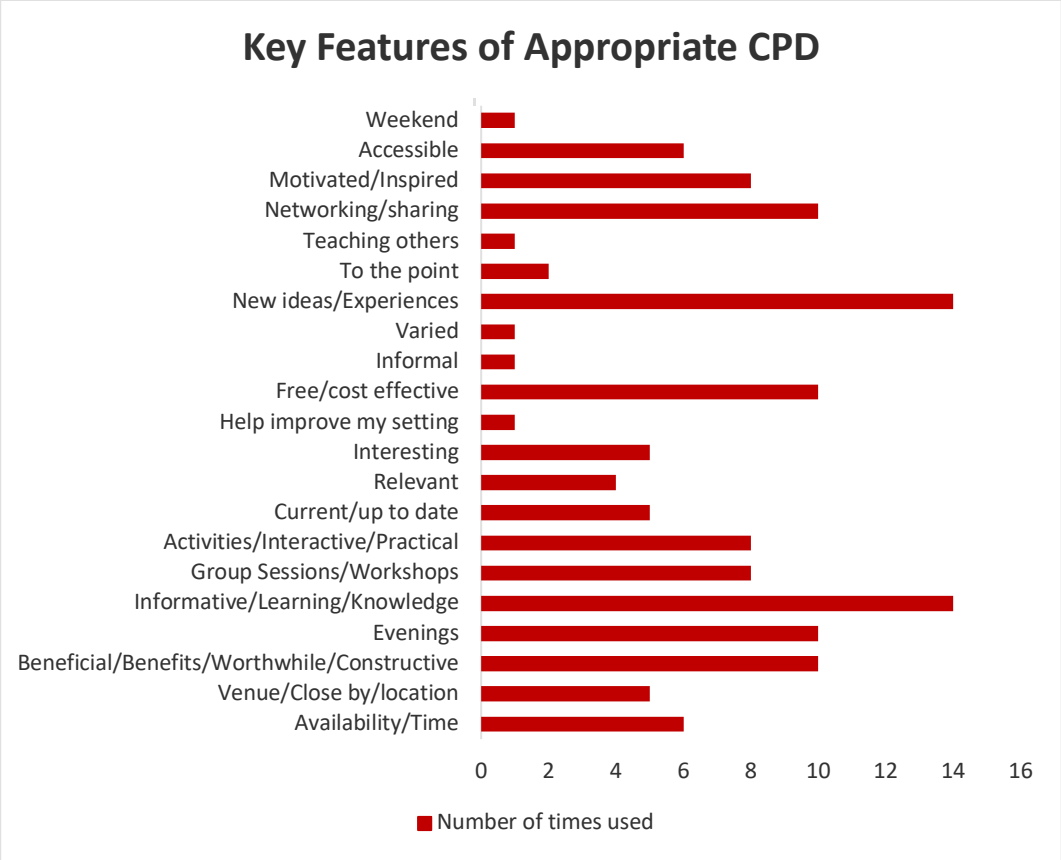
6.5.1 The Process: What could work?

I posed the question 'so what could work?' to which one of the childminders asked if I could bring back the training sessions I used to offer. I had previously run a series of standalone, topic based training workshops during evenings and at weekends, which I had created initially, in order to evidence and meet the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) leadership standards. These training workshops had run over a period of two years, being held in a local village hall, and organised with the support of members of the childminding group to which I had belonged. Some of the childminders present had been involved in organising and attending these workshops, and were potentially expecting a similar experience. I had to be mindful not to dismiss this idea, but also to open up discussion of the possibilities for alternative approaches to be explored, and the idea that this enquiry was an opportunity for existing CPD experiences to be developed upon.

At a previous training session I attended, we had been asked to participate in a handprint activity as a means of exploring the scope of a topic. The activity was effective in identifying our ideas, as well as being an encouraging way through which to build group engagement and discussion. However, it did not fit neatly within usual methods of data

collection, such as observations or focus group discussions. Instead, Ritchie, et al., (2014) describe this type of activity as generated data which provides 'participants a direct and explicit opportunity to articulate their own meanings' (p. 55). The dual intention of this activity was to facilitate exploration of what the childminders wanted CPD to encompass and to encourage them to begin to share ideas and work collaboratively.

The handprint activity comprised a staged approach to identifying key features of CPD which I have outlined in Appendix 9. All of the key words from each stage of the activity are combined into the table in Fig 6.4. Remembering that words were repeatedly chosen as part of the staged process of the activity, there should have been a total of 120 key words. However, an additional 10 words were written across the handprints; therefore from the total of 120 fingers drawn across 24 handprints there was an overall total of 130 words. Every word has been included in the table, and those which have a similar meaning have been grouped together, using a backslash, to display the 21 features most frequently put forward by the childminders.



[Fig 6.4 Key features of appropriate CPD identified through a handprint activity]

Two features of CPD were recorded most frequently; the importance of learning and gaining new knowledge, as well as the sharing of new ideas and experiences. Following these, the opportunity to network; the desire for CPD to be worthwhile; and accessibility factors, such as cost and evening availability were popular features. Newby (2010, p. 470) defines grouping data as a 'creative process', and one which enables raw data to be reproduced as overarching themes. The structure of the activity was designed to lead the childminders through the process of thinking about how we might undertake a model of CPD that would work for them. Through refining and grouping their ideas to select their top five key words, they then worked together in to produce three final group definitions of what they wanted from a model of CPD (Fig 6.5).

Group Paragraphs
CPD should be motivational so you leave the session wanting to implement what you have learnt. It needs to be in a local location which also means that networking is effective. Any CPD must fit around our working hours and family time. Costs must be minimal. CPD must provide us with new knowledge and ideas that we can practically implement in our setting.
CPD should be accessible for all childminders to benefit, share knowledge and keep motivated. It should allow childminders to network to be able to share ideas and gain knowledge, as well as being constructive and useful within your everyday routine.
CPD should be at easily accessible times for childminders, should be affordable (or free!), at a venue that is local and with parking, and ideally in group/workshop set up. Importantly it should be beneficial – relevant to childminding and going to help us improve our setting or practices.

[Fig 6.5 Group paragraphs: CPD should be…]

A mapping exercise identifies the potential of more than five of the key words used in each paragraph, which, when supported by anecdotal conversations during the activity, occurred because the childminders wanted to fully express their views of how 'CPD should be…' rather than adhere to the structure of the activity. An instance such as this was encouraging, demonstrating the childminders were confident enough to shape the activity outside of the activity rules. As described by Flicker (2014, p. 123), the 'goal of… discussions was not necessarily to come to a consensus, but to explore the range of ways of seeing and understanding'. Through the paragraphs the childminders defined the broader theme of accessibility as being held at an appropriate time, affordable, and in an appropriate location. Further, stating that CPD should have a beneficial and motivational affect, and be organised in a workshop style.

6.5.2 The Process: How it could work

Next, we built on the ideas from the handprint activity to negotiate what our CPD enquiry might look like, and explore the practical details of how we would begin to reimagine CPD. Through a group discussion, the childminders focused on the notion of monthly workshop sessions, each exploring a different CPD topic, and identified my role as being the trainer. I became concerned that we were simply going to engage in the current transmissive style of CPD, using the concept of a topic based approach, through a series of standalone sessions. However, I was equally mindful of Cotton's (2013) discussion on professional learning, in which she recognised that meeting over a series of sessions and with an additional focus on guiding 'shared projects' (p. 21), could enable the research process to progress and develop, through reflection and evaluation.

'Self-directed professional development' (Ingleby & Hedges, 2012, p. 538) is considered important across the literature (for instance Minott, 2010; Ingleby & Hedges, 2012). Consequently, I agreed to facilitate topic based sessions, but rather than commit to a series of topics, I suggested we started with one, then decide through reflection and evaluation how we wanted to proceed when we next met. Whilst I could not anticipate the direction of the research prior to this meeting, I had pre-empted the potential requirement to identify a topic for exploration through the CPD enquiry. Thus, I had facilitated access to an online programme called Menti, which enabled the childminders to text suggestions for a CPD topic, or submit these via their web browser from their mobile phone, to the online programme. I displayed the website by utilising the smartboard and it displayed their suggestions in real time, in the form of a word cloud. I also supported the childminders' consideration of topics, by sharing the list of professional develoment needs the childminders had put forward through the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.7. Professional Development Needs), to which I had also added some

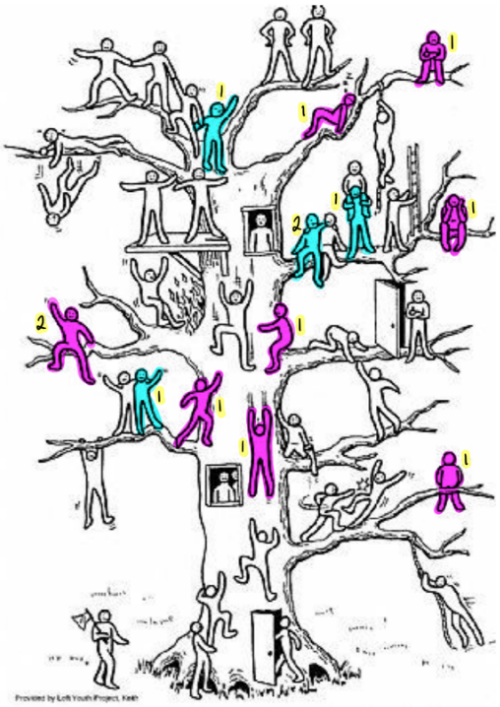
further topics for consideration, based on my review of current CPD opportuntiies in chapters two and three. I drew from the discussion of Cotton (2013, p. 20) that 'new knowledge needed to be given to a group so that it did not become a closed learning community'. Through this process, the topic of 'schemas' was put forward as the most popular CPD focus, and thus became the focus of the following workshop session.

6.6 Childminder Reflections

The final activity of the evening was a short reflection and evaluation of the session. Introduced in chapter four (see 4.12.1. Documents: Reflection Tree and Evaluation), my intention was not simply to gather an evaluation of the session, particularly as this was an introduction to the research, rather than a training session; but to also promote reflection as part of the core action research process, as well as provide a medium for any additional comments the childminders wished to add. Activities such as this, are also an opportunity for quieter members of a group to add their views anonymously (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009).

6.6.1 Reflection Tree

The childminders selected a blob that best represented them, then wrote a short explanation of why they had chosen that particular blob. The choices portrayed in Fig 6.6, are collated and colour coded into two groups; purple for blobs positioned on their own and blue for those positioned as part of a pair or group. In addition, the number of times each blob was chosen is included, highlighted in yellow and totaled in the accompanying table for ease of reference.



Purple	Blobs on their own	9
Blue	Blobs with others	5

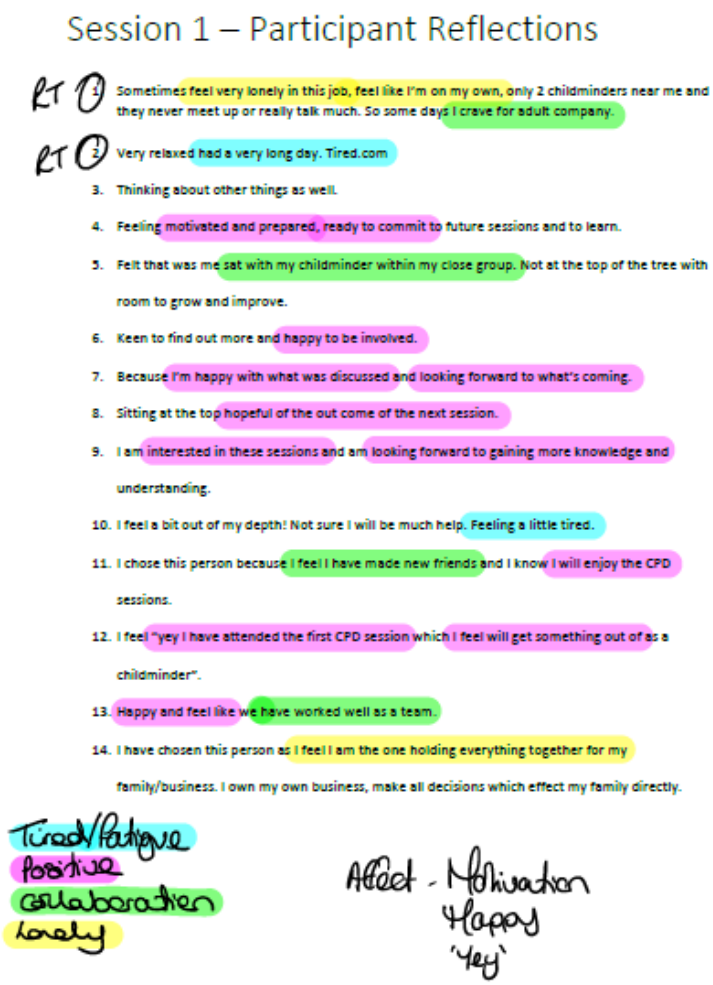
[Fig 6.6 Reflection tree blob choices: Session one]

Overall, there was a sense of independent engagement through the blob choices, nine of which were positioned on their own; as well as an indication of collaboration, through the selection of five sets of blobs positioned together. The blobs are open to multiple interpretations in their grouping and positioning on the tree; yet supported by the written comments, they provided a more informed insight, into the feelings of the childminders. Although initially used as a tool for reflection, the blobs 'reinforced the content, providing another form of… support' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 102) through the data analysis, and acted as a visual accompaniment to the voices of the childminders. Furthermore, they took on meaning for my own reporting within the thesis, being incorporated symbolically as a means of encroaching on the art/impressionist presentation of authentic qualitative data across Ellingson's (2009) continuum.

Just as Sarah and friends aided in the telling of the voices from the survey findings, each blob has been utilised to support the presentation of my analysis of the reflections

throughout the findings chapters. I could have simply assigned letters to each blob for reference, however I gained confidence from Oliver's (2014) advice that 'it is possible to develop new and innovative ways to include data in the thesis. The main requirement being, that the presentation should reflect as accurately and validly as possible the original data at the point of collection' (Oliver, 2014, p. 170). Moreover, Ellingson (2009, p. 154) proposes that 'we can blur the boundaries between art and reporting' to enhance the aesthetic value of a report 'serving to make it more beautiful while simultaneously furthering its primary goal of effectively communicating meaning' (p. 154).

In addition, through my initial preparation of the data, I followed the advice of Creswell (2014) to assign the code of RT to indicate reflection tree comments, and EV to identify the evaluative comments. They are each preceded by the number of the section on the template, and numbered participant response, as demonstrated in Fig 6.7. In addition, I chose to prepare and organise the data by hand, rather than by utilising computer programmes such as NVivo (Creswell, 2014). Software programmes such as these offer deep analysis across a range of data types from 'virtually any source, including surveys, interviews, articles, video, email, social media and web content, rich or plain text, PDF, audio, digital photos, spreadsheets, and notes from integrated third-party applications' (NVIVO, 2020). However, much of the data we were generating comprised handwritten notes, and paper based documents, which are less compatible with computer based programmes. Instead, I found the process of taking photos of handwritten reflections, typing up evaluative responses, and writing directly on the data via the iPad Pen and the GoodNotes App to promote manual engagement with my data, which Ellingson (2009) describes as also enabling and 'in-depth experience' (p. 17).



Session 1 – Participant Reflections

RT 1 Sometimes feel very lonely in this job, feel like I'm on my own, only 2 childminders near me and they never meet up or really talk much. So some days I crave for adult company.

RT 2 Very relaxed had a very long day. Tired.com

3. Thinking about other things as well.
4. Feeling motivated and prepared, ready to commit to future sessions and to learn.
5. Felt that was me sat with my childminder within my close group. Not at the top of the tree with room to grow and improve.
6. Keen to find out more and happy to be involved.
7. Because I'm happy with what was discussed and looking forward to what's coming.
8. Sitting at the top hopeful of the out come of the next session.
9. I am interested in these sessions and am looking forward to gaining more knowledge and understanding.
10. I feel a bit out of my depth! Not sure I will be much help. Feeling a little tired.
11. I chose this person because I feel I have made new friends and I know I will enjoy the CPD sessions.
12. I feel "yey I have attended the first CPD session which I feel will get something out of as a childminder".
13. Happy and feel like we have worked well as a team.
14. I have chosen this person as I feel I am the one holding everything together for my family/business. I own my own business, make all decisions which effect my family directly.

Tired/Fatigue
Positive
Collaboration
Lonely

Affect - Motivation
Happy
'Yey'

[Fig 6.7 Example of coding reflection tree comments by session and respondent number]

The childminders indicated a range of feelings through their blob choices, providing explanation via an accompanying narrative in the text box next to the reflection tree. Nine responses were positive, commenting on their motivation to be involved in the research, whilst five were less positive, either commenting on their feeling of being tired, or in relation to their broader role of being a childminder. I subsequently discuss these under two headings of positive and challenging responses.

6.6.1.1 Challenging Responses

The challenging responses comprise feelings of fatigue, and a sense of loneliness.

6.6.1.1.1 Fatigue

Fatigue, and worry about the demands of their childminding role, presented themselves from the outset of the research as a barrier to CPD. Two of the fourteen childminders commented specifically on their tiredness; the childminder who shaded the blob asleep on the tree was '*very relaxed, had a very long day. Tired.com' (RT1.2)* and the childminder who shaded the blob falling down the tree trunk, also commenting that she felt *'a bit out of my depth! Not sure I will be much help. Feeling a little tired' (RT1.10).* Lightfoot and Frost (2015) reported a similar feeling for their participants, who were 'mentally, not just physically, tired and vulnerable after giving so much every day' (p. 411).

Although evenings had been chosen by the group as the most appropriate time to meet, 'long hours are… common in the sector' (Kalitowski, 2017, p. 9) and I knew from my own experience that childminders start work early in the morning to provide childcare for parents, who themselves need to get to work. They often finish mid evening to provide childcare until these parents have finished work, and collected their child. To then engage in CPD from 7.30pm to 9.30pm as we had arranged, results in 14.5 hours of work in a single day. Through a survey initiated by PACEY, Kalitowski (2017) , found that 38% of childminders in her sample worked for more than 50 hours per week. However what is less commonly considered is that due to the independent, self-employed nature of the childminding role they are also often the sole practitioner in their setting. Therefore, breaks are not possible; breakfast, lunch and dinner, alongside all other activities, are taken with the children in their care.

6.6.1.1.2 Lonely

I determined in chapter two that childminders are often isolated (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Mooney & Statham, 2003, Owen 2007), they do not have regular opportunities to work together and even fewer opportunities to contribute their views within research (Ang, et al., 2017). Childminding can be a busy and demanding job, exemplified through the comments below:

Thinking about other things as well (RT1.3).

I have chosen this person as I feel I am the one holding everything together for my family/business. I own my own business, make all decisions which effect my family directly (RT1.14).

As well as indicating loneliness and a desire to network with others:

Sometimes feel very lonely in this job, feel like I'm on my own, only 2 childminders near me and they never meet up or really talk much. So some days I crave for adult company (RT1.1).

Networks had been identified as an integral source of support for childminders (Owen, 2007), yet were reported by Callanan (2014) to have moved to largely online provision. The reflection contributed by this childminder, demonstrated the continuing need to establish sector led networks, as suggested by the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b) and this remained a focus throughout this research.

6.6.1.2 Positive Responses

The positive comments put forward initial indications of how CPD opportunities could positively affect childminders, by increasing their motivation and confidence.

6.6.1.2.1 Motivation

Siraj, et al.., (2017) identify through the Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) study, that CPD can affect participants by enhancing 'motivation, confidence, developing professional relationships, [and] supporting personal characteristics' (p. 23). In this first meeting there was an indication of the opportunity to meet, affecting a disposition to learn, motivation, and confidence that their participation would be beneficial for their own development:

Feeling motivated and prepared, ready to commit to future sessions and to learn. (RT1.4)

I feel "yey I have attended the first CPD session which I feel will get something out of as a childminder". (RT1.12)

Through these responses, the childminders expressed a committed outlook, with a sense of motivation and purpose.

6.6.1.2.2 Collaboration

Action research is recognised by McNiff (2017, p. 56), as able to 'take into account personal emotions and relationships, as well as structural ones', when developing practices. Similarly, longer-term relationships between the practitioners and instructors or mentors were identified by Laningan (2011, p. 407) as important for 'maximising the effectiveness of the training'.

A collaborative approach to the session was also demonstrated, as well as being indicative of existing relationships and the forming of new ones;

Felt that was me sat with my childminder within my close group. Not at the top of the tree with room to grow and improve. (RT1.5)

I chose this person because I feel I have made new friends and I know I will enjoy the CPD sessions. (RT1.11)

Happy and feel like we have worked well as a team. (RT1.13)

The sense of collaboration is representative of the daily interactions and regular engagement, demonstrated by these childminders through the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.1.2. Offline Engagement). Kemmis (2009) suggests that relations between practitioners in action research are already defined by the wider context in which they work. Nonetheless, it is also action research that holds the capacity to develop practice (McNiff, 2017), which in this context includes the potential to make collaborative opportunities more accessible, through the development of CPD and support networks. In addition, the friendly nature of the individual childminders facilitated the making of new friends in this session.

6.6.2 Evaluation Comments

The reverse of the reflection template, invited the childminders to evaluate specific elements of the session, broadly related to the features of CPD that the childminders had identified as necessary through the survey responses (see Chapter Five: 5.5.3. A Positive Difference). I listed these for evaluation as: discussions with colleagues; gaining knowledge and practical ideas; their own development; and with an open-ended opportunity to add 'any other reflections'.

'Working systematically' (Ritchie, et al., 2014, p. 271), I first isolated the responses that had indicated feelings of fatigue and loneliness, to look more deeply for any further anxieties that might require specific support during future sessions. Three of these five childminders had gone on to reflect more positively through comments such as; *'lovely group of ladies, easy to talk to' (EV3.11)* and *'looking forward to [gaining knowledge]*

(EV2.2). The childminder who had expressed feelings of loneliness and who craved adult company *(RT1.1)* made no further reflective comments on the other side of the template. Thus, having gained no additional insight, I noted to continue to focus on the 'social dimensions' (Lanigan, 2011, p. 407) of CPD, building, forming, and supporting relationships throughout the core action research.

The remaining evaluative comments are discussed with regards to the respective sections on the template; gaining knowledge and understanding; discussion with colleagues; new ideas to take to your setting; your own development; other reflections.

6.6.2.1 Gaining Knowledge and Understanding

In line with the introductory purpose of this first session, the childminders confirmed their understanding of the research *(for example EV2.3).* Yet, the final comment also presented a reminder of the need to promote collaborative ownership of the process;

> *Understood everything that was explained about Kay's study. (EV2.7)*

For me, this first session could be aptly defined as a transition process. I had spent three years working within the first thesis action research phase, reading, developing and refining my own understanding of the topic and research process, and now I was inviting others to join me for the core action stage. Bleach (2013) identifies action research as a 'methodology [which] directly involve[s] the participants as co-constructors of the research process and CPD programme' (p. 376). However, in order to achieve this, the comment highlighted the need for me to be mindful of my positionality, to enable and promote a collaborative approach, as opposed to it being viewed as my study.

6.6.2.2 Discussions with Colleagues

The new and existing relationships were defined by two of the childminders at this early stage as being positive. Specifically, they were happy with the size of the group and felt

confident in expressing their views. The co-creation of the ethical agreement had potentially supported this confidence and paved the way for honest and confident views to be offered:

> *A nice number of people, already got new ideas. Feeling very relaxed and comfortable with everyone. (EV3.3)*

> *Think everyone got on well for the first session and we [are] confident to input into the group. (EV3.10)*

A sense of finding it *'interesting to meet new colleagues with different views'* (EV3.12) was also put forward alongside a positive view that it is *'good to get together with a large group of childminders that are motivated to go forward with CPD'* (EV3.8).

6.6.2.3 Ideas to Take Back to your Setting

Two of the three evaluative comments in this section identified the sharing of ideas which had occurred naturally in this first session through the childminders' own 'professional dialogue' (Bleach, 2013, p. 375);

> *A new schemas app shared by another childminder (EV4.1).*

This insight demonstrated the potential for learning to be a collaborative process through the enquiry, and one which could be facilitated by the childminders.

6.6.2.4 Your Own Development

The final set of comments were reflective of the anticipation of learning. In this session the childminders had learnt and discussed the aims and purpose of the research, and they had been invited to collaborate in the design and exploration of CPD. One comment demonstrated an eagerness to develop *(EV5.3),* and one childminder identified her understanding of the *'learning possibilities' (EV5.4),* afforded by her involvement in the

core action research. Crowley's (2014) emphasis on the importance of professional learning as a move forward from professional development, provides an insight that this motivated stance promotes active engagement with learning, rather than passive accumulation of knowledge. The use of the term *'motivated' (EV5.1)* further demonstrated the childminders' willingness to engage with a CPD enquiry.

6.6.2.5 Other Reflections

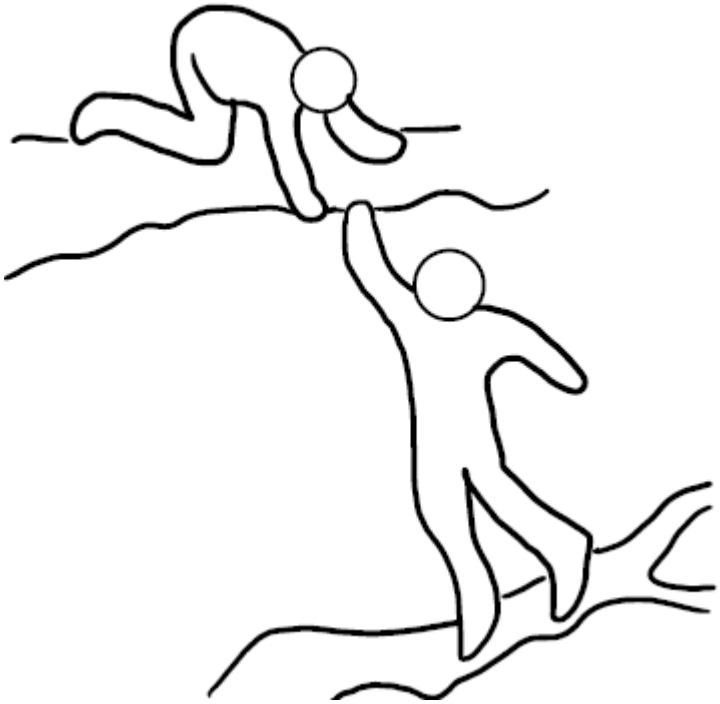
A clear sense of *'looking forward'* to participating in the research featured in three of the four final evaluation comments *(EV6.1, EV6.2, EV6.3)* emphasising their overall keenness to be part of the core action research enquiry.

6.7 Chapter Summary

At this introductory meeting, we had begun to work collaboratively, exploring how the core action research could inquire into ways in which CPD could be more appropriate. The childminders indicated anticipation of learning through their involvement in the core action research, and signaled their motivation and commitment to exploring new ways of working. Nonetheless, a reminder of the fatigue and isolation felt by some of the childminders in their demanding roles was also provided. During this session we had worked together to create ethical boundaries; the childminders identified their understanding of what the research entailed; provided their consent to participate; and we began to build relationships. The next step signifies our first cycle of core action research, presented in chapter seven.

Chapter 7

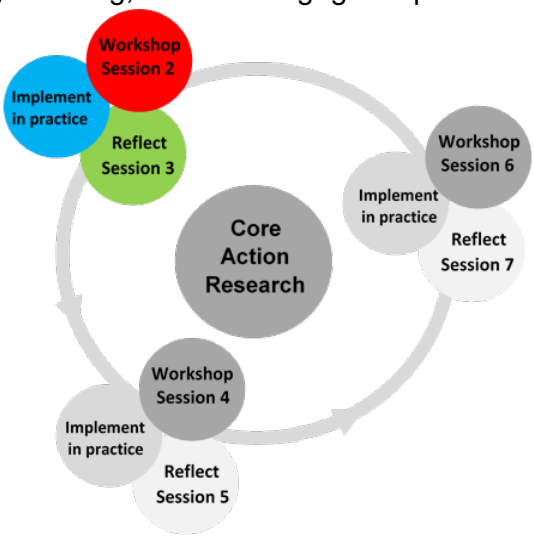
Forming a Cyclical Model of CPD



7 Cycle One

7.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The childminders were tired. They worked long hours and were heavily burdened in their multiple roles (see Chapter Six: 6.6.1.1.2. Lonely). Nonetheless, they also demonstrated through our first meeting, that they were motivated and committed to professional development. They had agreed to explore a deeper understanding of the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate, through research, further demonstrating that they actively seek opportunities to collaborate and network. I had met with the group of childminders for the first time at the introductory meeting (see Chapter Six: 6.3. Participants), during which time we reviewed the current opportunities and challenges to accessing CPD activities. We explored the key themes arising from the survey results that identified standalone training sessions as the primary form of available CPD. The childminders fed back that they valued the opportunities afforded through such activities, including networking, learning, and sharing good practice. However, they also experienced significant barriers broadly comprising the accessibility, and relevance of these opportunities.



[Fig 7.1 Core Action Research: Cycle one]

In this chapter, I introduce the first cycle of our collaborative core action research, depicted in Fig 7.1. The chapter is divided into three sections which correspond to the three stages of the cycle: I present the data from our second meeting designed as a workshop session; followed by my reflections on the implementation into practice stage;

then I present our reflections on practice and on the research which occurred during the third meeting. This cycle is the first of three core action research cycles, together forming the 'action and observation' stages of the thesis action research. Whilst the process looks neat and planned in its visual presentation (see Chapter Four: 4.11.2. Core Action Research: Phase Two), articulation of the mess (Cook, 2009) through which this structure evolved is conveyed across chapters seven, eight and nine, to provide an authentic account of our experiences.

Within this chapter, I present insights into our experiences, gathered through the first cycle of core action research, which build upon the features of CPD that had emerged from the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.8. Features of CPD) and that builds upon our introductory discussions of the design of the research (see Chapter Six: 6.5. Research Design). In addition, I establish the development of our collaborative approach to engaging and researching into a model of CPD; including the unexpected critical moments (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009), which add practical insights of childminding, gathered during the implementation into practice stage of the first cycle (see Chapter Seven: 7.3. Implementation into Practice). Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing the childminders reflections on practice and our evaluations of the first core action research cycle, and I make visible the way in which we developed the model as we moved into the second cycle.

[Fig 7.2 Cycle One: Workshop]

7.2 Workshop Two: Schemas

The first workshop, highlighted in Fig 7.2, focused on the topic of schemas, which was chosen by the childminders during the previous meeting (see Chapter Six: 6.5.2. The Process: How it could work). During the same discussion, we had agreed to continue to meet at the university, on the first Monday

of each month from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. The location and time were deemed accessible by the childminders, there was a free car park, and refreshments were available from various outlets on and around the campus.

7.2.1 Trainer and Facilitator

In this first session I assumed the role of trainer and facilitator, introducing the childminders to the topic of schemas. Lave and Wenger (1991) differentiate, in a community of practice model, between a learning curriculum and a teaching curriculum. A teaching curriculum is instructional 'mediated through an instructor's participation, by an external view of what knowing is about' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 96), whereas, I sought to take the approach of a learning curriculum which 'assume[s] that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to the activity, and hold varied viewpoints' (p. 97). The latter promotes opportunities for shared engagement and a shared understanding within the community of practice.

I had designed the workshop session to focus upon ten of the main schemas described by Arnold (2010), which we explored through group discussion and practical activities. Piggot-Irvine (2006) lists the types of activities that should be included in professional development programmes such as 'surfacing of ideas… and prior knowledge; engaging in enquiry; entering into dialogue and reflection; and reframing actions and plans' (p. 483), as well as opportunities to co-construct knowledge. I provided a range of resources to accompany the activities, in order to promote interaction and engagement, which reflected materials typically found in a home-based setting, for instance: kitchen items, such as a colander and wooden spoons; recycled packaging, including foam and chocolate trays; and craft materials.

Exploration of the resources, and discussion in terms of how they supported schematic play, formed the main activities, during which I began to move fluidly between the roles of trainer; providing information, and facilitator; encouraging discussion and engagement with the activities. Piggot-Irvine (2006) describes the role of a facilitator to require 'multiple facilitation skills' (p. 483), for instance organisation, empathy, and high expectations of learners. Whereas, Given (2008) describes the role of an action researcher to vary across that of 'facilitators/researchers/consultants' (p. 6), thereby enabling 'knowledge generation and the development of new practices [to be] integrated and theorized' (p. 7).

I joined in with the childminders' discussions and interaction with the resources; drawing from my previous childminding experience to offer practical examples; listen to their contributions and questions and learn about their experiences. The childminders considered how they might provide the time and opportunities for children to be driven by their schematic play, and explored the resources in terms of how they could promote child led activities. In addition, they shared stories of schematic behaviour that they recalled from their existing knowledge of the children in their care and discussed some of the challenges they experienced in practice; such as how to promote free accessibility to the resources for older children, whilst remaining mindful of risks from smaller objects to the younger aged children in their care. Final reflections and evaluations on this session are discussed later in this chapter (see section 7.4.4. Reflection on Practice: Session Three).

7.3 Implementation into Practice

Looking forwards to the following session, I felt positioned again in Cook's (2009, p. 279) 'messy area' of the action research process. Together, the childminders and I were

exploring ways of developing a model of CPD, which was appropriate to meet childminders' distinct needs, for example, by holding meetings in an appropriate venue; at an appropriate time; and based on an agreed focus. Nevertheless, at this point we had engaged in a standalone workshop, and made open-ended plans to revisit the same topic of schemas in the next session. During our discussions at the workshop, we had co-constructed knowledge and understanding of practice; the childminders identified new ideas they had gained from each other and from the session, and indicated their motivation to develop their understandings through implementation in their settings. I suggested we could share some of these accounts during the next session, to which they agreed and suggested bringing photos of the changes they were implementing.

The action research approach denoted a cyclical process in order to adhere to the principles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (McNiff, 2017). Yet, it was not until the first cycle had been carried out in full that I could see, with hindsight, how our actions were beginning to fit into the structure of an action research cycle. My position as a doctoral researcher entailed my own journey of 'building, and extending skills and knowledge about educational enquiry' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 1), and my role in the thesis action research was to produce an authentic account of the core action research, from a more 'distant… perspective' (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007, p. 422).

Through her self-study, Nyanjom (2018) describes the importance of the researcher articulating their lived experience throughout the enquiry process, in order to critically engage with the mess. However, Cook (2009) asserted that accounts of action research, often 'portray neat and tidy research models' (p. 278), which often do not account for the mess. Tidy models of action research were unquestionably useful in developing my understanding of action research as a methodological approach for this enquiry (for example, see Chapter Four: 4.11.2. Core Action Research: Phase Two). However, the

ways in which the models of action research transpose into practice is by way of a developing process that is changed and modified over the course of the research. During this time, Cook (2009) asserts that if 'hidden… [the mess] would continue to be incorrectly characterised as negative and would remain misunderstood and under-utilised' (p. 279).

Although we did not meet again until session three (two months later), I have included this period of time as a key stage within the core action research (CAR) framework; defined as the implementation into practice stage (Fig 7.3). It was during this stage that the childminders implemented their learning and ideas from the schema workshop into their daily practice; which, through our emerging model of CPD, formed the action and observation stages of the core action research cycle. I was not directly involved with the childminders in this stage of the core action research; they selected ideas from the workshop session to implement into their practice and documented their observations of the changes to practice.

[Fig 7.3 Cycle One: practice stage]

During this time, I was engaged in observing where we were in the core action research process. I took a 'cautious and thoughtful' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 106) approach to reflecting on my actions at each stage of the CAR, during which time I was 'mulling' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 97) over our collaborative actions, engaging in what Ellingson (2009, p. 74) also terms as 'wondering'; a process used to question and explore goals. I understood both of these terms as thinking processes; the former suggesting an act of contemplation, whilst the latter indicates an active curiosity. Thus, the third session began to formulate, through my wonderings, as an opportunity to facilitate the next step in the action research cycle of reflecting on practice.

Through my mullings and wonderings I was involved in what Wilson (2008, p. 180) defines as 'reflection before action', which in this instance, allowed me to identify the potential for the third meeting to achieve two goals of action research: the first to create an opportunity for the childminders to reflect on their implementation of knowledge to practice; and the second to allow us all to reflect collaboratively on the first cycle of the core action research, with a final objective of looking forward to developing the next cycle.

Divided into these two preconceived parts; the third section of this chapter subsequently presents the childminders' reflections on practice (see section 7.4. Reflection on Practice: Session Three) and then our reflections on the first cycle of the core action research (see section 7.5. Reflection on Research: Session Three).

7.4 Reflection on Practice: Session Three

[Fig 7.4 Cycle One: three]

The previous workshop on schemas had been held in July, and our discussions during the session enabled us to identify that a meeting in the school holiday month of August would not work for the childminders. August is when they are at their most busy, providing holiday childcare for the school children, as well as the regular early years childcare for their under-five year olds. Therefore, the reflection session, highlighted in Fig 7.4, was held two months later on the first Monday in September, 2017.

Through the survey, the childminders had identified challenges of CPD to include the quality of some of the sessions; describing them as un-engaging and boring and reporting that tutors simply read information from PowerPoints (see Chapter Five: 5.5.6. Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision). With this in mind, I facilitated an introductory activity, to re-engage us all as a group and provide an opportunity to recap on the previous workshop focus of schemas. We played Kahoot; an interactive online quiz

programme that has engaging features such as scoring and team player options. The programme invites players on their own, or in teams, to interact with multiple choice questions via the mobile phone app. During the game, the programme displays live updates such as, which player answered the question the fastest and who got the most correct in a row. One childminder evaluated the activity positively at the end of the session as a *'fun way of seeing how much we know' (E18).*

7.4.1 Examples of Practice

The childminders brought with them some examples of the changes they had made to their practice over the previous two months, in the form of child observations, photos of activities, and some had verbal stories to contribute. The examples gathered during the implementation stage of the CAR, offered an insight into practice knowledge, which Ang, et al., (2017) identify is lacking within current research. Consequently, I was mindful that the childminders' practical contributions were not lost through written reporting modes of the research, such as this thesis.

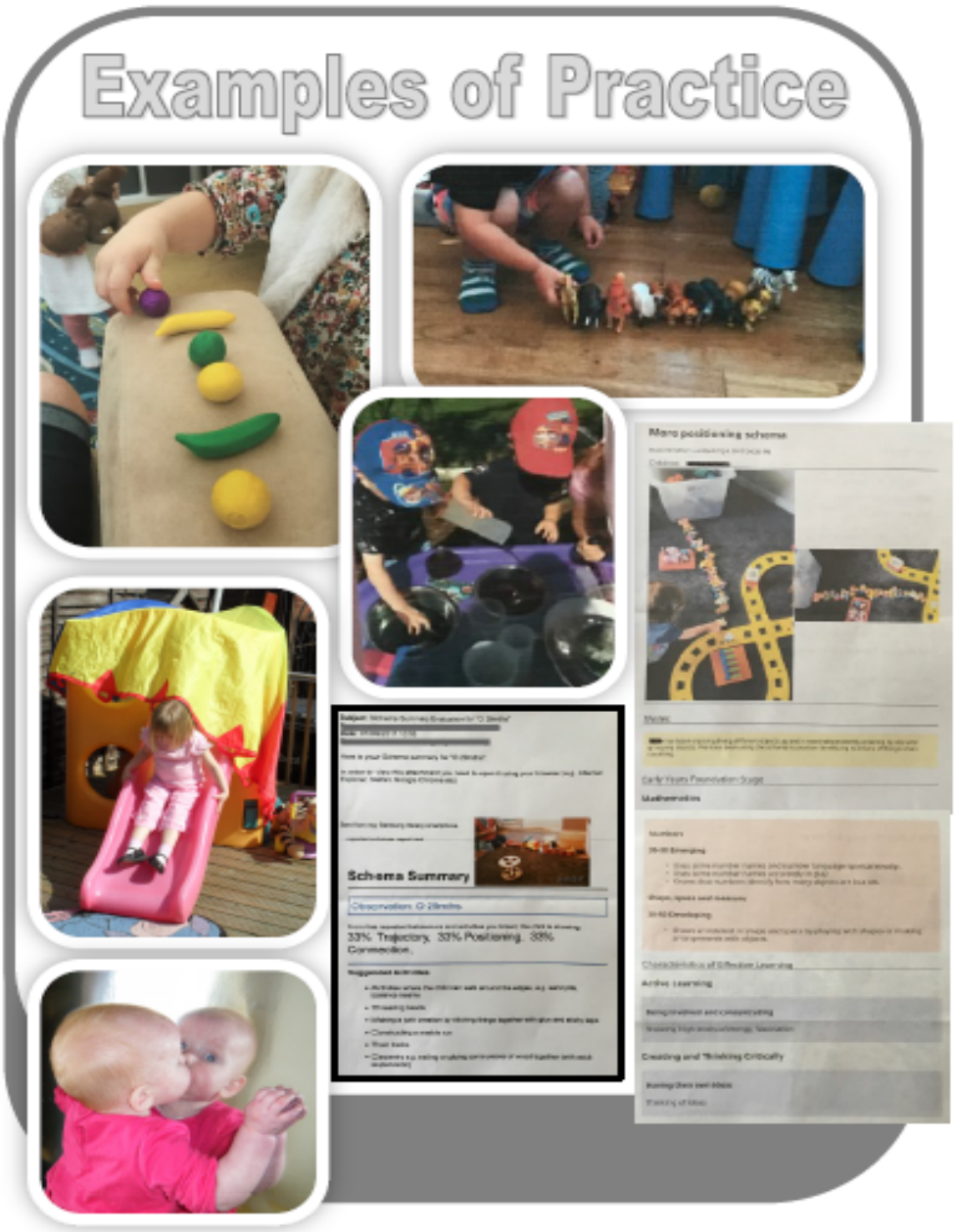
The decision of how to present examples of practice as data, required further consideration, and necessitates a second interim opportunity from my reporting of the collaborative action research. Whilst primary accounts of childminding practice are rare within research, they are more common within sector publications such as: professional magazines (Nursery World, 2019); forum discussions (The Childminding Forum, 2019); and independent websites, for example; Childminding UK (2020). O'Connell (2013) had included photos of childminding environments in her thesis, scanned in as images of pages from her accompanying journal article (O'Connell, 2011), which worked as a strategy to provide the visual data.

At the end of the core action research I had collated a selection of the photos shared during the research (based upon those that protected the children's identity), within the Essential Childminder Magazine (ECM) (see Chapter Four: 4.13.1.2. The Essential Childminder Magazine) which I had subsequently shared with the childminders. Therefore, like O'Connell (2013), I saw no need to reinvent what had already been achieved. It was technically feasible to weave together the different genres of writing with which I had engaged, to create a thesis which 'accomplished the integration of artistic and social scientific work' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 104). Further, having spent time considering the aesthetics of other elements of the thesis presentation such as the font size, page layout, chapter structures, tables, and contents; it seemed remiss not to pay just as much attention to the presentation of the visual data (see for example, Fig 7.5).

There had been much discussion around open ended resources and activities to promote and encourage child led and schematic play in the previous workshop session. The photos shared by the childminders focused on examples of the resources and activities they had introduced into their practice (Fig 7.5). For example, the second photo on this page (bottom middle) demonstrates the use of everyday household objects, by providing colanders, alongside a collection of pipe cleaners. Rice Crispies have provided an opportunity for mark making in the photo on

[Fig 7.5 ECM examples of practice: schematic resources]

the left, whilst potentially supporting either a rotation or trajectory schematic activity. The final photo (bottom right), portrays a selection of natural and household items, organised in an inviting way to promote positioning or seriation schematic play.



[Fig 7.6 ECM examples of practice: schemas]

The second page from ECM (Fig 7.6), includes two examples of schematic play from my own childminding practice (which were offered during the workshop session as examples

of schematic play, therefore included in the magazine); the slide (middle left) to demonstrate diagonal trajectory behaviour; and the mirror (bottom left) as an example of learning through the orientation schema. Positioning and seriation schematic play was evidenced through three of the childminders' pictures (top left, top right and middle right) and the trajectory explorations of pouring in a water tray in the final picture (middle). On this page, are also examples of observations that two of the childminders had brought to share, which demonstrate the use of apps, designed specifically to record observations on children in early years settings.

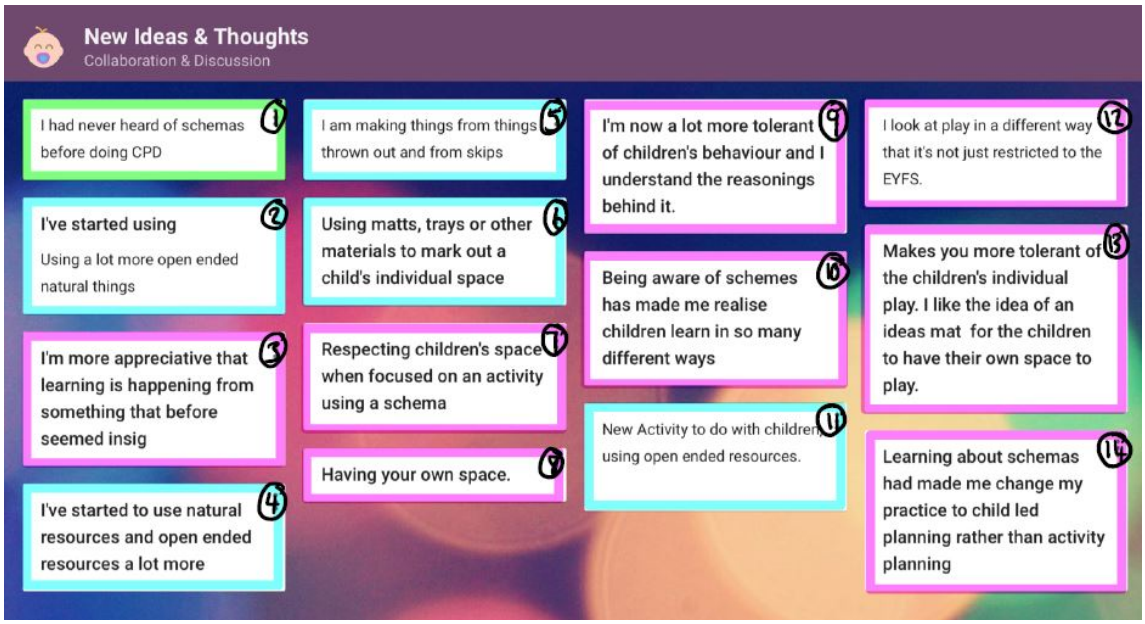
The examples of the observations (bottom middle and bottom right), had used a schema app and an online programme called Tapestry that enabled the type of schematic behaviour to be recorded, which then generated automatic links to the EYFS areas of development, and characteristics of effective learning (DfE, 2017a). Software such as Tapestry (The Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, 2019), is becoming more popular across early childhood settings, as a means through which children's observations can be recorded, for example on iPads, then shared in real time with parents through a secure log in site. These examples provide a window of insight into the digital observational tools and methods employed by this group of childminders to record and reflect on their children's development.

7.4.2 Reflecting on Practice: Building a Community

Central to the concept of a community of practice is access to members of the group who hold varying levels of experience; a range of information and resources; and ongoing opportunities for participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through these opportunities Wenger (1998) suggests that more experienced members support the newer members of the group, through a social learning model, representative of Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding learning, through the support of a more knowledgeable other. In

addition, Ingleby and Hedges (2012) report that communities of practice can 'enhance professional activity' (p. 537). Through this collaborative opportunity to reflect on practice, the childminders shared their photos, observations and verbal accounts initially in small groups. They each took on the role of the more knowledgeable other, to share, reflecting and discuss their practice. One of the childminders reported, during their final reflections, that they '*enjoyed being part of the group, being able to listen to others with more experience and to be able to discuss new ideas/activities' (RT1.7)*.

After the small group discussions, we opened up the discussion as a wider collective group. In advance of this session, I had prepared a Padlet, designed to capture some of the discussion and to support the participation of quieter members of the group. A Padlet is an online notepad through which the childminders could anonymously contribute thoughts and ideas via their mobile phones, which can then be displayed on the smartboard. The childminders posted a range of reflective comments, which summarise our small and whole group discussions (presented in Fig 7.7). The comments indicate some of the ways in which the childminders' views and beliefs around good practice had developed, as well as examples of the changes they had implemented to their practice. Examples of the childminders' learning from this first cycle include: being more appreciative and tolerant of the ways in which children learn (P3; P9; P10; P13); deeper consideration of children's learning spaces (P7; P8); an understanding that play is not *'just restricted to the EYFS'* (P12); and a clearer focus on child led play (P14).



[Fig 7.7 Padlet: Reflections on development of practice]

In addition, the childminders shared that they had tried out new activities and resources, more specifically to encourage open ended play, and they had started to use natural and recycled resources (P2; P4; P5; P11); as well as incorporating the Montessorian approach of *'using matts, trays or other materials to mark out a child's space'* (P6). Finally one childminder (P1) acknowledged schemas as a completely new concept that she had not encountered prior to engaging in the CPD.

Our reflective discussions had comprised the majority of this third session in the cycle, however, we undertook two more activities before completion of this meeting. The first, was for the childminders to complete the reflection and evaluation template, as a means to reflect on the session and to evaluate the developing features of the CPD. This became a consistent method of data collection, generated across the core action research (see Chapter Four: 4.12.1. Documents: Reflection Tree and Evaluation), and is presented in this cycle below (see section 7.4.4. Reflections and Evaluations on the First Cycle), just

prior to the final activity (see section 7.5. Reflection on Research: Session Three), during which time we collaboratively reflected on the research.

7.4.3 Interlude

Prior to presenting the themes from the session reflections and evaluations, I take an interim moment in my reporting on the first cycle of the core action research, in order to explain the layered approach to the action research. Ellingson (2009) recommends the use of strategies such as interludes, to enable the 'representation of reflexivity' (p. 13) within a researchers text, which in this instance has permitted me to rationalise my categorisation of the emerging themes, within the data.

My movement through the thesis action research comprised one year of core action research, then a further two years of reflection, data analysis and writing, to transition through to the third phase of the doctorate (Fig 7.8). I analysed the data consistently and systematically during the core action research, independently and in collaboration with the childminders, in order to inform the succeeding stages, and allow for continual development of our actions. Nonetheless, it was not until the second and final thesis action research phase, that I began drafting, writing and reviewing the findings chapters. Consequently, my thinking around the emerging themes continued to develop after completion of the CAR to support my presentation of our experience in a refined form as a thesis. In addition, my continuing engagement with literature provided more recent studies from which to draw, one of which, presented an understanding of key features of CPD for the

[Fig 7.8 Thesis Action Research: write and re-write draft chapters]

broader early childhood sector, across three domains, listed as: '(i) content', '(ii) process' (also listed later in the article as (ii) delivery), and '(iii) affect' (Siraj, et al., 2017, pp. 22-23).

Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) suggest returning to the literature to 'broaden and deepen' (2009, p. 194) understandings of findings, for example, to consider differing ways in which others have addressed a similar topic. Siraj, et al., (2017) utilised domains of thought in the Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) study, to support their analysis of features of CPD, which 'support change and improvement' (p. 22). In relation to my research question, which explores the ways in which CPD could be more appropriate for childminders, I utilised these domains as a basis from which I could begin to group our emergent themes. I thereby, began to map the thematic categories across the data from each of the sessions, to the domains of thought (Siraj, et al., 2017).

However, the concept of a domain of thought, is utilised in the FEEL study (Siraj, et al., 2017) with the purpose of categorising features of CPD. Through our enquiry we had undertaken a more open-ended approach to exploring the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. Drawing from Brocks' (2012) representation of a typology of professionalism, she utilised the overarching notion of 'dimensions', which I considered to more accurately resonate with the breadth of the findings from the core action research. Consequently, I applied and expanded the notion of a domain, to instead consider dimensions of CPD. Further, I expanded the number of dimensions from the three domains identified by Siraj, et al., (2017), in line with our emerging insights from the reflections and evaluations. The table is presented in its entirety, in advance in Fig 7.9, in order to depict the way in which my developing understanding of the CAR data began to take form, across the thesis chapters.

Dimension of CPD		CAR Emergent Features		
		Chapter 7	*Chapter 8*	*Chapter 9*
Approach	**Collaboration**	Journey	Cyclical, journey	Cyclical
Content		Knowledge, practice	Reflection on Practice,	Reflection on Practice
Delivery		Style of sessions discussion	Discussion	Lived Experience
Affect		Motivation, confidence	Motivation, confidence, pride	Confidence, motivation, value
Effect		Community of Practice	Community of Practice	Community of Practice

[Fig 7.9 Mapping of the emergent CAR themes to the TAR dimensions of CPD]

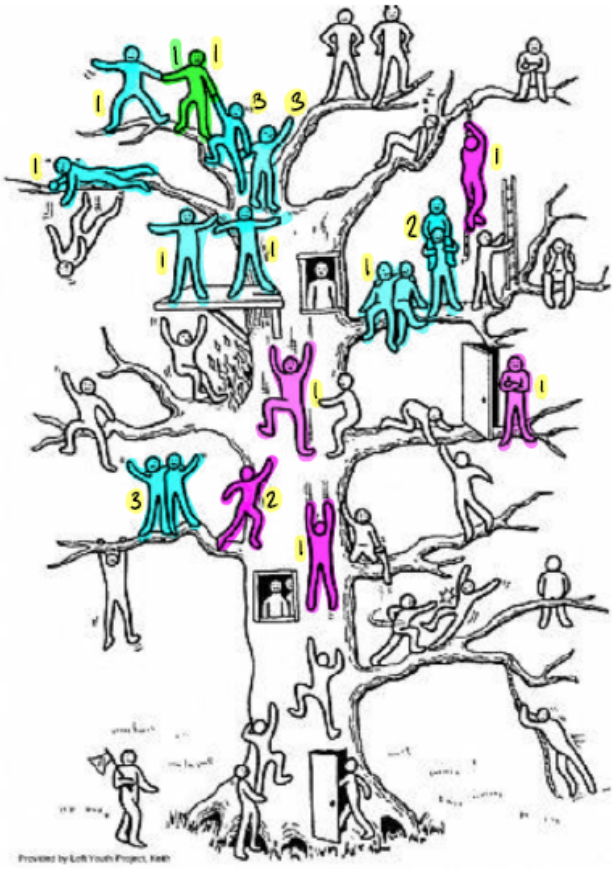
7.4.4 Reflections and Evaluations on the First Cycle

I collate and present the insights from the reflection tree and evaluation templates that were completed at the end of session two and three. They are demonstrative of the childminders individual reflections and evaluations of the first cycle within the core action research. The accompanying comments are collated from across two iterations of the activity (undertaken and the end of session two and session three). RT represents a comment on the reflection tree side of the template, and EV to indicate an evaluative comment. In addition, I have added an *'a'* to the coding used to identify the qualitative comments from session two, and a *'b'* if the comment was drawn from the session three reflections and evaluations.

The reverse of the reflection tree template provided the opportunity for the childminders to evaluate differing elements of the CPD process (see Chapter Four: 4.12.1. Documents: Reflection Tree and Evaluation). At the first introductory meeting, the childminders identified their preference to engage in CPD through workshop style sessions (see Chapter Six: 6.5.2. The Process: How it could work), which we commenced

from session two (see section 7.2. Workshop Two: Schemas). As a result of this development, I adapted the section of the evaluation form which had previously asked the childminders to comment on their own development; instead inviting them to comment on the 'delivery and style of the session'. Issues regarding the quality of existing CPD experiences which were delivered in a workshop style, had already been identified through the survey (5.5.6.2 Negative Views on Quality), as trainers reading from PowerPoint slides; lack of relevance of the content of the session to childminding; and the transmissive way in which the sessions were carried out. Therefore, I added a means through which the childminders could evaluate the quality of the sessions to inform our developing approach.

The childminders began by shading the blob figure which they considered best represented them, then explained why they chose that person. A summary of the blob choices are presented in Fig 7.10, which depicts the number of times each blob was chosen, shaded purple if positioned on its own, and blue if positioned as part of a group or pair. I discuss the reflective and evaluative comments across six broad themes: fatigue; approach; content; delivery; the affect; and the effect of engaging in the sessions. In addition, I noted that the childminders *gained so much in this [reflection] session (EVb1.1),* including a sense of feeling *'comfortable' (EVa2.7)*, and providing a reminder of the importance of continuing to cultivate a safe space in which to promote the reflective discussions (see Chapter Six: 6.4. CAR Ethical Considerations).



Purple	Blobs on their own	6
Blue	Blobs with others	17
Green	Blob as Kay	1

[Fig 7.10 Reflection Tree: Summary of sessions two and three blob choices]

Collectively, across this first cycle, the childminders highlighted six blobs positioned on their own and seventeen positioned with others, indicating a developing sense of community and a collaborative approach to their engagement. In addition, one childminder coloured a second blob (highlighted in green on Fig 7.8), labelling it as representational of my role; commenting *'Kay is helping me up the knowledge tree' (RTa1.5).* I understood this as the literal positioning of my role in 'partnership [with] participants… and… facilitators/researchers/consultants' (Given, 2008, p. 7). I considered the reflection to epitomise the multiple and fluctuating positions we held across the research process. For example, the placement of the figure positioned me within the group, working with the

childminders towards our collective and developing understandings of a model of CPD. It also placed me as being assisted up the tree by the childminders, demonstrating the movement of our peripheral positionings within the community. Finally, the accompanying written reflection added a perception of my role, closer to that of the master of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

7.4.4.1 Fatigue

One childminder provided a reminder of the fatigue highlighted previously in the first session (see Chapter Six: 6.6.1.1.1. Fatigue) that is experienced by childminders due to the long working hours and demands of the role: *'It's been a long day' (RTa1.1).* However, this childminder went on to comment positively across the evaluative sections, and we reviewed the organisation of the CPD as evening sessions, during our next step, when we reflected collaboratively on the research (see section 7.5.1. Areas for Development).

7.4.4.2 Approach

The childminders demonstrated that a collaborative approach to the sessions had supported their independent learning, from each other, as part of the CPD experience. In turn they began to view CPD as a process, depicted by their journey climbing the tree.

7.4.4.2.1 Collaborative

Fauth, et al., (2010) found that 73.3 per cent of the childminders in their study, used other childminders as their most frequent source of support, and although we had only met twice as a CAR group the childminders were actively engaged, through a collaborative approach and were supportive of each other through their discussions and sharing of ideas. Collaborative working was identified and defined through the reflections and accompanying blob choices as supporting learning; *'I feel I have*

met some other people and we can work together for a better understanding' (RTa1.3), as well as indicating a developing sense of being part of a group; '*Gaining knowledge from others, participating as a group' (RTa1.10).*

Two blob figures, positioned as a pair, were shaded to acknowledge a continuing collaborative approach to learning through *'good teamwork' (RTa1.11)*; further demonstrating the social construction of learning with other childminders who hold a variety of experiences *(RTb1.7)* adding that they enjoyed the opportunity for '*idea sharing and getting inspiration from others' (RTb1.11).*

Conversely, three of the childminders reflected positively on their own independent learning from the training session, yet chose to accompany their statements with blobs positioned as a pair *(RTa1.4; RTa1.9; RTa1.12).* I understand this to demonstrate a sense of their own individual learning, yet also with the recognition that this learning occurred with others:

'Found subject very good and was able to connect the schemas to my own children' (RTa1.12).

7.4.4.2.2 Journey

Professional development is identified as a process through Hordern's (2012) review of policy, and within research, such as that of Bleach (2013). A sense of this movement was illustrated during the early stage in the core action research, by the childminder who chose the blob figure climbing up a rope:

> '*Feel like I can move up the tree to progress further with watching the children and seeing/observing what schemas they are displaying' (RTa1.6).*

In addition, four childminders combined their perception of collaborative learning with their sense of professional development as being a journey *'always climbing' (RTb1.3)*. Another of these felt she had been supported to reach the top of the tree:

> *I feel I'm on top of the topic with the help of all the others (RTb1.2).*

Whilst another was on her way:

> *Getting to the top with others (on my journey) (RTb1.8).*

In addition, providing a reminder that they were *'not quite at the top as there is always room for improvement' (RTb1.6).*

Two childminders continued the journey of learning by '*climbing the tree of knowledge!' (RTb1.1),* however this time, with an independent focus on their own learning, demonstrated through their individual blob choices, and stating for example that they were 'a*lways climbing learning more things' (RTb1.3).*

7.4.4.3 Content

Knowledge and practical ideas were identified by the childminders through the survey as two valued features of CPD (see Chapter Five: 5.5.3.1. New Ideas and Broadens Knowledge). However, Hoban (2002) believed that existing CPD models focus primarily on either knowledge, or context specific practice, suggesting that a greater balance between the two is needed in future models. Kemmis (2009) identifies that action research has the potential to change practice; understandings of practice; and the

conditions in which practice is undertaken; recognising that 'each shapes the others in an endless dance in which each asserts itself, attempting to take the lead, and each reacts to the others' (Kemmis, 2009, p. 463). Further, Cherrington and Thornton (2013, p. 120) identify both 'theoretical and content knowledge' to be an integral element of professional development, for which Bleach (2014) identified 'the action research process [as] instrumental in helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice' (p. 195).

7.4.4.3.1 Knowledge

Comments from the workshop session specify a link between the knowledge we had constructed, and the future application of this understanding to practice, for example:

> *I feel that I understand the topic and will use my new knowledge in my setting (RTa1.9).*

Kennedy (2014) identified a limitation of the training model of CPD asserting that 'what the training model fails to impact upon in any significant way is the manner in which this new knowledge is used in practice' (p. 339), whereas, through this reflection, the childminder identified the intention to apply knowledge to practice, as a result of her engagement in the cycle.

The childminders had directed against repeating the same old topics through their survey responses (see Chapter Five: 5.5.6. Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision), and emphasised the diversity of the childminding workforce as all holding varying levels of knowledge and experience. To this end, the childminders in this action research group had decided on the topic focus of the first workshop session (see Chapter Six: 6.5.2. The Process: How it could work), and I had facilitated the session to introduce the basic schematic concepts, as well as provide opportunities to explore some more detailed

theoretical understandings of schemas. Through their evaluations of this session, one childminder stated it was *'great to refresh current knowledge' (EVa1.5),* and another '*recapped on lots of knowledge I learnt back at uni' (EVa1.2)*. Further insight was added, detailing the achievement of a *'better understanding of the schemas never really understood what to do with the information' (EVa1.9)*, as well as confirming their existing knowledge had been *'enhanced' (EVa1.1)*.

Subsequently, the evaluations of session three, which had provided an opportunity for the childminders to reflect on their practice and implementation of the knowledge, indicated that they had consolidated their previous learning through the group discussions. These instances included opportunities to ask questions and share ideas, as well as acting as a means through which the childminders continued to construct their learning. They had gained a *better understanding (EVb1.9)* and gained new practical ideas for activities *(*for example*; EVb1.7).* Two childminder's offered more general comments, identifying their increasing pedagogic understanding that '*learning isn't always about the EYFS' (EVb1.4,)* and that the *'children are doing more schemas than… I think at times' (EVb1.3)*. Finally, demonstrating a developing confidence in knowledge, expressed by one childminder *'in recognising schemas and planning to accommodate extending learning' (EVb1.6)*.

7.4.4.3.2 Practice

All of the childminders evaluated the sharing of practical ideas positively, during the workshop session; eleven of which gave specific examples of ideas they were taking away with them, such as for new resources: '*using more open ended objects, not expecting an activity to have a certain outcome' (EVa3.3);* or to develop their practice: '*will be doing observations in a new way in future' (EVa3.2).*

One of the distinctive features of a childminding setting is the access to everyday resources, including household equipment such as saucepans and furniture; and everyday recyclable materials, including cardboard boxes and milk containers. Audit scales designed to measure the quality of the resources and home environment are available, such as the Family and Childcare Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R) (Harms, et al., 2007), yet, they are not referred to in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) or included in Ofsted inspection guidance. Further, they do not include specific reference to household items in their indication of the quality of resources in a family and childcare environment. In fact, the terminology used resonates with a group-based setting more than with a family home environment, for example, through the arrangement of indoor and outdoor areas into specific areas of learning, and the use of wall displays in the childminders' home (Harms, et al., 2007).

Otero and Melhuish (2015) utilised the FCCERS-R, as well as the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEW) (Siraj, et al., 2015) in the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) (Otero & Melhuish, 2015), to assess the quality of childminding practice and the home environment. However, encouraged by O'Connell's (2011) call for alternative conceptualisations of quality, I had included examples of everyday resources within the workshop session, to demonstrate how the childminders could support schematic and open ended play opportunities, specifically in a home-based environment. The childminders enjoyed '*moving around, looking at objects and discussing ideas' (EVa4.3)* and had been inspired '*to use 'everyday' objects rather than just toys (EVa3.4)'*. More generally, they stated that they would '*try new things at home after this [reflection] session' (EVb3.9)* and identified specific activities they wanted to explore, such as '*wooden blocks – (homemade)' (EVb3.1)* and *'using mats to help children mark out the space for focused individual activities' (EVb3.11).*

7.4.4.4 Delivery

Providing the space and time for conversations, and the sharing of different perspectives, is a crucial element of professional development (Leitch & Day, 2000), recognised by Crowley (2014, p. 87) as 'unfortunately… often unavailable'.

7.4.4.4.1 Discussion

The evaluative responses of the workshop (session two) and reflection session (three) indicated *'much more discussion on this occasion' (EVa2.1).* The childminders had been willing to share ideas, and *'learn from others experience' (EVb2.8)* signifying a developing shared constructivist culture of learning, which had also been identified by Owen (2007) as an important feature required within CPD opportunities. They found it *'interesting to hear how others see things' (EVa2.10)* and '*hear others points of view' (EVb2.2),* co-constructing new knowledge and understandings throughout the collaborative process.

The evaluative comments indicate that the structure of these sessions provided the space and time to support each other through a developing community of practice, during which time they could be *'open and reflective' (RTa2.6),* which they found *'reassuring' (EVa2.5)* and *'very useful' (EVa2.7).* Evaluations of the opportunity for discussions were evidenced to be *'very good' (EVb2.1; EVb2.9; EVb2.10)*, as well as '*enjoyable' (EVb2.6),* and '*priceless' (EVb2.11).*

7.4.4.4.2 Style of the Session

Training sessions are defined by Kennedy (2014) as having a transmissive purpose, involving knowledge being delivered by an expert to passive recipients. However, Wells (2014) and Hordern (2016) believe there is a need to include input from an expert during CPD sessions, in order to support the professional development of practitioners. Nonetheless, the childminders had identified through the survey that in their current

experience of CPD, there was a '*lack of trainers who have the practical experience, knowledge and insight'* of childminding (see Chapter Five: 5.5.6. Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision). Therefore, I drew from my own experience of childminding to facilitate the sessions in this cycle, and involve the childminders as active participants framed within a social constructivist approach to professional development.

This sharing of roles was evaluated by the childminders as a *'good mixture of Kay talking and group work' (EVa4.2)* and a *'good balance between delivery and participant input' (EVb4.11).* Adjectives such as *'excellent, informative, pacey, engaging' (EVa4.5),* were used to broadly evaluate the style of the session, adding that the sessions were *'a good mix' (EVb4.6),* well *'presented' (EVa4.7)* and *'explained'* (*Eva4.10).* The time for discussion, and the level of engagement by the childminders were identified as reasons why the session worked well, revealing that *'everyone joined in discussions' (EVb4.2)* and that it was *'very relaxed, but it worked as all chatted to each other, rather than just the person next to you' (EVb4.9).*

7.4.4.5 Affect

Engaging in the sessions had a positive affect for the childminders that began to develop their confidence and motivation.

7.4.4.5.1 Confidence and Motivation

One childminder reported a developing confidence in her knowledge:

> *I am going home tonight feeling confident about the topic (RTb1.5).*

Two childminders indicated they would *'continue to learn'' (EVb5.4)* and were *'motivated to explore further' (EVb5.6),* supporting the belief held by Bleicher (2014, p. 805) that by

promoting ‘involvement in such collaborative efforts, [learning] captures their interest’. Motivation is reported by Bleicher (2014) to be a fundamental component to the cycle of collaborative action research, as it supports ‘the quest for more content knowledge’ (p. 804). In addition, the childminders reported their motivation to be affected positively through their engagement in CPD, and they were ‘*looking forward to the next session!’ (EVb5.5)*.

The childminders had drawn from their own experiences within the discussions to co-construct their learning by sharing examples of practice, asking questions and engaging with the resources and activities. As a result, another childminder reflected on her increased confidence and motivation, to develop her practice and provision;

Feeling confident about existing knowledge and motivated to refresh ideas/activities and resources – thank you ☺ (RTa1.8).

7.4.4.6 Effect

One childminder did not add a comment to accompany her choice of the blob, which could indicate a lack of engagement with the activity, or that she did not want to share her reflection.

7.4.4.6.1 Community of Practice

She positioned her blob at the bottom of the group of four blobs (at the top of the tree);

resulting in a total of eight childminders choosing this particular group of blob figures across this cycle. This insight reinforces the idea that we were building a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) from which, there emerges the potential to develop localised childminder networks (Owen, 2003; Fauth, et al., 2010).

7.4.5 Informing the Next Cycle

There were two final evaluations, the first expressing thanks and the second indicating that they *'can't wait for the next session!' (EVb5.11),* which we had identified through a group discussion as being designed around the topic of 'International Approaches'. This time rather than using a word cloud to suggest topics, the focus of international approaches stemmed from an anecdotal discussion with one of the childminders. Being fairly new to childminding, this individual was very focused on working within the EYFS statutory guidance (DfE, 2017a), primarily concentrated on the seven areas of learning, and the creation of an enabling environment. This was good practice, and a testament to her determination to provide high quality childcare. However, what she had not had time to consider was what we termed during this conversation as *'life outside of the EYFS'*. Schemas, had been an example for her, of an element of early childhood practice which is not mentioned in the EYFS statutory guidance (DfE, 2017a), and therefore a new concept to her.

I was inspired by the conversation with this particular childminder and asked the wider group if they would like to explore 'life outside of the EYFS', by looking at other approaches to childcare in which they do not use the EYFS as a framework for practice, to which they agreed. This session is presented in chapter eight (see 8.2. Workshop Four: Life outside of the EYFS)

7.5 Reflection on Research: Session Three

The final focus of our discussions at the end of session three, and subsequently the end of the first cycle of core action research, was to explore our views and reflect on our actions as a CAR group of co-researchers. This involved exploring what was going well and what we wanted to change, or develop, moving forward to the next cycle.

I invited the childminders to reflect on the overall process of what we had been doing over the past few months as a model of CPD. We discussed the elements we had enjoyed and considered to be working well, and any challenges we were experiencing, as well as our suggestions to change or develop the process. I was also keen to capture these ideas, to support our ongoing analysis of the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate, therefore, I provided some sheets of note paper: pink to record the positive reflections and green to note the areas for development. This strategy also provided the opportunity for the childminders to record any additional comments that they may not have been comfortable to share in our group discussions.

In total, the childminders created eighteen pink notes and five green notes. I present the green notes first (coded 'G') to represent the suggestions for developing the next cycle of research.

7.5.1 Areas for Development

The accessibility of CPD was addressed through our discussion (G1; G2, G3), providing a reminder that evening sessions are tiring, *'A little tired after a day of working. Brain is a little tired' (G3);* whilst suggesting Saturday's as an alternative; *'I think I learn better when I have a course on a Saturday as opposed to an evening session after a long day at work. However I have found these sessions have held my attention' (G2).*

We had agreed collectively, during the first introductory session to hold two hour sessions, in the evening, once a month (see Chapter Six: 6.5.2. The Process: How it could work). However, this did not deter from the fact that evening sessions are not ideal for all childminders. Saturday training is sometimes available and included occasionally in Local Authority CPD provision. Nonetheless, the childminders complimented these challenges with suggestions of how to develop the evening sessions further, for example,

through different types of learning experiences including ‘g*uest speakers, outside activities… or maybe learning outside the classroom – going on visits or a different learning experience’ (G4).*

The final comment added an observational insight that to date we had carried out the evening sessions during the autumn months when the evenings are shorter. Highlighting that ‘*dark nights ☹’ (G5)* can add to the sense of a long day and the feeling of fatigue by the childminders.

7.5.2 Positive Reflections

There were 18 individual pink notes, however, through the recording process of our discussions some of these listed a number of positive statements on the same note. In order to draw overarching themes from these reflections, I numbered the post it notes, and compiled the individual statements into a table, grouped and coded across the dimensions of CPD: approach (AP); delivery (D); Effect, recorded as learning (L); Affect (AF). In addition, I categorised collaboration (C) as running thread of CPD, and acknowledging the anomalous responses (AR) (Appendix 10). I present these interpretations under the corresponding headings:

7.5.2.1 Approach

Ingleby (2017) emphasised the importance of gathering findings on practitioners’ experiences of the process of CPD, to generate a better understanding of how it can be developed to be more effective. The cyclical process of a three stage cycle of core action research which had begun to emerge, was also evident to the childminders, and mentioned positively through their reflections. One childminder stated that *‘training is pointless without the opportunity to implement what you have been introduced to and then reflect on it by coming back together as we’ve done here’ (A24).* Further comments

outlined the enquiry based approach, describing it as *'a great way to learn' (A25).* In addition, the childminders compared our approach during this first cycle directly to *'CPD courses that are offered at the moment… where the tutor only provides a PowerPoint… and leaves little time to build enthusiasm' (A22)*, as well as stating that *'it's not just an evening session, here's your certificate and finished' (A21).* Online courses were also mentioned as not providing *'the opportunity to share good practice' (A22)*, leading to the discussion in the next thematic area, of the delivery of CPD.

7.5.2.1 Delivery

Online courses were thought by the childminders to be *'mind numbing… which you can skip through and learn nothing' (D1)*, whereas the general consensus was that *'this training has been an excellent mix of tutor led and student participation' (D3). C*omments such as these, support the potential to achieve suggestions within the literature, such as those made by Hordern (2012) that early childhood practitioners should inform and 'take greater control' (p. 116) over the design of CPD activities.

The survey results in chapter five, identified the importance of the content of CPD to be relevant in terms of differentiating for the varying levels of existing experience and knowledge held by childminders (see Chapter Five: 5.5.6. Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision). Formal qualifications in England, are designed in academic levels, thus student groups are often more or less working sequentially through the courses, for example level three in Further Education, level six in Higher Education degrees and then level seven Masters qualifications. However, CPD training sessions comprise a diverse group of individuals, all at varying stages and levels in their formal education, and practical experience. For example, in the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.6. Negative Views on the Quality of Existing Provision) Sarah, who held over 11 years of practical experience, reported that she wanted to experience new and challenging CPD

opportunities, whilst Rebecca also felt some of the training she had experienced was quite basic; being degree qualified, yet holding less than a year of experience working in a home based childminding setting. Considering 69 per cent of the childminding workforce are level 3 qualified (Bonetti, 2018), this equates to a complex task when designing and facilitating appropriate CPD sessions that meet the needs of such as diverse workforce.

Positive reflections on my approach to facilitating the sessions were shared, stating that *'Kay is very informative in the session… and is open to any questions' (D29)*, and they felt *'not being talked at, and having people reading from a PowerPoint is refreshing' (D32).* Two different terms were used to describe my role across the sessions of *'lecturer' (D27),* and *'tutor' (D28),* providing some initial insight into how my position within the core action research was coming across. It was reassuring that the childminders felt I had *'explain[ed] everything really well' (D27),* and had been *'informative in the session' (D29),* with an *'excellent mix of tutor led and student participation' (D28)*. However, the reflections also supported my observed understanding that the inclusion of time for discussion and the facilitation of collaborative activities within the design of the sessions, had allowed the childminders of varying knowledge and experience to support each other, by sharing ideas and co-constructing knowledge.

The style of the sessions was thought to be informal, during which the *'conversation flows easily' (D29)*. The allocation of time was appreciated; *'having time to discuss with other childminders… gives you so much more than a handout can' (D34)*, and *'2 hour sessions are a good amount of time and group sizes were practical' (D35).* Recalling that I had been apprehensive about facilitating a session devoted entirely to reflection, I was then particularly interested to note that one childminder *'found the reflection session much more informative than the training session' (D31).* Furthermore, the childminders

reflected positively on specific activities such as *'using photos creates and generates lots of discussion and meaningful sharing of ideas' (D33),* as well as '*having to go away and make notes to bring back and discuss gave me a reason to follow it through' (D31).*

7.5.2.2 Effect: Learning

Learning occurred through the process in the form of gaining knowledge on the topic of schemas; *'I have learnt so much… I feel my knowledge has increased' (L13),* and in gaining practical ideas to take back to their settings; *'I go home with lots of ideas of ways to improve my setting' (L16)*. Existing knowledge was also identified by *'realising I know more than I thought I did' (L17).* Campbell-Barr (2018) questions the knowledge base of early childhood, suggesting the need to explore how technical knowledge gives meaning to daily practice. This is evident here as one childminder realised *'it* [is] *happening in my setting all the time and I need to record it more' (L15),* whilst another *'can now relate to what children are doing in my setting' (L13).*

7.5.2.3 Affect: Inspired

The childminders felt positively affected through their engagement with this first cycle of CPD. They reflected on their enjoyment of the sessions (E10) and the quiz (E12), and shared that they felt *'inspired when I leave the session' (E11).*

7.5.2.4 Collaboration

Positive references were made of the opportunities to meet, talk to each other, share ideas and *'bond with other childminders' (C9).* Childminding networks provide key benefits to support practice (Dawson, et, al., 2003 & Owen, 2007) and the childminders reported they *'Love meeting other minders' (C3)* and they *'met new childminders that* [they] *never would have met' (C4).* They found it enjoyable, interesting, useful, and positive *(C2; C4; C5; C8)* to engage in collaborative discussions, further demonstrating

the formation of a community of practice which had the potential to support an ongoing approach to professional development (Sheridan, et al., 2009). Moreover, reflective practice is well documented as a key feature of professional development (Bleach, 2014) and action research (McNiff, 2017). As a result of our collaborative approach to professional development, one childminder acknowledged that it is *'good to talk to others… recognising things you may not on your own' (C6),* revealing the beginnings of critically reflective discussions between the childminders.

7.5.2.5 Anomalous Responses

There were two comments which did not fit easily into the themed categories, instead providing a sense of regret that *'I missed the second one due to illness' (AR19)*, as well as providing positive feedback from an Ofsted inspector about the process of engaging in the core action research:

> *Recently had an Ofsted inspection and explained to her how I was going forward with my CPD. She was very impressed that I was doing it monthly and was enthralled to hear we were going over schemas (AR20).*

During an Ofsted inspection, childminders must demonstrate how they 'evaluate their service and strive for continuous improvement' (Ofsted, 2018, p. 6). The childminders in O'Connells' (2011, p. 796) study were 'cynical about the substantive and evaluative 'qualities' called up by regulation', whereas evidencing engagement in CPD activities to Ofsted had not yet been raised in this study. Engaging in CPD as a measure of quality of provision, was put forward by the childminders during the survey, as necessary to their role (see Chapter Five: 5.5.3.2. Raises Quality and Benefits Children). Through these survey responses, they recognised that CPD enhanced the quality of provision, although they made no reference to the value this added for Ofsted inspections; instead focusing

on the positive impact it afforded to the children and families in their care. A childminder receiving positive feedback from an Ofsted inspector, in relation to participating in the core action research, supports the potential for it to have a positive effect on practice and measures of quality.

7.6 Chapter Summary

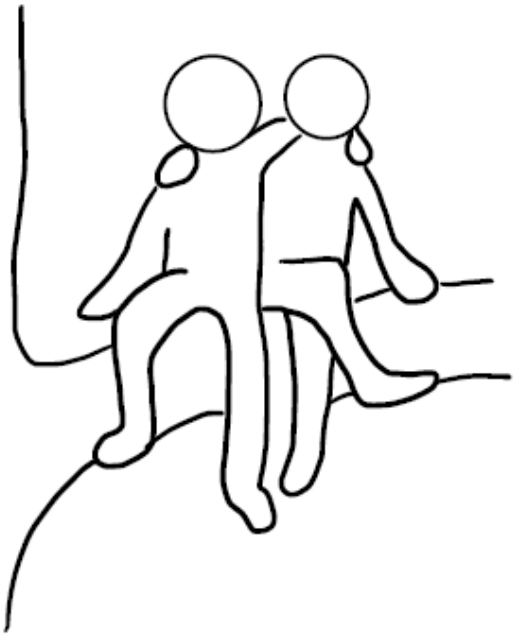
I began the research by asking, in what ways CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. Through this first cycle of the core action research, a three staged cyclical approach had emerged; encompassing a workshop session, time to implement the knowledge and understanding into practice, and a third session providing an opportunity to reflect both on practice and on the core action research. The childminders had reflected and evaluated throughout the first cycle, providing a sense of how their engagement with the CPD had positively affected their motivation and confidence, as well as indicating a developing community of practice. The notion of professional development is 'often seen as merely participation' (Timperley, 2011, p. 5), whereas, a shift towards professional learning was demonstrated, through the emergence of a cyclical model, a focus on the co-construction of knowledge and skills, the use of a systematic, enquiry-based approach, and the inclusion of opportunities for engagement and reflection (Timperley, 2011).

In addition, Crowley (2014) places an emphasis on 'practice and dialogue as central sources of professional learning' (p. 82), which occurred through this cycle by sharing insights into childminding practice, which enabled further knowledge and understanding to be co-constructed through the discussion. Furthermore, the childminders established themselves as researchers; capable of utilising their existing skills of observing children and reflecting on their practice, to contribute and build upon the knowledge shared

through the developing core action research. My role therefore, started to become ’more facilitative and less directive’ (Stringer, 2014, p. 13), as we moved into the second cycle of the core action research.

Chapter 8

The Childminder Approach



8 Cycle Two

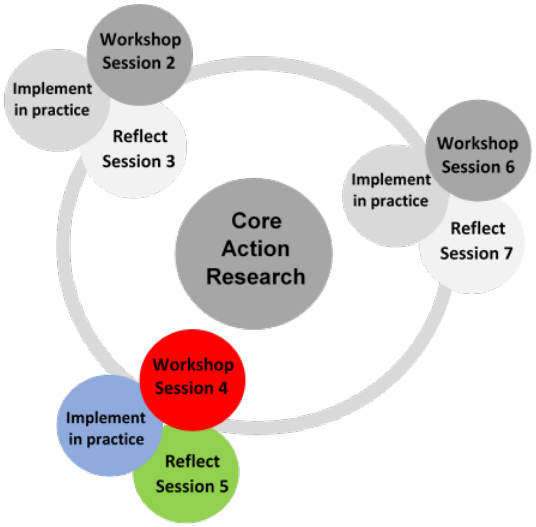
8.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The ‘early years sector in England is famously fragmented’ (Kalitowski, 2017, p. 23), and childminders working within this sector have been identified as holding a distinctive, yet fragile identity (Jones & Osgood, 2007; Ang, et al., 2017). Childminders were brought under the same statutory educational framework as group based settings through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008), to which they employ a distinctive approach (Ang, et al., 2017) through their intrinsic mothering values and home-based approach to working with children and families (Brooker, 2016). They are characterised by common features such as their home environment and their close relationships with children and parents (O’Connell, 2011; Ang et al., 2017), and are often profiled through surveys (Otereo & Melhuish, 2015; Bonetti, 2018). However, childminders remain less visible in terms of practice and pedagogy (Ang, et al., 2017), and the childminders in this study believe there is a societal lack of understanding surrounding what we termed through this second cycle of the core action research, as the ‘childminder approach’.

The childminders had reported an increasing scarcity of external support (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4.2. Cost). They called for a greater understanding of the childminder approach to inform CPD provision, which we had begun to explore through the first action research cycle (chapter seven). The childminders, and I, had worked together to begin to formulate an approach to CPD which was more appropriate to meet their distinct needs. This had emerged as a three staged structure comprising; workshop, implementation and reflection sessions, and we had placed an emphasis on the accessibility of the CPD to be held locally, and outside of working hours. Through the design of the first cycle, I had facilitated the delivery and inclusion of relevant content, with opportunities for reflection

and the sharing of practice, and through their collaborative engagement, the childminders had begun to build a network of support, through a community of practice. In addition, examples of practice were documented by the childminders, which had facilitated an insight into childminding practice within the first core action research cycle.

A new topic focus of 'life outside of the EYFS' had been chosen for the second cycle of the core action research carried out through the same cyclical structure, encompassing the three stages of; workshop (session four), implementation into practice, and reflection (session five), highlighted in Fig 8.1. Consequently, through the presentation and discussion of our experiences in this chapter, I build upon understandings of how CPD can be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, by providing further insight into the emerging dimensions of CPD (approach; content; delivery; effect; and affect). In this chapter, the childminders contextualize these features by constructing further insight into their 'distinct' (Ang, et al., 2017) pedagogy.



[Fig 8.1 Core Action Research: Cycle two]

8.2 Workshop Four: Life outside of the EYFS

The EYFS (DfE, 2017a) outlines basic childcare regulations in England, and sets out expectations for supporting children's learning and development across seven areas of learning. Childminders are required to complete an introductory short course during their registration period, in order to support their understanding of these policy expectations (ECC, 2019). They are not required to hold any formal childcare qualifications to support

their broader knowledge and understanding of early childhood. Yet, despite the lack of formal qualification requirements, Bonetti (2018) found that 69 per cent of childminders are recorded to hold at least a level 3 early childhood qualification. Nevertheless, research such as the Nutbrown review (2012) and more recently of Elwick, et al., (2018) describe early years training and qualifications as 'cluttered and confusing' (p. 515). Instead, Siraj, et al., (2017) and the OECD (2019) identify CPD activities to be a suitable driver for the development of quality practice, outside of formal qualifications.

This second cycle, followed the same three stage structure as the first, depicted in Fig 8.2. We began the first workshop session by exploring and discussing our current understandings of practice. The childminders brainstormed their priorities: to meet children's individual needs; offer a range of activities to promote learning indoors and outdoors; keep children safe; and encouraging independence. They shared their ideas as a whole group and we discussed the notion that practice is based on individual values and beliefs, as well as being guided by policy frameworks, which in England, is currently in the form of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017a).

[Fig 8.2 Cycle Two: Workshop]

I introduced five high quality international approaches (OECD, 2004) to early childhood provision, as examples of practice that sat outside of the EYFS (DfE, 2017a): High Scope; Reggio Emilia; the Swedish National Curriculum; and the principles of the Steiner and Montessori approaches. The focus was placed on the principles of the approach, rather than the type of setting, in order for us to review the practice principles and enable the childminders to explore the similarities and differences to their own practice.

I made examples of these differing approaches to practice visible to the childminders through the use of video clips, and a visit from a guest speaker that had previously been suggested as a way to develop the CPD experience (see Chapter Seven: 7.5.1. Areas for Development). Use of the clips instigated interesting group discussions after each video on key elements of practice and the childminders were particularly interested in the examples of Swedish pre-school practice. Examples in the video clip incorporated elements similar to provision in a home-based environment, including; eating meals around a full size dinner table, and key workers being responsible for 'family' groups of children of mixed ages.

At the end of the session an anecdotal discussion occurred on what the childminders defined as the 'childminder approach'. They reiterated the views previously gathered through the survey, that many of the existing CPD opportunities provide examples of practice in group based settings, yet lack examples of childminding settings across the CPD materials. Basford (2019) recognised that the intention of the EYFS was to unite the different types of settings across the ECEC sector 'yet so far, has failed to find common ground in the establishment of a unifying title that is representative of the responsibilities, values and knowledge base that early years practitioners possess' (p. 779). Bashford (2019) goes on to state that it is the core values, which 'bind this eclectic group' (p. 779), whereas, our discussion is an example that demonstrates a perceived lack of understanding of what these core values are for childminding. Further, childminding pedagogy has been defined through literature differently to that of other types of early childhood settings, thought to employ a 'distinct' (Ang, et al., 2017, p. 261) pedagogical approach to practice. Through our discussion, the childminders called for a greater understanding to be demonstrated of their 'childminder approach' within CPD sessions that are on offer to them.

We did not have time to unpick and explore these ideas further. Instead, I suggested we continue these discussions in the subsequent reflection session, at which time we would be reflecting on any changes to practice that the childminders had implemented from this session. The final focus of the evening was afforded to completing the reflection and evaluation forms, of which an analysis is presented and discussed in this chapter in section 8.4.4 Reflection Tree and section 8.4.5 Evaluation Comments.

8.3 Implementation into Practice

[Fig 8.3 Cycle Two:

The childminders expressed an eagerness to implement some of the ideas they had gained from the workshop, into practice, over the course of the following month. This period denoted the implementation stage, of this second cycle of the core action research, highlighted in Fig 8.3. In addition, one of the ways in which the childminders had initially suggested CPD could be more appropriate, through the survey, was by asking for the individuals who delivered the CPD, to hold an understanding of the childminder approach to childcare and education (5.5.4.3 Experience and Relevance). This, in turn, could generate *'childminder specific courses' (R6),* which reflect a deeper understanding of the childminder approach, within the content material of the session. Led by the childminders' discussion, I organised the following session to facilitate three elements: an opportunity for the childminders to reflect, collaboratively, on their implementation of ideas into practice; opportunities to explore further insight into the childminder approach; and finally time to reflect more broadly on our completion of the second cycle of the core action research.

8.4 Reflection on Practice: Session Five

[Fig 8.4 Cycle Two: Reflection]

The reflection session is highlighted in Fig 8.4, to complete the second cycle of the core action research. We began this session by recalling key ideas from the previous workshop and I utilised the Mentimeter programme again, as a way in which the childminders could share their recollections as a whole group, and to record an account of our reflective discussion (Fig 8.5).

[Fig 8.5 Mentimeter: Childminder recollections of examples from practice outside of the EYFS]

These recollections served as a starting point for our discussions, including the ways in which the examples from the workshop, had inspired developments to the childminders'

own practice. The childminders recalled the names of the approaches they remembered through four of the statements. Yet, it was the specific activities that were recalled by the majority of the childminders (through 19 of the 23 statements), such as risky play, involving lighting candles and the use of dolls with no facial features, to promote imagination and storytelling. Basford (2019) identifies that practitioners should be introduced to 'alternative ways of knowing' (p. 782) in order to 'challenge the taken for granted assumptions about what is the right type of educational experience for young children' (ibid). The cyclical structure of the sessions and the childminders' engagement in the construction, implementation and reflection of practice, demonstrated an action research approach to CPD to be a feasible approach to challenge existing ways of working. Yet, it also demonstrated a focus on constructing understandings of existing practice, such as the childminder approach, that is not currently as visible amongst the 'taken for granted assumptions' (Basford, 2019, p. 782).

There were two childminders present at this reflection session, who had been unable to attend the previous workshop. They were particularly interested in the conversations we were having surrounding the Swedish approach to childcare, and so with the agreement of the rest of the childminders, we re-visited the corresponding video clip in order to support these two individuals' understandings, and enable them to join in with the conversations. This occurrence revealed, that attendance at each stage of the cycle needed to be considered in future iterations of a cyclical model of CPD, in order for the childminders to be able to engage fully with the three stage cyclical approach. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) advise that group members in action research should be 'flexible and open to new ideas…they must be prepared to innovate when the traditional solutions to a problem are clearly inadequate or inappropriate' (p. 141). The collaborative and flexible approach to the sessions had, in this case, enabled us to change and adapt

the activities within the session, based on our impromptu conversations and the childminders' differing needs.

8.4.1 Examples of Practice

The childminders had taken some of the practical ideas from the previous workshop session, to apply to their own practice during the implementation stage of the CPD cycle. They had selected photos of the activities they had tried in practice over the course of the month, and in some cases had brought the physical resources with them that they had purchased, to show the rest of the group such as: books; large scarves; and wooden toys. We repeated the same process as previously, sharing photos, reflecting on experiences and co-constructing new understandings of practice through group discussion.

Examples of practice from the childminders' settings are displayed in Fig 8.6, which encompassed new resources such as a 'wobble board'; reclaimed wooden shapes; figures; and small logs; as well as an example of the resourceful way in which the stair gate, in a home environment, was utilised to create a play den. Discussions were rich in accounts of specific activities that they had been trying, and the ways in which they had changed their environments or accessed new resources. In addition, through the discussions, the childminders reflected on how the new activities and approach to practice had supported the children's learning and development.

[Fig 8.6 Examples of Practice: Session five]

8.4.2 Distinctive Pedagogy

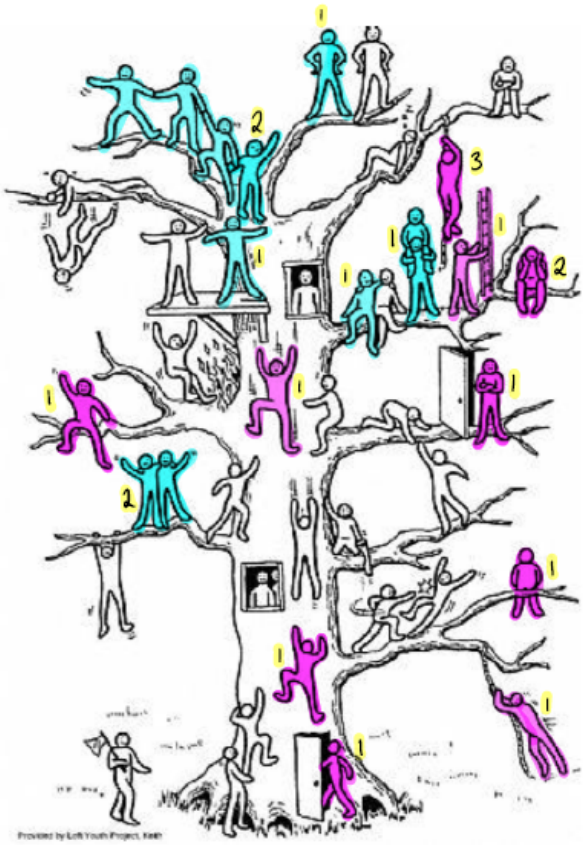
'A core feature of action research is to see how one research question can transform into another' (McNiff, 2017, p. 155). Through this core action research, we were questioning the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. The childminders had identified that part of the answer to this question, necessitated a deeper

understanding of childminding to be held by those involved in facilitating CPD opportunities. Asking another question of 'what is the childminder approach?'

My use of integrated crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) to create the final doctoral thesis, acknowledged 'multiple representations' (p. 127) to be produced from one data set. In this instance, narrative responses created in exploration of 'the childminder approach', are considered outside of the immediate scope of the doctoral thesis. The insights present four key elements of childminding which need to be considered in future opportunities for CPD: the home environment; family values; care and education; and their differences from group-based provision. Through these localised insights childminders have begun to build an understanding of their collective, distinctive (Ang, et al., 2017) identity that will provide an important direction for future research.

8.4.3 Reflections and Evaluations on the Second Cycle

Through the end of session reflections across this second cycle, thirteen childminders chose blobs who were positioned on their own, and eight chose blobs positioned with others (Fig 8.7). There was more of a focus on individual practice and the childminders' own development, demonstrated through the blobs selected to represent this cycle. The majority are positioned towards the top of the tree, depicting the sense of '*Onwards and upwards! ☺' (RTb1.9),* and supporting the view that professional development is a journey (Bleach, 2013).



Purple	Blobs on their own	13
Blue	Blobs with others	8

[Fig 8.7 Reflection Tree: Summary of sessions four and five blob choices]

Across the reflections and evaluations of the CPD process, in this second cycle, an overall focus was placed on having learned about the different approaches to childcare provision, as well as the gaining of new practical ideas. The childminders recognised the journey of their learning, building upon the collaborative and independent opportunities afforded through the workshop and reflection sessions. They demonstrated a growing confidence and sense of pride in their role, and built upon understandings of the dimensions of CPD. They added insight into the practical considerations of a cyclical approach, placing importance on the opportunity within the content of the sessions to reflect and gain practical ideas, and demonstrating the value they placed on being involved in the sessions, and the creation of a support network. The remaining discussion, provides a reflective insight into the emerging dimensions of CPD.

8.4.3.1 Approach

This was the second cycle of CPD in the core action research, and whilst attendance at all sessions was not compulsory, one of the childminders *'missed the last session to this so found it a little hard but have enjoyed this week as its shown me that I do a lot!' (EVb1.5).*

8.4.3.1.1 Cyclical

The cyclical approach to the CPD process necessitated engagement with each of the stages in order for the childminders to engage effectively in each step of inquiring into an area of practice. However, as demonstrated in the record of participation table (see Chapter Six: 6.2. Recruitment), none of the childminders were able to attend all of the sessions. This created an issue during the reflection session as one childminder was unable to effectively engage in the discussion on a topic she had not previously explored. This was addressed through our collaborative decision making during the sessions, for example, in this instance, we referred back to the materials from the workshop, to include those who had missed the information previously.

8.4.3.1.2 Journey

A continuing sense of the journey of professional development, was revealed, by the

childminders who were *'working my way up the tree of knowledge' (RTb1.2),* including their eagerness to continue learning '*enjoying sessions and eager to learn and explore more' (RTb1.1);* which was represented visually through the blobs climbing the rope and the ladder.

8.4.3.2 Fatigue

We had continued to get together for the sessions in the evening. and so fatigue

remained a factor, illustrated through the blob holding his head in his hands; *'Monday been a long day' (RTa1.4),* whilst another chose a blob positioned at the bottom of the tree, swinging on a rope,

representing the ongoing feeling of being *'worn out' (RTb1.7)*.

8.4.3.3 Content

Wells (2014) includes reflection as an element of professional learning programmes, in order to allow knowledge to be placed in context.

8.4.3.3.1 Reflection on Practice

In this instance, the childminders evaluated that they had gained knowledge and understanding by *'reflecting back' (EVb1.1; EVb1.2)*. Carter and Fewster (2013) believe that reflection enables the development of practice and pedagogy, which was demonstrated in this enquiry, through the more general opportunity to reflect through group discussion and questioning; commented on by the childminders as having the effect of being '*thought provoking' (EVb1.9)* and 'c*oming here makes me re-think my whole knowledge and understanding' (EVb1.7).* Further comments added, that they were *'enjoying gaining a new understanding (EVb1.8)* and now *'understand how other countries offer childcare' (EVb1.6).*

A multitude of ideas to develop practice were also shared during the sessions, some of which were listed in the evaluations; for example *'wooden activities' (EVb3.4)* and *'scaling resources down' (EVb3.8).* One childminder indicated that she would continue to explore the topic; *'want to look at Reggio' (EVb3.5),* whilst another more broadly *'will look at more approaches and how I can incorporate them into my setting' (EVb3.9).* The childminders

added that *'seeing videos really helped bring the 'theory' to life' (EVa1.4),* and confirmed it was *'nice to have a guest speaker' (EVa4.6).* These evaluations provided an indication that the childminders were engaged (Timperley, 2011), and prepared to contextualise their ideas through subsequent application to practice. However, Colmer, et al., (2015) provide a reminder that the implementation of ideas by itself, is not sufficient to develop away from a transactional experience akin to Timperley's (2011) definition of professional development. It is the interpretation and learning which results from this engagement, that denotes a more transformative journey towards professional learning.

8.4.3.4 Delivery

All the childminders evaluated the delivery of the session positively; largely through descriptive adjectives as before, including; *'excellent' (EVb4.3); 'good' (EVb4.7);* and *'relaxed' (EVb4.8).* The style of the session was considered to be collaborative:

8.4.3.4.1 Collaborative Discussion

The collaborative approach to the sessions was a positive feature; *'I like the fact we are involved in the session' (EVb4.1)*, even for those who felt less confident; *'enjoyed it good participation even if I find it a little uncomfortable' (EVb4.5),* as well as appreciating the *'great mix' (EVb4.2)* and '*variation' (EVb4.4)* of the session. Descriptions such as '*brilliant' (EVb2.6); 'good' (EVb2.1; EVb2.5; EVb2.7); 'informative' (EVb2.8), 'great' (EVb1.9)* and '*enjoyable' (EVb2.9),* defined the opportunity to have discussions in the sessions, during which time the childminders *'talked about different things we had tried and brought' (EVb2.2).* Analysis in chapter seven (7.4.4 Reflection and Evaluations), introduced the importance of facilitating time for reflective discussion, and in a manner in which the childminders felt comfortable. It was, therefore, encouraging that this seemed to continue in the second cycle, during which time the childminders felt it was *'easy to voice opinions'*

(EVb2.4) within a *'really good fun group' (EVb2.5).* Overall, they deemed the discussions to be *'interesting* [and] *lively' (EVb4.9).*

8.4.3.5 Affect

The focus on practice in this cycle had prompted further exploration into the childminder approach to practice, and they had begun to define their own distinctive pedagogical approach.

8.4.3.5.1 Confidence and Pride

A sense of confidence and pride in their practice was shared through the reflections:

Enjoyed the session as felt confident to write about my setting. Felt pleased with how I run my setting (RTb1.6)

'Standing high and proud of the childcare I can and try to provide' (RTb1.8)

A focus on different approaches to childcare was denoted by the topic of this cycle, however, the perceived confidence in these approaches and the conviction with which the individuals in the video clips spoke of their practice, was singled out through one particular evaluative response;

'No single approach doubted their practice at all' (EVa5.2)

A discussion of the pride and confidence with which the individuals in the videos exemplified their practice had occurred naturally between us all at the end of the workshop session. It inspired a passionate, in-the-moment, collective articulation of identity by the childminders, exemplifying the identification by Ang et al., (2017, p. 261) that they are 'distinct from any other types of early years care'. The conversation

exhibited an increasing shift 'from an individualist to a collectivist orientation to research' (Gergen & Gergen, 2015, p. 405) as the childminders mutually voiced their questions and immediate responses, to what they themselves termed in this moment as the 'childminder approach'.

A climbing blob was also chosen to represent a more general positive affect of engaging in CPD, providing an example of the ways in which this was supporting change and

development to the childminders' approach to practice; *I'm having a more positive feeling – clearing out and re-thinking ideas, activities, resources (RTb1.3)*.

8.4.3.5.2 Motivation

Childminders are self-employed, taking ownership of their business and their childcare services, therefore, their practice is most often a reflection of their own family values (Brooker, 2016); of which the childminders in Ferri's (1992) study had been reluctant to develop. However, the childminders in this study indicated through their reflections, at

the end of the workshop, that the information and discussion of the different approaches, had affected a sense of *'feeling motivated and ready to try new ideas and a different approach to the way I've done things before' (RTa1.9).*

Motivation to try new ways of working was indicated by the childminders in this study. They reported feeling *'inspired and motivated to try out some new ideas' (EVa5.4),* for example specifying they would *'look at planning' (EVa5.6).* They commented more broadly that they liked the Swedish approach and would try this in their setting *(EVa3.8; EVa3.9),* and specifically identified activities and strategies they would like to undertake, that they had picked up from across the different approaches, such as *'child led, choices*

in play' (EVa3.2); the individual mat idea, calm environment, less restrictions' (EVa3.5); and *'rice and flowers in a sieve… tying up of ribbons' (EVa3.12)*.

8.4.3.6 Effect

The childminders' motivation to implement what they had learned, also supports Cherrington and Thornton's (2013, p. 120) belief that effective CPD 'aligns with a constructivist approach to teaching and learning', in which the focus is on professional learning, and the positioning of practitioners as experts within the CPD process.

8.4.3.6.1 Community of Practice

The childminders in this study felt that *'doors are open to explore different learning experiences (RTa1.10),* as an effect of engaging in the CPD, however, they were complimenting these knew experiences by sharing insights into their own practice; evidenced through an evaluation in which one childminder identified the group had contributed their *'shared ideas and own experiences and opinions' (EVa2.1).* Hordern (2012) deems opportunities such as these to be an important feature for the professional development of the broader early years sector, enabling the workforce to 'gain influence over… the professional body of knowledge' (Hordern, 2012, pp. 108-109), and through which Evetts' (2003) notion of knowledge being created from within the workforce becomes an emerging possibility.

The workshop had resulted in a different way of thinking, and the session was signaled to be an important stage of the CPD cycle, in providing an initial insight into *new approaches… am just starting looking into new ways of delivering ideas into the setting (RTa1.1).* Timperley (2011) differentiates between professional development and professional learning defining the former as 'delivery of some kind of information… to influence…

practice' (p. 4), whereas professional learning involves an 'internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge through interaction with this information' (p. 5). The childminders indicated characteristics of professional development in that they *'want to learn more and move ahead (RTa1.8)*, yet also indicating the potential for professional learning through their recognition that there is *'still so much to explore, question and try out' (RTa1.12).* Further, Timperley (2011) argues that professional learning requires the learners to be 'seriously engaged' (p. 5), and in this instance the childminders indicated they were '*keen to see how ideas I liked may work (or not)' (RTa1.11)* through the implementation stage of the cyclical approach.

Through his research in schools, Bleicher (2014) suggests that professional learning necessitates the need for teachers to take charge of their own learning through the action research approach; working together in an environment that is geared towards a community of learning. However, the nature of the self-employed, home-based, childminding role, limits opportunities for childminders to create a community of learning within their workplace. Instead, more innovative approaches are required; evidenced through one of the evaluative comments which revealed a small group of childminders had *arranged for a few of us to have a WhatsApp page' (EVa3.7).* This strategy had the potential to enable the childminders to continue to network, and support each other, outside of the core action research, without the need to be physically in the same place.

The reflections which were visually supported by the blobs standing together on a branch, demonstrated the childminders were continuing to form relationships '*making new childminding friends, feeling happy tonight' (RTa1.5)* and sharing ideas to support the development of practice; 'g*etting to know my group better – sharing of ideas' (RTa1.7).* In addition they were gaining support from each other through

the collaborative opportunities afforded by the workshop; illustrated through the blob

supporting another on their shoulders ; *'I have had help with ideas for my setting' (RTa1.6).* In addition, the opportunity for '*working together and having different ideas' (RTb1.4)* continued to establish a sense of collaboration within the learning process; further emphasised by this childminder, who coloured in the entire group of blobs at the top of the tree, rather than one individual blob within the group.

Owen (2007) found that 'training through the network model… made significant differences in the profession of childminding' (p. 29), however, the childminding networks which flourished when supported by the National Childminding Association (NCMA) (Dawson, et al., 2003), now reside primarily through online forums (Callanan, 2014). The networks which thrived during the investment in the early childhood sector by the Labour Governments of 1997-2010 (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2016) have now moved away from localised opportunities to network, towards more generalised, virtual spaces, and webinars (Early Education, 2020b) through which to communicate and engage in CPD. Nonetheless, as identified through the survey in chapter five (5.5.1.1 Online Engagement), these can often be *'moaning grounds where inaccurate messages get shared and spread' (Q10, R35).* As a result of forming relationships through the core action research (CAR), the childminders were beginning to create their own local network, from which the sharing of ideas could continue to be facilitated across their individual settings.

8.5 Reflection on Research: Session Five

At the end of the previous cycle, we reflected as a group on the ways in which the cyclical model of CPD could be developed moving forward to a new cycle (see Chapter Seven:

7.5. Reflection on Research: Session Three). As a result I had invited a guest speaker to the workshop in this second cycle (see Chapter Eight: 8.2. Workshop Four: Life outside of the EYFS), who had shared her experience of visiting an early childhood setting in Reggio Emilia. We now undertook the same process, to discuss what was working and what could be developed, at the end of this second cycle. To record our discussions I provided the childminders with luggage tags on which they noted the positive elements drawn from our discussions on one side, and the ideas we had for possible developments on the reverse.

In total, the childminders used eight tags to record positive reflections and noted points for development on the reverse of six of the tags. I numbered each tag (coded 'TAG'), first presenting the developments for consideration, as we looked forward to the next cycle

8.5.1 Areas for Development

'*More practical activities – crafts' (TAG1)* were suggested to be included in the sessions, which emphasised a focus on the importance of engagement with learning and interaction with practical resources. The remaining comments, focused on developing the accessibility of the approach to CPD which is pertinent for future iterations of the research and for development of a model of CPD which is more appropriate to meet the needs of childminders.

8.5.1.1 Accessibility

The accessibility of CPD opportunities was identified by the childminders, through the survey (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4.4. Accessibility), to be a fundamental challenge to engaging in CPD. They work from their own homes, which necessitates the need to travel to an external venue to attend CPD sessions. CPD offered by the Local Authority, often

utilises space available in Children's Centres, nursery, or pre-school settings and I had previously organised CPD sessions, specifically for childminders, by hiring space in a village hall. However, there are often cost implications when having to book external venues, which can impact on the accessibility of the CPD. This is therefore highlighted, as a key area for consideration if this research was to continue after the doctoral study. Through our discussions at the end of this cycle the childminders added a consideration of the housekeeping elements of the CPD venue. I had changed the room at the university in which we were meeting, resulting in *'nowhere to get refreshments close to training room and pushed for time after work' (TAG5);* and the *'car park quite far away and could do with a drinks machine' (TAG6).* In addition, the sense of fatigue continued to be a factor particularly during an evening session '*a long weekend just have to concentrate more' (TAG2);* and they felt *'a little tired… a month goes really quick' (TAG3).*

8.5.2 Positive Reflections

Our positive evaluations of this second cycle, provided further insight that our cyclical approach to CPD was supporting learning as an independent and collaborative experience. Further, the childminders' continued to identify that engagement with this CPD was developing their confidence.

8.5.2.1 Effect

We had taken a collaborative approach to the exploration of a model of CPD, however, childminders are self-employed, and therefore responsible for their own CPD.

8.5.2.1.1 Learning

The motivation to continue their own learning outside of the CPD sessions was demonstrated through the reflections: *'loving finding out about different teaching approaches and looking forward to researching them further myself' (TAG6); 'subjects*

are interesting, lessons/group activities make me want to learn more' (TAG4). Further, they acknowledged the introduction to knew understandings of practice; '*I wouldn't have explored other approaches if I hadn't have been on this course' (TAG4).*

8.5.2.1.2 Community of Practice

The feeling of being *'generally isolated on a daily basis' (TAG1)* was raised through this activity, which continued to emphasise the importance of networking and the opportunity to form a community of practice afforded through our collaborative approach to CPD (Wenger, 1998). As a result of our developing relationships the childminders felt '*involved in our own learning, and the input is valued and listened to' (TAG7).* Similarly, the opportunity to *'hear others views on what they do different to myself' (TAG2)* was valued.

8.5.2.2 Affect: Confidence

A generic statement of *its all good' (TAG8)* was made, whereas another childminder commented more specifically that she '*really want these to continue find it is helping my confidence' (TAG3).* We had started discussions during the sessions that it would be a shame to cease the opportunities for CPD once the research had been completed, therefore, we agreed to use the group Facebook Page to keep in touch for the remainder of the core action research and to explore future possibilities for CPD after the completion of the core action research.

8.6 Informing the Next Cycle

The idea for 'attachment' as the topic focus of the next cycle stemmed from a group discussion, during this reflection session. We had been debating the differing values of educating and caring for children, through our discussions of the childminder approach to childcare. Childminders are the key person in their home-based setting, which is

defined in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) to ensure that 'every child's learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. The key person must seek to engage and support parents and/or carers in guiding their child's development at home. They should also help families engage with more specialist support if appropriate' (p. 10). The childminders expressed their interest in learning more about the underpinning theory surrounding attachment, as well as having the opportunity to share ideas on their individual approaches to supporting attachments; for instance, sharing examples of how they support new children and families during settling in periods.

8.7 Chapter Summary

I summarise this chapter by re-visiting one particular evaluative response;

> *'No single approach doubted their practice at all' (EVa5.2)*

I understood the comment to recognise the sense of value held towards their role, that the practitioners across the different approaches demonstrated, through the video clips. This is at odds with the low professional status experienced by those who work in the ECEC sector in England (McGillivray, 2008), and even more so by childminders who are 'often disregarded or overlooked' (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Thus far, the childminders in this enquiry, had been sharing understandings and reflecting on their experiences, co-constructing insights into their individual practices, such as specific activities and resources. However, through this second cycle, they identified with broader elements of practice, and distinguished how other approaches, such as the Swedish example mirrored many wider aspects of childminding practice. For instance, the environment had been created specifically to emulate elements of a home, such as eating together around a dining table. We identified, that what might be considered as innovative practices in group settings, such as going for a walk, or caring for groups of children across differing

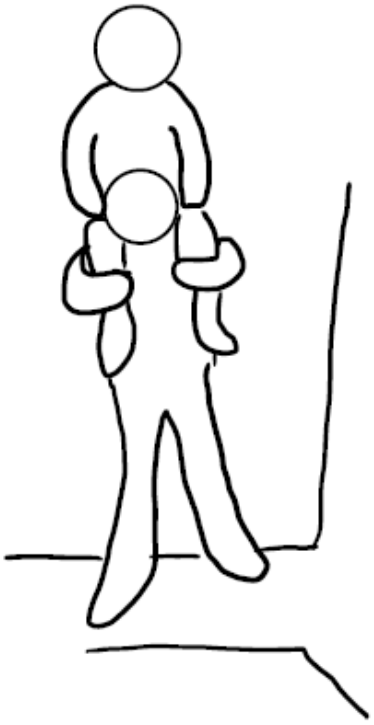
age ranges, are everyday practices for childminders, long established within home-based childminding provision. In order for CPD to be more appropriate, a greater understanding of the childminder approach is required, and there is a need to develop resources which reflect childminding practice for use in future CPD opportunities.

In addition, the childminders and I had continued to reflect upon and evaluate our ongoing experience of a model of CPD. Initial analysis of the data from this cycle built upon understandings of the dimensions of CPD, adding consideration of the need to engage in each of the three stages of one cycle, in order to be able to follow the process of gaining knowledge, implementing change and then coming back to reflect. Participation in all of the sessions across the research was not always possible, therefore, future opportunities for CPD using this model could be offered as individual cycles. By engaging in a cyclical process, rather than a standalone session, we were also continuing to build a community of practice as an effect of the CPD, which was, in addition, working to develop the childminders' confidence and motivation to learn.

In chapter nine, I present data gathered from the final workshop (see Chapter Nine: 9.2. Workshop Six: Attachment) and provide an insight into our collaborative approach to analysis of the data in the final session that had been gathered across the core action research (see Chapter Nine: 9.4. Reflection on Research: Session Seven).

Chapter 9

Collaborative Data Analysis



9 Cycle Three

9.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I present the third cycle of our core action research, which depicts the 'messy, imperfect, and exciting process of constructing, reconstructing, and co-constructing meaning' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 42). The third cycle of the core action research, illustrated in Fig 9.1, follows the same structure that emerged through our early explorations in chapter seven; of an initial workshop, followed by time to implement ideas into practice, concluding with the collaborative space to reflect and evaluate. In chapter eight, I demonstrated how we extended our efforts through the second cycle, to explore the distinctive pedagogical approach of childminders, towards the care and education of children; resulting in a deeper insight into five dimensions of CPD; approach, content, delivery, affect and effect. I conclude the presentation of the core action research in this chapter, through exploration of the third and final cycle. During this time, we explored the topic of attachment (see section 9.2. Workshop Six: Attachment); following the workshop the childminders reviewed their settling in policies and made longer term plans to continue to develop their approach to building secure attachments with the children in their care. Next, I present our insights from collaborative analysis of the core action research experience. Through this final reflection session, we drew out the ways in which CPD

[Fig 9.1 Core Action Research: Cycle three]

could be more appropriate for childminders, and put forward suggestions for future developments and collaborations.

9.2 Workshop Six: Attachment

[Fig 9.2 Cycle Three: Workshop]

Through session six, depicted in Fig 9.2, I introduced the topic of 'Attachment' as the focus of the workshop for the third and final cycle of the core action research. Attachment is a fundamental element of practice in early childhood, identified within the EYFS (DfE, 2017a, p. 6) through the principle of 'positive relationships' to promote children's wellbeing. Similarly to the childminders in Brookers (2016) study, who 'expressed real concerns about attempting to meet the wishes of parents and comply with EYFS requirements' (p. 80), the childminders in this session expressed their feelings of being burdened during a child's settling-in period, by having to deliver the EYFS (DfE, 2017a), which, they felt, took them away from the care element of their role.

I drew from the activities that had evaluated positively across the previous cycles, to include video clips as a way of introducing some theories of attachment that underpin practice in the ECEC, for instance Bowlby (2008); who champions the consistency of the childminding role, to be well placed to offer children and parents a secure relationship as the sole provider of childcare. We reviewed some exemplars of settling-in policies from a variety of settings, and the childminders shared examples of their individual approaches towards building secure attachments and relationships with children and their families.

9.2.1 Reflective and Evaluative Comments

The childminders had *'really enjoyed today's subject of attachment' (RT1.4),* all reflecting on the knowledge and learning they had gained from this session, mirrored through the blob choices illustrated in Fig 9.3. They built on their experiences of learning, commented

positively on the style of the session and indicated their continued developing confidence, and enjoyment of the sessions. In addition, they illustrated a sense of achievement through the positioning of six of the eight blob figures, standing together at the top of the tree.

Purple	Blobs on their own	2
Blue	Blobs with others	6

[Fig 9.3 Reflection Tree: Session six blob choices]

I isolated the blob positioned at the bottom of the tree, which illustrated the feeling that the childminder '*was walking into a dark room, a little like the unknown' (RT1.8).* Further scrutiny demonstrates her initial concern was accompanied by a positive evaluation, stating she did *'understand attachments more after this session' (EV1.8).* The second blob, located on its own, was placed in the middle of the tree in a position reflective of the topic of attachment; holding on to the tree trunk, commenting it is *'good to be reminded about how significant attachment is' (RT1.3).*

9.2.1.1 Effect

Three of the remaining six blob choices chose the group positioned together *'nearly at the top of the tree, as was very interested in today's CPD' (RT1.2),* focusing their reflective comments on their own learning. These childminders felt they were *'learning lots and taking it all in to use in my setting (RT1.1),* in addition, commenting that they felt *'like I have been given so much advice during these CPD sessions' (RT1.5).* They expressed a greater insight into attachment; specifically that *'crying is normal' (EV1.7),* and the *'different theories behind attachments' (EV1.6)*.

The other three blob choices were positioned at the very top of the tree, indicating they valued the opportunity to '*look at my setting… I know I am doing this but good to re-enforce knowledge' (RT1.7)* and to *'re-learn things I studied at uni many years ago but forgotten. So really great to refresh memory' (RT1.4)*. An emphasis on differentiating the training to suit varying degrees of knowledge, had been suggested by the childminders, through the survey responses (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4.3. Experience and Relevance), and was supported by research such as that of Cherrington and Thornton (2013). They focused on CPD as a means to acquire and construct knowledge, within communities of practice, which, in turn, were defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) to encompass individuals of varying knowledge and experience. In this instance, the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, provided opportunities for experienced members of the group to re-enforce, or re-construct, forgotten knowledge, whilst others were engaging with the ideas for the first time.

The childminders in Brooker's (2016, p. 75) study, were clear that their 'knowledge and expertise… derives to a large extent from their own experiences as mothers'. In this study, all the childminders present *'had a similar ethos on how to deal with attachments' (EV2.6),*

therefore, much of the discussion comprised the sharing of varying experiences from practice. The childminders *'bounced ideas off each other' (EV2.2)* and thought the opportunity for discussion to be *'reassuring and motivational' (EV2.3).* The discussions are also evaluated, by the childminders, to have promoted a *'greater understanding of how the child feels' (EV3.8),* and a reassurance that *'settling in [can] take a long time and should always be my focus' (EV3.6).* Further, the childminders intended to *'look differently at [my] settling in policy' (EV3.2)* and *'change their settling in process' (EV3.8),* re-evaluating and revisiting their policies.

9.2.1.2 Delivery

By having the opportunity to choose their own topics of focus for the workshops, either directly or through anecdotal conversations, the childminders and I, were able to work collaboratively from the outset of the process, thereby, supporting their interest in the topic. The delivery of the session was evaluated as positive by all of the childminders, using descriptions such as *'interesting' (EV4.1; EV4.4; EV4.8) 'excellent as always' (EV4.3)* and *'fantastic' (EV4.7).* One of the childminders, commented specifically, that she had enjoyed the videos and group discussion (EV4.4) and overall they considered the sessions to be *'well delivered' (EV4.2)* with a *'good presentation' (EV4.6).*

9.2.1.3 Affect: Confidence and Enjoyment

The childminders also expressed that they had *'thoroughly enjoyed all the sessions and have learned loads' (EV5.8),* as well as being *'hopeful of more interesting training' (EV5.1).* Further, they indicated their growing sense of feeling '*more confident to discuss my setting with fellow childminders and take on board their opinions' (RT1.6).*

9.3 Implementation into Practice

[Fig 9.4 Cycle Three:

At the end of the workshop, the childminders expressed their intentions to re-visit their settling-in policies, and in the long term approach their transition process with a greater understanding of the underpinning attachment theories (Fig 9.4). In keeping with the three stage framework of CPD, we would usually have reflected on the implementation of their ideas into practice during the following reflection session. However, in this cycle it would be the final time we met, consequently we devoted the session, instead, to reflecting on the core action research in its entirety.

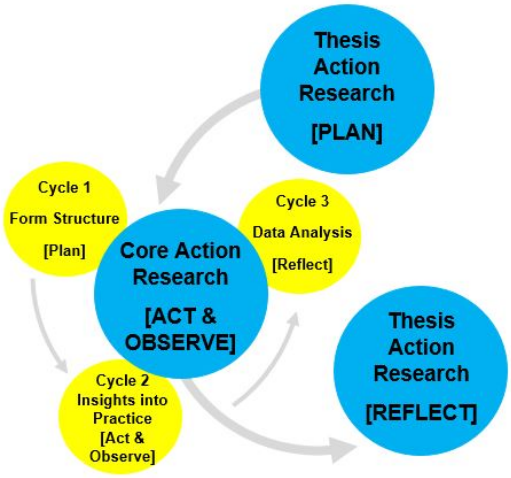
9.4 Reflection on Research: Session Seven

[Fig 9.5 Cycle Three: Reflection]

Data analysis, in action research, requires engagement 'in multiple levels of reflection and analysis, re-reflection and further interpretation based on reflection' (McNiff, 2017, p. 192), necessitating an ongoing and engaged approach to data analysis, throughout the core action research. Consequently, we had built ongoing opportunities for reflection and evaluation into our cyclical framework. I had been analysing 'on the run' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 175), throughout the core action research, whereas, Rowley (2014, p. 240) states that, in action research, 'as the project draws to a close, there is [also] a phase during which there is an enhanced focus on data analysis'. Session seven (identified in Fig 9.5), provided us with such an opportunity, at the end of the third cycle, during which time we reflected on the CPD process, and reviewed our experiences collaboratively.

9.4.1 Interlude: Action Learning

I take a final interlude, at this stage in the core action research, to reflect on my developing understanding of our approach to the core action research and subsequently our process of CPD. I had drawn from the ideas of Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) to frame my doctoral research into three distinct phases: the first thesis action research cycle; followed by a core action research cycle; then a final cycle of thesis action research (Fig 9.6). Within the core action research, we then undertook three collaborative cycles of plan (workshop stage), act and observe (implementation stage) and reflect (reflection stage). However, on reflection, the first two cycles of the core action research phase, align more closely to the concept of action learning, which is identified by Zuber-Skerritt (2015) as:



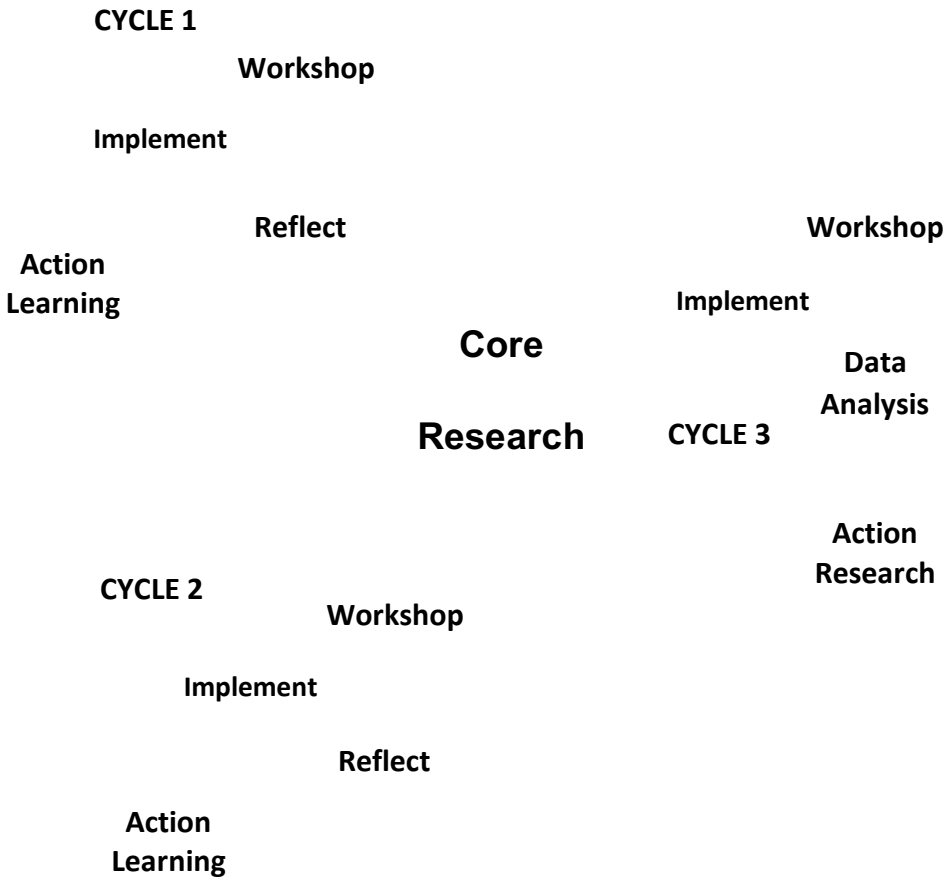
[Fig 9.6 Action Research Overview]

> 'learning from and with one another in sets of support groups; working together collaboratively on solving complex problems of mutual concern; sharing experiences, ideas, feelings; and critically reflecting on what works and what does not, how and how not, and why or why not. It aims to improve or change work practices and to create knowledge or understanding' (p. 7).

Action learning places a focus on the co-creation of knowledge, between practitioners from different settings, who meet regularly to support each other, 'study real life problems' (Revans, 2011, p. 9) and learn from their experiences. Dick (2017, p. 1) distinguishes that 'in action learning, each participant drew different learning from different experience. In action research a team of people drew collective learning from a collective experience'.

Through the first two cycles of CPD, the childminders had reflected on their learning and evaluated the CPD process. However, it was not until the third cycle that they engaged in reflection upon and engagement with the data, to analyse our collaborative experience, across the cycle of core action research.

I depict my developing understanding of our engagement in the core action research in Fig 9.7. Through this diagram I indicate our collaborative engagement in the core action research, to comprise two cycles of action learning, and one final cycle of action research. The reflections and evaluations carried out in the first two cycles of the core action research, resulted in further learning; namely, informing the continuing CPD process; and developing the community of practice; whereas, the reflections carried out in the final cycle resulted in further insights for the research (Dick, 2017).



[Fig 9.7 Action learning and action research framework]

Zuber-Skerritt (2015) conclude that the combination of action learning and action research is beneficial for both universities and community members, in enabling collaborative action research to be conducted 'with, not on, communities' (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015, p. 17). Subsequently, I present our collaborative engagement with the data from the core action research, in this final reflection session.

9.4.2 Collaborative Data Analysis

A great deal of qualitative data had been constructed across the course of the core action research, therefore this final session, provided 'the means to engage stake-holding groups in the processes of analysis… in meaning-making, discussion and dialogue… with the intent of developing mutually acceptable accounts' (Stringer, 2014, p. 156). As is usual for qualitative research, the amount of data collected from the core action research sessions, was extensive and wide ranging (Ellingson, 2009), including data from activities, photos, reflections and evaluations. I was mindful that we needed a collective opportunity to engage with it, in a way that was meaningful to all of us. Flicker (2014, p. 122) states that data analysis is 'commonly understood to be a highly skilled activity that requires in-depth training', providing examples of strategies employed to break data into digestible pieces. However, Flicker (2014, p. 122) also recognises 'that community members may see and understand the world very differently from researchers… creatively finding new ways to make the work inclusive and (often) more fun'.

I had been inspired by one of my doctoral supervisors, to support the childminders' understanding of data analysis, through an activity which utilised the metaphor of Quality Street chocolates as data (O'Brien, 2016). These chocolates are all different shapes and

sizes, wrapped in various packaging of differing colours, and comprise an array of flavours and centres. The childminders worked together, to group them in different ways; discussing their decisions based upon factors such as colour, type and preference. We discussed that, if the wrapping is peeled, the chocolates reveal deeper distinctions, which can lead to re-grouping and different decisions. Further, we discussed the elements of the chocolates which are not visually obvious, such as flavour, and the additional sources of information, supplied, for example, by reading the ingredients list. By engaging the childminders in applying the principles of data analysis to Quality Street chocolates, it allowed us to discuss the similarities and differences, and acknowledge the interpretive nature of the 'best flavour' of chocolate. In addition, it worked some way towards the suggestion by Flicker (2014, p. 122) that 'clear instructions and excellent facilitation are required' in order to support collaborative engagement with the data analysis process, and bring what Cornish, et al., (2013, p. 80) describe as a 'diversity of perspectives to the analysis'.

I re-introduced the research question which had underpinned our explorations through the core action research; 'In what ways could CPD be developed to be more appropriate for childminders?' In response, baseline data (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009) had been gathered through the survey, and subsequent initial analysis had begun to identify features of CPD; such as relevance of the content; accessibility of the sessions; and opportunities to learn and gain new ideas. We had explored these features, during the core action research cycles, in which the childminders had determined an additional emphasis on the need for CPD to be a collaborative and supportive experience. We had undertaken two full cycles of the core action research, and during this final cycle Stringer (p.135) defines the 'task of the research facilitator… to enable participants to make better sense of their experiences'.

I therefore invited the childminders to revisit and review their initial ideas, by re-engaging with the handprint method of determining which features were required for appropriate professional development activities. The ideas remained largely the same as in chapter six (6.5.1), with an additional emphasis on the desire for CPD to '*be interesting, exciting and fun. We want to be motivated, inspired…*' (Fig 9.7) The re-written paragraphs are provided for reference in Appendix 11.

9.4.3 Refining the Data

In preparation to support a collaborative approach to analysing the data in this session, I had summarised a list of the prevalent key features of CPD, that I had drawn from across the reflections and evaluations of the core action research cycles (Fig 9.8) for member checking. According to Ellingson (2009) this approach 'demystifies the process of meaning making, demonstrating to them (and reminding you) that research constitutes a messy, imperfect, and exciting process of constructing, reconstructing, and co-constructing meaning' (p. 42). I presented the features to the childminders on a large sheet of paper. We spent some time discussing and defining the meanings of some of the features; for example a number of the childminders defined a 'suitable time' as a weekend, whereas others considered an evening session to be more suitable. To record our analysis, the childminders weighted the features by importance, voting through the placement of ten stickers onto the listed features (enabling multiple votes to be given to a single feature). Now weighted (Fig 9.8), the features demonstrate the predominant requirement for CPD to be interesting and engaging, followed by consideration of the organisational features of CPD such as time and affordability. The quality of the content, and relevance to childminding were also most important for future CPD opportunities.

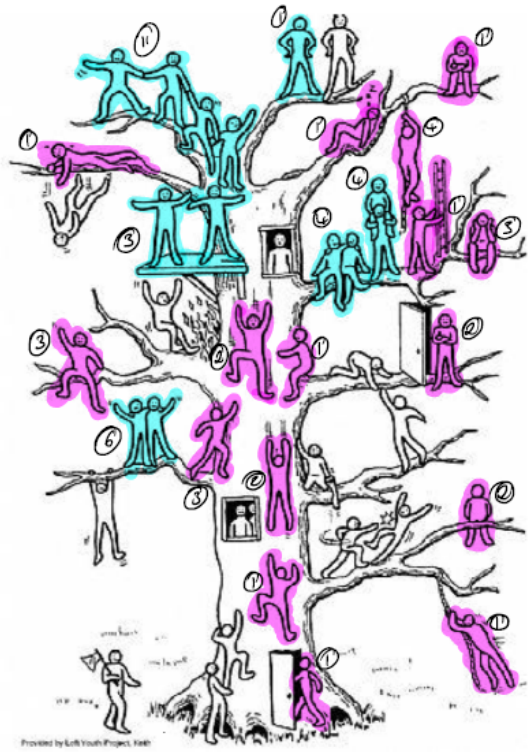
Interesting and engaging	10
Suitable time (evenings and weekends)	8
Affordability (free or low cost)	7
Suitable content	7
Trainers with practical experience, knowledge and insight	7
Appropriate and challenging level	3
Practical activities (interactive)	2
Opportunities for networking and sharing good practice	2
Visits	1
Support with computer literacy	1
Informative	1
Refreshments	1
Awareness (effective advertising to promote awareness of CPD)	0
Guest Speakers	0
Learning outside the classroom	0
Outside activities	0

[Fig 9.8 Features of CPD weighted by importance]

9.4.4 Analysing a Collective Story

In chapter four (4.12.2 Emerging Data Collection Methods), I explained the ways in which I had collated the data, during the cycles of the core action research, by utilising the digital advantages of the iPad Pro. In addition, I was able to further reduce some elements of the data, for example, by collating the responses gathered through repetitive methods of data collection. I grouped evaluation comments from across the sessions and collated the reflection tree blob choices into one template (Fig 9.9). Techniques such

as these, provide an example of how similar data was grouped together, thereby allowing me to print the digital notebooks, to be shared with the childminders during this session.



[Fig 9.9 Reflection Tree Overview: All blobs chosen from across the CAR]

Strategies such as these, which pull data together, enabled summarised versions of the data to be created for the childminders and I to analyse in collaboration. For example, across the reflections undertaken during the core action research, it became apparent that the five sets of blobs grouped together in pairs were chosen eighteen times and the larger group at the top of the tree was chosen eleven times; resulting, collectively, in all of the blobs positioned together, being chosen 29 times. The remaining blobs, positioned on their own, were also collectively chosen, a total of 29 times; demonstrating a visual parity between an independent approach and collaborative engagement along this journey of professional development.

Through our discussion, we also acknowledged the blobs that had not been chosen at all throughout the core action research; namely, those fighting on the bottom branch, the one above them with a saw, and the blob further up, near the fire, in the centre of the tree. We determined these omissions to reinforce the core action research as a positive experience, not one which had resulted in any negative occurrences.

9.4.5 Refining a Collective Story

Through our collaborative analysis of the data, our goal was 'not to come up with one right answer but to explore, and engage, with a range of plausible explanations' (Flicker, 2014, p. 123). The blobs had been a consistent method of data collection, used to promote reflection throughout the core action research. Therefore, in order to facilitate open ended engagement with this data, as well as provide a means through which to record our discussions and ideas, I created large A3 prints of the reflection tree blobs,

individually illustrated, in each of their different positions, although this time each accompanied by a thought bubble (Fig 9.10).

We worked together, to review and discuss, both the data and our experiences from the core action research. We captured the key elements of our analytical conversations on the templates, resulting in a total of 63 comments. These are coded by the headings which had already been used at the end of the core action research (depicted in Fig 9.11) to present them in the Essential Childminder Magazine: positive feelings (PF); challenging feelings (CF); practice (P); cyclical (CY); knowledge (K); collaboration (C); the trainer (T); and developments (D). In addition, I numbered each of the statements in each section, to enable accurate reference to the original data set.

Practice

Thought-provoking – made me think about my own practice after I left the session.

Enjoying a mix of practical activities and talking/presentation and sharing practice.

Reflection on your own practice – force yourself to see what you're good at and what you can develop.

Taking the time to think and reflect on my practice.

Looking at other settings and how they differ from your own.

Cyclical

Really enjoyed the whole process – regularly meeting with the same teacher and same group of participants, really made the experience more enjoyable and very different to individual courses I have done before.

It's been good to do training, go home and come back to be able to discuss the subject further, reflect on it and have the opportunity to get answers to any questions that arose after the training.

Knowledge

Thinking about what I want to know more about – it was nice to have input.

We have been given new ideas for activities, understanding of behaviour related to schemas.

Always climbing learning new things.

Gained knowledge.

Collaboration

Lovely to have a group setting where childminders can support each other and build relationships.

Having a chat with like-minded people, not worrying about who we express ourselves because we all know times can be pressurising, things can be frustrating etc....

Working together helping each other to improve. Enjoy spending time together. We're here for each other, supporting and holding out a hand. Together we can do this.

Do helpful to meet and work together with other local childminders. There is NO support for childminders in this area in my experience over the last 3 years. No free training, no opportunity to network with other local childminders. It's been really helpful.

Respecting others opinions without challenging them.

We have different opinions/methods. We respect each other. You try and we'll see.

Feeling supported by others who are working in the same environment, gives positivity.

Achieving together

Wow look at us up here.

Great mix of people, learning about all different aspects of the job, watching videos and reflecting on what we do.

Involved fully in the session.

I really enjoyed the group setting – working together as a team, sharing ideas and encouraging each other. Really nice to see the same people, rather than strangers each time at individual CPD sessions. Helps to make you feel at ease and comfortable to share your opinions openly.

Enjoyed it, good participation even if I find it a little uncomfortable.

Working as part of a network – leaning on each other for support.

Happy to feel that I worked as a team.

Enjoying group activities. Meeting other childminders, discussing activities.

Support from other childminders. Working together.

Listening.

Positive Feelings

I actually could cope coming out telling what I have spent all day doing – still enjoying it.

I'm feeling motivated and on top of the world I want more.

Championing childminders, feeling motivated about what we do.

Left the session feeling valued and in a career that really matters.

This has created a nurturing environment to feel comfortable to share and feel valued.

Everyday another door opens – no matter how hard things get.

I found this gave me the motivation and kick start my aims and goals.

Given the confidence to be climbing up – back to where I want to be – not where I let myself go down to.

Confidence
Motivation
Valued
Nurtured

The Trainer

I found Kay to be an interesting, motivating and approachable session leader – crucial for effective learning in successful CPD. Really wonderful to have a teacher who is championing Childminders, making us feel valued, that what we do is an important job.

Don't feel supported or motivated by most other trainers as they don't understand childminders practice and we get talked at.

Kays training has been enlightening. It's motivational and I have come away with new ideas, it's been engaging, fun and thought provoking.

You need a relationship with the trainer – you need to have mutual respect.

I don't know what to do. Kay has expertise as a childminder and delivers training in a way which helps motivate and inspires me to research further into a subject.

The sessions were devised by someone that not only has the knowledge and experience and truly understands our role.

Having Kay as our trainer, motivates you to want to come to the sessions, rather than if it was a council employee who is just reading a PowerPoint.

Good balance of what was delivered to us and what we brought to the sessions.

Gained knowledge as trainer had experience and was able to answ questions. Everyone was valued. Just someone reading PowerPoir

Overall it has been very uplifting and inspiring, I feel like childminders should and could have a voice. Having a tutor who was a childminder, and is still very passionate about what we stand for I feel we have/are being championed for what we do, so I cannot think of any negative comments to give for the training.

Challenging Feelings

Time to take myself out from the 4 walls to think about how things are going – what I could improve/change while listening to others. Sometimes feel alone in what I do.

I'm feeling tired in the evening. I'm just going to think about

Attending meetings of an evening can be tiring when you have been working since 8.45am.

I'm bored of this. Feeling tired, evenings and weekends can be precious family time and the motivation isn't always there for

Developments

It would be good to see things in practice – visits etc...

Maybe not have a whole session on reflection. Just have 20 minutes reflection at the beginning of each session.

Bit tired now, future sessions to be done weekends – mornings.

There is a need for existing childminders to be trainers and deliver – then they can truly appreciate and understand and have the lived experience.

Clinging on to the hope that the role of a childminder will be understood and appreciated as still misunderstood.

Enjoyed the CPD sessions networking with others. Feel the childminders network is slipping away. Not really aware of who many childminders are anymore.

The following discussion presents our concluding reflections on the CAR data, building on our understandings of the ongoing sense of fatigue and isolation, and the emergent dimensions of CPD: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect. I share our thoughts and experiences in our final collective story, on the ways in which CPD can be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, and I put forward our suggestions for further developments of CPD and research.

9.4.5.1 Fatigue and Isolation

The timings of the sessions had been decided through a collaborative discussion during our first meeting (see Chapter Six) and were subsequently, all held on a Monday evening, commencing at 7.30pm. This enabled the childminders time to finish work and travel to the university, the sessions then concluding at 9.30pm. However, this was not ideal for all, and reference to feelings of being tired were few but persistent; appearing in all but one of the session reflections. The childminders continued to hold the view that *'attending meetings of an evening can be tiring when you have been working since 6.45am' (CF4),* suggesting they remained a *'bit tired now, future sessions to be done weekends – mornings' (C3).* Although the sessions resulted in a particularly long working day, the childminders also appreciated the *'time to take myself out from the four walls to think about how things are going – what I could improve/change while listening to others. Sometimes feel alone in what I do' (CF1).*

9.4.5.2 Approach

The childminders understood the approach to the CPD as being a journey (Hordern, 2012; Bleach, 2014), recognising that they are 'a*lways climbing learning new things' (K8).* In addition, the cyclical approach to professional development had emerged to comprise three stages: workshop; implementation; and reflection.

9.4.5.2.1 Cyclical

The cycle was recognised by the childminders to have *'been good to do the training, go home and come back to be able to discuss the subject further, reflect on it and have the opportunity to get answers to any questions that arose after the training' (CY2).* In addition, limitations of the process were identified, for example during session five (see Chapter Eight: 8.4. Reflection on Practice: Session Five) we found participation in each stage of the cycle was required in order to support engagement with the other stages. For the purposes of this research, the childminders had committed to a series of sessions over a period of 10 months, however they were not all able to participate in all of the sessions.

9.4.5.3 Content

Discussions of the content of sessions and the opportunities for learning, established that the childminders felt they had '*been given new ideas for activities' (K7)* and had *'gained knowledge' (K9).* In addition, they identified that they had been involved in the learning process in various ways, such as by having time for discussions and asking questions; '*can I ask you a question about that?' (K5),* and through opportunities to contribute their ideas and input into the sessions; *'thinking about what I want to know more about – it was nice to have input' (K6).* Bleicher (2014, p. 805) emphasises that 'involvement in such collaborative efforts captures their interest and aligns most closely to their… lives', articulated by the childminders to have '*sparked an interest that I want to know more about (K4).* Furthermore, in discussion, the childminders appreciated that their learning had not been limited to within the sessions, they had *learnt so much and it's opened up new doors for me to explore areas that I wouldn't have before (K2),* instead, the content of the sessions had provided them with the starting point, from which to continue their

explorations in their settings, and through their own engagement to learn more about the topic.

9.4.5.3.1 Reflection

The childminders engaged in *'a mix of practical activities and talking/presentation and sharing practice' (P2)* across the different types of sessions within each cycle. The opportunities to reflect, and to share understandings of how the knowledge discussed in the workshops, had been implemented into practice, were deemed to be '*thought provoking – made me think about my own practice after I left the session' (P1).* Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p. 105) define reflection for professional change, in action research, to involve 'individuals interpreting and re-interpreting their practice'. The value placed on such opportunities, was evident through our analysis of the reflective activities within the sessions; such as using the video clips to enable '*looking at other settings and how they differ from your own' (P5)*, as well as utilising the discussions within the group which promoted '*reflection on your own practice – force yourself to see what you're good at and what you can develop' (P3).*

Reflection is central to developing early years practice (Schön, 1987; Hallet, 2013a), further identified by Callanan, et al., (2017, p. 15) to 'drive continuous improvement…and increase the quality of the early years sector as a whole'. Reflection is broadly incorporated into statutory guidance, which includes the requirement that 'practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice' (DfE, 2017a, p. 10). Nonetheless, Ingleby (2017) argues that an outcome driven curriculum, such as the EYFS, does not encourage a critically reflective approach to practice. Therefore, following the suggestions of Bleach (2014) and Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013), who believe there is a greater benefit to the individual participating in a process of CPD, when it includes opportunities to apply and reflect on practice; we incorporated

time to implement the ideas gained from the workshop session. This was followed by the opportunity to reflect on the implementation of these ideas, as a key element within our three stage cyclical approach. Reflecting on the process, the childminders stated they valued the opportunities for '*taking the time to think and reflect on my practice' (P4).*

9.4.5.4 Delivery

Bleicher (2014) argued that the development of CPD opportunities by those who hold a support role for the sector, for example, external authorities and private organisations, often result in deficit models of CPD (Kennedy, 2014), which take the form of standalone training sessions. Challenges were associated with this type of training by the childminders, through the survey responses in chapter five (see 5.5.4. Challenges to CPD) including factors such as, cost and timings. Ingleby (2015, p. 151) perceived a 'passive acceptance of the need for instruction' across the early years workforce, whereas, Our collaborative approach to action research had enabled individual roles, to become a 'negotiated social activity' (Townsend, 2014, p. 118), within a community of knowledge and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this instance, the childminders reported, that there *'was a good balance of what was delivered to us and what we brought to the sessions' (T8).*

9.4.5.4.1 Lived Experience

The childminders had reflected on the delivery of the sessions throughout the cycles, primarily using descriptive adjectives such as 'good' and 'excellent'. In this session, they revisited these comments, discussing and expanding their views, to add that an '*interesting, motivating and approachable session leader [is] crucial for effective learning in successful CPD' (T1).* Moreover, drawing comparisons to previous experiences they held of CPD, commenting that '*having Kay as our trainer motivates you to want to come to the sessions, rather than if it was a council employee who is just reading from a*

PowerPoint (T7). The childminders defined the role I had taken, through the workshop sessions, using terms such as trainer, teacher and tutor, adding '*the sessions were devised by someone that not only has the knowledge and experience, [but] truly understands our role' (T6).* Through these discussions, there was a sense of uncertainty towards CPD led by individuals who did not hold specific experience of childminding. Future offers of CPD, through a session based model, are viewed by these childminders, to require facilitation from individuals who have experience of childminding.

9.4.5.4.2 Multi-Faceted Roles

Townsend (2014) describes collaborative action research to be typified by the combination of researchers working together with practitioners, each holding expertise in their differing roles. Thus, the emphasis is placed on the ways in which knowledge is 'constructed in reference to the personal attitudes and beliefs associated with the particular roles' (Townsend, 2014, p. 118). Similarly, Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) describe the diversity of collaborative action research groups as reflective of each member's personal differences, as well as their level of participation in the action research, which is equally fluid. I considered mine, and the childminders' roles to fluctuate at different times, for different reasons, and across the different sessions. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) differentiate further between the role of the researcher in a doctoral study, during thesis action research, and as an insider member of the workgroup, during the core action research. The collaborative approach to the CPD enquiry and the broader understanding held by the childminders that the CPD enquiry was the focus of doctoral research, facilitated a group sense that *'childminders should and could have a voice' (T10).* We each took on different roles, at different times, therefore culminating in all of us moving between our multi-faceted roles throughout the enquiry.

My role as a doctoral researcher was understood by the childminders as *'really wonderful to have a teacher who is championing Childminders, making us feel valued, that what we do is an important job (T1).* The childminders indicated that they agreed with suggestions of CPD being led from within the workforce (Evetts, 2003), by identifying that *'you need a relationship with the trainer – you need to have mutual respect' (T4).* In this instance, the childminders attributed that they had *'gained knowledge as trainer had experience and was able to answer questions. Everyone was valued. Not just someone reading PowerPoints' (T9),* whereas, usually, they *'don't feel supported or motivated by most other trainers as they don't understand childminders practice and we get talked at' (T2).*

9.4.5.5 Affect

CPD is recommended to improve quality of provision (Callanan, 2014; Siraj, et al., 2017) and develop professional identity (Miller, 2008; Brock, 2012; Crowley, 2014).

9.4.5.5.1 Confidence, Motivation and Value

For the childminders in this enquiry, CPD also affected them in a positive way, they *'left the session feeling valued and in a career that really matters' (PF4).* The childminders' experiences of CPD during the core action research, affected an increased confidence and sense of motivation; 'g*iven the confidence to be climbing up – back to where I want to be – not where I let myself go down to' (PF8)* and '*found this gave me the motivation and kick start[ed] my aims and goals' (PF7).* Discussions around the challenges of the role were also included, however, the childminders' resilience, and their overall positive approach, was evident; 'e*veryday another door opens – no matter how hard things get (PF6).*

In their study of professional development, Lightfoot and Frost (2015) included the sense of feeling valued for their participants, as one of three dimensions of their framework for

analysis. According to Lightfoot and Frost (2015) 'no matter what the participants' role or status, the educators' stories all indicate[d] their need for recognition; for their expertise; their personal qualities; that they do a worthwhile job; and their aspirations for themselves and the children whom they educate and care for' (p. 408). We had '*created a nurturing environment to feel comfortable to share and feel valued' (PF5)*, through the formation of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and a by taking a collaborative and ethical approach to the research (see Chapter Six: 6.4. CAR Ethical Considerations). We had focused on relationships (see Chapter Six: 6.3.1. Relationships) and given consideration to the 'social dimensions' (Lanigan, 2011, p. 407) of the CPD, which had resulted in the childminders *'feeling motivated and on top of the world I want more' (PF2).*

9.4.5.6 Effect

Childminders are recognised to work in isolation (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Mooney & Statham, 2003, Owen 2007), they are self-employed, and work from their own homes with small groups of children.

9.4.5.6.1 Community of Practice

The collaborative nature of this core action research approach was an important feature, promoting a sense of being *at ease and comfortable to share your opinions openly (C12)*. Townsend (2014, p. 117) suggests that 'the development of relationships in collaborative action research can, ultimately, result in the growth of communities of action researchers'. In this example, the regularity of the sessions throughout the process enabled the childminders in the group to get to know each other; they *'really enjoyed the whole process – regularly meeting with the same teacher and same group of participants, really made the experience more enjoyable and very different to individual courses I have done before' (CY1).* The childminders explained it was *'really nice to see the same people,*

rather than strangers each time at individual CPD sessions. Helps to make you feel at ease and comfortable to share your opinions' (C12).

The childminders felt that they were *'involved fully in the session' (C11),* which led to the sense of *'achieving together' (C8), a*s well as *'working as part of a network – leaning on each other for support' (C14).* The creation of a community of practice, through our approach to the CPD, demonstrates the possibilities for local networking to be facilitated from within the workforce, rather than relying on the limited opportunities as a result of reduced Local Authority capacity to support early childhood networks (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4.4. Accessibility). However, whilst the collaborative approach to the sessions created a '*lovely… group setting where childminders can support each other and build relationships' (C1),* it also allowed for everyone to *'have different opinions/methods' (C6)*.

Townsend (2014) considers action research communities to be 'especially beneficial where they include people with differing perspectives' (p. 117). In this instance, the childminders had acknowledged the potential for differing views, through the ethics statements generated at the beginning of the enquiry, and had included a commitment to be respectful of other peoples' opinions (see Chapter Six: 6.4. CAR Ethical Considerations). As a result, we had forged a community in which *'we respect each other' (C6)*, taking on collaborative roles of *working together as a team, sharing ideas and encouraging each other' (C12).* The childminders had '*learnt something new and want[ed] to share it' (K1),* as well as feeling *'supported by others who are working in the same environment [which] gives positivity' (C7).* Moreover, they did '*not worry about how we express ourselves because we all know times can be pressurising, [and] things can be frustrating' (C2)*.

9.4.6 Developing CPD

The childminders put forward suggestions for future continuation of this model of CPD, to include alternative times, and to continue to promote a collaborative approach. They had *'enjoyed the CPD sessions networking with others' (D6),* however, felt that the '*childminders network is slipping away. Not really aware of who many childminders are anymore' (D6).* Further suggestions to develop the workshop sessions, were put forward, such as: *'it would be good to see things in practice – visits etc… (D1);* as well as developing the structure of the sessions*; 'maybe not have a whole session on reflection. Just 20 minutes reflection at the beginning of each session (D2).*

The childminders reinforced the need for training to come from within the workforce, emphasising the importance that; '*there is a need for existing childminders to be trainers and deliver – then they can truly appreciate and understand and have the lived experience (D4).* Sheridan, et al., (2009) identify an objective of professional development, as involving the transference of responsibility for delivery from the 'formal trainer (coach, consultant, group facilitator) to individuals and groups of professionals within early childhood settings' (p. 380). According to Sheridan, et al., (2009), this would then allow professional development activities to better reflect the developing individual needs of the practitioners, and in this example, would continue to support the final hope that the childminders put forward; '*that the role of a childminder will be understood and appreciated as still misunderstood' (D5).*

9.5 Concluding the Core Action Research

We concluded the core action research phase, with intentions to resume our exploration of CPD after my completion of the final thesis action research phase. However, prior to completing the writing of the thesis, I took stock (McNiff, 2017), once again, to share with the childminders our experience of the core action research, now in its entirety, for final comment (depicted in Fig 9.12). In order to achieve this, I engaged in a dendritic process of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009), which enabled the overall picture of the data to be compiled into one text and shared with the core action research group of childminders.

[Fig 9.12 Thesis Action Research: Broaden and share data analysis]

McNiff (2017, p. 192) suggests inviting participants to access 'your interpretation of the data… inviting critical responses', which we had achieved, in part, during the final session. However, Ellingson (2009, p. 127) describes the process of dendritic crystallization as entailing a 'more dispersed manner in which researchers publish and share the multiple representations they produce', going on to explain that dendritic processes 'are responsive to the contexts of the enquiry' (2009, p. 127). Engaging in this additional step, prior to entering the writing up stage, therefore enabled me the opportunity to offer my interpretations of the data to the childminders in a written style that is more fitting for practice than a thesis (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002), and one which was familiar to them, in the format of the Essential Childminder Magazine (see Chapter Four: 4.13.1.2. The Essential Childminder Magazine).

9.5.1 Essential Childminder Magazine

Utilising the magazine format, allowed me to 'keep the forest and the trees' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 129), as I created a final overview, incorporating the workshop materials, as well as the reflections and evaluations on practice, and on research. I emailed the Essential Childminder Magazine to the childminders in PDF format, with a message thanking them for participating in the core research, and inviting them to continue to offer their feedback. Their responses to the magazine added further insight to the ways in which the CPD had inspired them:

> *'Oh my, that's made me feel emosh seeing ECM back for another edition and all the photos ☺ thanks for this it's amazing. It would be great to do some sessions again I feel there has been nothing and I need the boost and inspirations' (Email response A, 30/10/18)*

The ways in which their engagement with the CPD had developed their confidence:

> '*I really enjoyed all the sessions, I'm not sure if you'd remember but I only registered in Jan '17 after many years in a nursery and bringing up my own children so I found the sessions invaluable, for information, training and for reassurance from other minders that my practice is 'good enough' and to remind me to follow the child's lead. I would definitely attend if sessions were to start up again but more than happy to wait' (Email response B, 20/10/18)*

The ways in which the CPD had provided opportunities for learning, and emphasised the value of being part of the process:

> *'Thank you so much for sending this through and for another brilliant edition of ECM! I actually felt quite emotional seeing the magazine in its glory again*

and it reminded me how much we learnt with you and how enjoyable it was to be part of it all. I hope your draft is coming along well. I'd love to read it/offer any feedback or input if you need it at all' (Email response C, 22/11/2018)

The responses also reiterated the childminders' willingness to continue to engage with the action research, by feeding back on drafts of the thesis, as well as their motivation to continue to collaborate on future CPD opportunities beyond the doctoral research.

9.6 Thesis Action Research: Phase Three

The final section of this chapter, draws together the discussion from chapter five through to chapter nine. I have illustrated my position, at this stage in the research process, as having moved from the core action research, through a stage of sharing the findings with the childminders, and now entering the writing and re-writing stage (Fig 9.13). Whilst this journey is illustrated to have moved neatly, through stages within the thesis and action research phases, the process has been much more complex. I actually began the writing stage at the very beginning of the doctoral process, when I undertook my first reviews of literature and submitted the required papers for stage one of the EdD programme. Nyanjom (2018) describes the messy steps of action research to be 'presented logically and in a linear fashion' (p. 630), which feels at odds with the weaving, cyclical, looping motion that is actually experienced. I reflect further on this process in my concluding chapter (see Chapter Ten: 10.3.1. Research Process).

[Fig 9.13 Thesis Action Research: Write and re-write draft chapters]

9.6.1 Refining the Findings

Crystallization, as an approach to data analysis, enabled 'multiple processes of meaning making' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 156) to occur, as well as to retain a focus on my voice, the voices of the childminders, and our collective voice throughout the presentation and reporting in the thesis action research. By weaving together our reflections and evaluations from the sessions and across the cycles, a number of key features of CPD emerged during the core action research. These evolved through the cyclical research process, enabling us to build deeper understandings as we moved through our enquiry-based approach. We explored and refined the features of CPD, through our collaborative data analysis stage (see section 9.4. Reflection on Research: Session Seven), which I categorised across five dimensions of CPD (Fig 9.14). These categories were subsequently utilised to report the findings in chapter six through to chapter nine. Through this process I demonstrated how we had worked collaboratively to inform the ways in which we thought CPD can be developed, to be more appropriate for childminders.

Dimensions of CPD		Features of CPD
Approach	Collaboration	Cyclical, journey
Content		Knowledge, reflection on practice
Delivery		Style of the session, multi-faceted roles, lived experience
Affect		Motivation, confidence, pride, value
Effect		Community of practice

[Fig 9.14 Features of CPD mapped to dimensions of CPD]

There is 'debate about the number and nature of key features' (Siraj, et al., 2017, p. 22) within studies of CPD, in the early childhood sector. Therefore, the features listed in Fig 9.14 are understood to be representative of our contextualised enquiry. Siraj, et al., (2017) used three domains of thought to categorise features of CPD; content, delivery

and affect, which informed their study of professional development, in the broader ECEC sector. Whereas, additional consideration of the approach and effect of the CPD, were identified and considered through this enquiry with childminders.

9.6.2 Bringing it all Together

Prior to undertaking the core action research, I presented childminders, in chapter two, as regulated and inspected members of the early years workforce, tasked with the responsibility for their professional development. Their place within the ECEC sector is cemented through the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008), however the sector is receiving decreasing amounts of government funding, and support services such as the Local Authority are not able to sustain a funded approach to CPD. Childminders are a less visible workforce within the public and PVI early years sector, resulting in challenges and barriers towards the CPD opportunities that are available. These are in part, due to the self-employed nature of their provision, based within their own homes, yet also as a result of the need for wider developments towards an understanding of their distinctive pedagogical approach to childcare and education. I discerned a need to reconceptualise existing understandings of quality of provision which inform the content of CPD activities, in order to be more appropriate and reflective of the childminding approach to practice (O'Connell, 2011).

I initially identified seven features of CPD for consideration of a model of CPD that is more appropriate for childminders, which I explored in chapter three (see 3.5. Features of CPD). Through my engagement with literature that explored CPD in the ECEC sector, I also identified the knowledge base of early years to be an uncertain (Campbell-Barr, 2018), yet growing area of development; further evident in the ongoing focus within research, and through increasing government interest in curriculum and quality of provision. Moreover, qualifications in the early years are described as a complex field to

navigate (Nutbrown, 2012), and the formal training requirements for childminders are different than for other roles in early years. Therefore, in addition to acquiring existing knowledge, CPD has the potential to be a means through which new knowledge can be explored, and socially constructed, through incorporation of opportunities for reflection on practice.

Collaborative action research was justified, in chapter four (see 4.10.1. Collaborative Action Research), as a suitable approach, through which to explore a model of CPD that was more appropriate for childminders. In addition, and as a result of the lack of insight into childminders' experience of CPD across the literature, I undertook an additional step in the action research process, to take stock. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009, p. 147) describe this step as a useful opportunity to collect 'baseline data about the circumstances of [my] research', rather than assume my views and experience as generalisable. Therefore, in order to establish the views of childminders on current CPD opportunities, I carried out an initial survey (see Chapter Five), the results from which, provided a deeper insight into the experiences of CPD from a local group of childminders. These included insights into current barriers to accessing CPD opportunities, as well as emphasised a need for CPD to be more relevant. Through the survey, the childminders called for the individuals, tasked with organising and leading CPD opportunities, to hold an understanding of their distinctive pedagogy. The insights gained through this survey, provided a baseline understanding of what was, and what was not, currently working for childminders, which were subsequently presented and discussed at an introductory meeting to the research (see Chapter Six).

This stage was conceptualised as the core action research phase of the doctoral enquiry, aimed at exploring the ways in which we could work together to develop an approach to CPD that is more appropriate for childminders. Our reflections and evaluations of the

evolving enquiry into CPD, are discussed and presented, in Chapter Seven through to Chapter Nine; each comprising one cycle from within the core action research. When viewed independently, each cycle was further conceptualised as a single three stage cycle of action learning; comprising a workshop session, the opportunity to implement knowledge to practice, then a second session to facilitate the sharing and reflection of practice (see section 9.4.1. Interlude: Action Learning). The final cycle completed the core action research, by providing the opportunity to reflect collaboratively, on our experience of the CPD as co-researchers, during which time we also made practical suggestions for the future development of a model of CPD for childminders.

Key features of CPD emerged, throughout the ongoing reflection and evaluation within the core action research, which I subsequently categorised under five dimensions of CPD: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect. I summarise my understanding of these dimensions of CPD prior to concluding the thesis action research in chapter ten.

9.6.3 Approach

CPD needs to be accessible for childminders, preferably offered in a way which can facilitate the creation of local networks and communities of practice. In addition, a three stage cyclical approach to CPD supports the accumulation and creation of knowledge; the implementation of this knowledge and subsequent development to practice; and finally the opportunity to reflect upon and consolidate new knowledge.

9.6.3.1 Accessibility

We addressed the accessibility of our model of CPD by making collaborative decisions on the organisation of the sessions: we held them at an agreed time in the evening and on an agreed day of the week; at an appropriate location, which had parking and refreshment facilities; and in this instance at no cost. We built upon these decisions

through our evaluations of the cycles, suggesting further developments, such as, improved access to refreshments. Issues of accessibility remained complex throughout the core action research. For instance, there was a consensus that this model of CPD requires engagement outside of working hours, however, the childminders found evening sessions to be tiring and some stipulated that they would prefer the option of weekend sessions in future.

9.6.3.2 Cyclical Process

Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013) identified that CPD opportunities were persistently offered in the form of 'fragmented and one-off lectures… divorced from practice' (p. 173), suggesting a move away from these traditional models of CPD. The approach that we took emerged as a three stage, cyclical process, which incorporated the opportunity to share, and discuss knowledge, on a topic of interest, at a workshop session, then to implement these new ideas into practice, and finally come back together to reflect on practice. Subsequently, the childminders viewed their learning as a journey throughout the core action research, which they illustrated through activities such as the reflection tree. Kennedy (2014) acknowledges that an action research approach, supports practitioners to question their practice, which, in turn, promotes autonomy over the development of an appropriate knowledge base. During this process, we found that opportunities for implementation, then reflection and discussion, enabled new knowledge to be constructed and considered, through a developing community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Moreover, this process facilitated the sharing of practice in the form of observations, discussions and photos that provided insights into practice previously deemed to be invisible (Jones & Osgood, 2007).

Crowley (2014, p. 79) found that 'at best, CPD was a stimulus for professional learning that actually came from the subsequent collective reflection and dialogue it stimulated'.

Through our cyclical approach to CPD, opportunities specifically for discussion, and reflection, were facilitated within the structure. Furthermore, opportunities to interact with this knowledge, through systematic and reflective enquiry is understood by Timperley (2011) to be conducive for professional learning. Our cycles of action learning are placed within a core cycle of action research, thus promoting a systematic approach (McNiff, 2017) to the enquiry. In addition, the childminders took on the role of researcher when they implemented what they had learned, subsequently, observing and recording the developments they made to their practice. In the third stage of the cycle, they shared their actions, questioning and reflecting on practice, and on the research. In doing so, they constructed new knowledge, and offered new insights into their distinctive pedagogy.

9.6.4 Content and Delivery

The content of CPD was identified as generally being relevant to group settings, which created a challenge for childminders and demonstrated a lack of understanding of their distinctive pedagogy (O'Connell, 2011). Within the survey, the childminders added that the topics of CPD were repetitive and often geared towards new childminders with little experience. Crowley (2014, p. 91) reported that 'the vast majority of adults prefer their learning to be relevant and contextualized, and to build upon that which they already know, understand, and can do'. In our enquiry, the collaborative approach to action research, worked to address the issue of relevance: the childminders choose the focus of the sessions; they contributed to the knowledge sharing and learning process; and reflected and evaluated throughout the process, to continually inform the development of the content and delivery of the CPD.

In addition, Siraj, et al., (2017) identified that features of CPD do not occur in isolation from each other, but all encompass a degree of overlap. In this case, the content of the CPD sessions was suggested by the childminders, at the end of this enquiry, to need to

be delivered by individuals who held implicit understandings and experience of childminding (see section 9.4.5.6. Delivery). Nevertheless, the childminders also recognised, that they had contributed to the delivery of the sessions partly through the varying nature of the stages, each denoting the adoption of different roles within the process, and partly through our collaborative approach, in which they valued the relationships we had built through a community of practice.

9.6.5 Affect and Effect

The childminders who completed the survey, and those who chose to continue their involvement in the doctoral study through the core action research, are already motivated to engage in CPD. Crowley (2014) recognises that individuals are 'intrinsically motivated to improve through professional learning, [when] they have a substantial say in the process and are likely to see the benefits' (Crowley, 2014, p. 93). The EYFS recommends CPD, in order to 'ensure they offer quality learning and development experiences for children that continually improves' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21), it does not stipulate CPD as a mandatory responsibility, or recognise additional purposes of CPD, such as to create networks or positively affect the motivation and confidence of practitioners (see Chapter Three: 3.5.2. Purposeful). Childminders are self-employed, they have a choice in whether or not they actively seek opportunities to develop. They demonstrated through the survey that CPD can affect them in a positive way (see Chapter Five: 5.5.2. The Affect of CPD), and consequently, this group of childminders believed CPD was necessary. Further, they provided an understanding that if CPD is offered in a way that met their needs, it can have a positive effect on their practice, as well as positively affecting their motivation, and confidence.

The childminders reported a developed sense of pride, and felt valued in the role that they undertake. Our collaborative approach, facilitated the emergence of a network of

support which can make a ‘profound difference’ (Owen, 2007, p. 29) to childminders, and is considered to be ‘invaluable’ (Callanan, 2014, p. 41). Research such as that of Owen (2006b), and Otero and Melhuish (2015), recommend access to ongoing support for childminders, and this is therefore an element of this enquiry that can be considered to develop further opportunities for support.

The childminders’ shared examples of their learning as an effect of their active engagement with the CPD process (Timperley, 2011), through which they had gained new knowledge and practical ideas. Rather than being trained as passive recipients of knowledge (Kennedy, 2005) the sessions were underpinned by social learning theory to promote opportunities for co-construction of new understandings, from within a community of knowledge and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

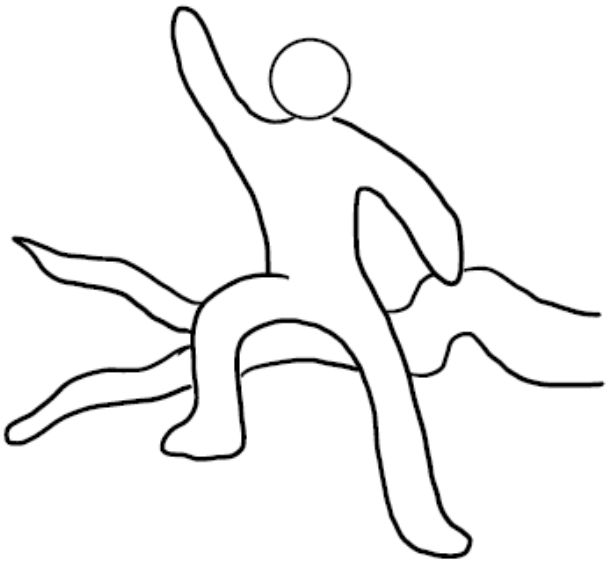
9.7 Chapter Summary

I have presented the ways in which I worked together, with a group of childminders to explore a model of CPD that better meets their distinctive needs. Through our collaborative approach to the research, we were able to identify key features of the process, which I subsequently presented in this chapter under five domains of CPD: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect. A greater understanding was gained, of the cycles of CPD to be examples of action learning, positioned within a framework of core action research. The childminders reflected throughout the core action research both on practice and on the research. Subsequently, we worked together during the final session to reflect on the whole experience across the core action research, and I presented the collective story in this chapter (see section 9.4.5. Refining a Collective Story). Finally, I shared the childminders suggestions to develop our model of CPD even further (see section 9.4.6. Developing CPD).

The next chapter concludes our enquiry, into what constitutes appropriate continuing professional development opportunities for childminders; summarising the contribution we have offered to current understandings of childminding practice, and to the wider notions of CPD. In chapter ten, I conclude the thesis action research and look to the ways in which this enquiry can be developed through further opportunities for research. In addition, I continue my reflexive account of the research process, through which I identify the limitations of this doctoral study, and reflect on my own learning from the enquiry.

Chapter 10

Conclusion of the Thesis Action Research



10 Conclusion of the Thesis Action Research

10.1 Introduction to the Chapter

My doctoral thesis is an integrated, crystallized account of our enquiry into continuing professional development (CPD), bringing together our actions and reflections from the core action research. It is not, however, the final account of our enquiry. Instead, I view the opportunity I have had, to explore CPD with childminders for this doctoral study, as our first engagement with action research. It is the beginning of an ongoing process, aimed at building upon existing understandings; both of childminding and of CPD, in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in England. Similarly to Ellingson's (2009) description of crystallization as an 'emergent framework' (p. 190), our collective story emerged throughout the action research, and I anticipate it to continue after completion of the doctoral process, through future opportunities for professional learning and research with childminders.

This concluding chapter provides an opportunity to bring together the thesis and core action research, for a final reflection on key elements of the doctoral enquiry. I reflect on the ways in which I achieved my aim: to work in collaboration with a group of childminders, to explore the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate. I offer a concluding discussion that summarises the context in which the research was carried out, and I reflect on my understanding of the research process. I consider the trustworthiness and authenticity of my approach to the doctoral research, and state my contribution to knowledge. In addition, I acknowledge some limitations of my enquiry and offer practical recommendations and suggestions for future research.

10.2 Aim and Context of the Doctoral Research

My aim was to inquire into the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. To achieve this, I sought to work collaboratively with a group of childminders and incorporate their insights throughout this process. CPD is suggested through the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) to improve the quality of practice in early childhood settings, thereby improving children's outcomes. Yet, CPD can also build confidence (Owen, 2007); support the creation of networks and communities (Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Kennedy, 2014; Otero & Melhuish, 2015); provide a means through which practice can be explored and knowledge can be constructed (Hordern, 2016; Campbell-Barr, 2018); and inspire and motivate a workforce (Cotton, 2013; Siraj, et al., 2017).

10.2.1 Personal Networks

Childminders in England face challenges and barriers to their engagement with current opportunities for CPD and are an under-researched workforce (Ang, et al., 2017). I was able to utilise my existing involvement with a local childminding network to facilitate a collaborative enquiry into CPD. I acknowledged that previous studies had undertaken similar explorations (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Ferri, 1992). However, they had been situated within a different policy context; one in which childminders were not required to adhere to a national statutory framework for education and care. Early studies, such as these, recommended training as a worthwhile endeavor for childminders, yet acknowledged the lack of support and understanding available more widely, of the 'minefield of diverse values, and behaviour' (Ferri, 1992, p. 192).

In order to undertake action research as a 'practical form of enquiry' (McNiff, 2017, p.9), participation was necessary from those involved. My previous experience, working as a

childminder in Chelmsford and more specifically having been a member of a local childminder network, benefitted my research in terms of the recruitment and participation of the core action research group of childminders. I had worked previously with twelve of the sixteen childminders in the core action research group (see 6.3 Participants), and I was actively involved on the Childminder Facebook page and in the local childminding community (see 4.11.1.3 Sample Group). Therefore, I was able to recruit a purposive sample of participants (Creswell, 2014) from the childminder population through my existing networks. However, childminders are not typically an easily accessible population within the childcare workforce, due to their private, self-employed status.

The diversity of childminder identity and autonomy of pedagogical approach within their childcare business, creates challenges for research, both nationally and internationally (see 2.2 Overview of Childminding Internationally and in England; 2.6 Discovering a Collective Identity). I thereby recognise my involvement in the childminding community to be a strength of this research, in that it enabled me to recruit a group of childminders who were motivated to participate and engaged throughout each stage of the core action research and beyond. By the same token, I also acknowledge my established childminder networks to be a limitation of this research. The engagement and motivation demonstrated by these childminders may not be replicated or sustained in future studies, with a different group of childminders, or in a different international, cultural, social or industrial context.

CPD is suggested for childminders within the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) and forms a part of the six yearly Ofsted inspection criteria to inform quality of provision. Nevertheless, it is an autonomous process for childminders who hold full, self-employed responsibility for their own professional development. In other sectors or contexts, in which CPD is mandated by line managers or necessitated under different regulations, the engagement and

motivation of participants may therefore differ. Moreover, I recognise that I will not be able to work with the exact same group of childminders again (for example, I know that at least one of the childminders who participated in this research has since changed occupation), or in the same policy context. For example, a new version of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been published since the completion of the core action research, which incorporates a number of changes to the areas of learning and development and the early learning goals (DfE, 2021).

10.2.2 Drawing from Previous Studies

Existing explorations of CPD for early childhood practitioners were available to inform and influence my approach to this doctoral research. For example, Hordern (2012) identified the need to focus on notions of 'appropriateness' (p. 109) and the ways in which 'early years practitioners can gain greater control over their continuing professional development and ongoing formation' (p. 115). Bleach (2014) exemplified a way in which an action research approach could promote a focus on CPD as a 'process rather than [a] product' (p. 187) and ongoing studies, such as that of Callanan (2014) and Otero and Melhuish (2015), reported the significance of CPD to promote high quality provision and sources of support for childminders. In turn, I have also considered the transferability and development of this model of CPD to inform future studies within the early years sector and which may also be extended to other industries (see 10.4.1.1 Transferability of the Model).

I was able to draw out examples of specific local challenges, faced by childminders, when accessing CPD opportunities, from insights provided through an online survey (see Chapter Five). The childminders indicated the need for CPD that was accessible and better reflected their distinctive pedagogical approach to childcare and education. Subsequently, I worked with a local group of childminders, taking a collaborative

approach to a model of CPD that comprised three cycles of action learning, within an overarching phase of core action research. Through this process, we were able to inform and develop our enquiry, through ongoing reflection and evaluation, on both practice and research. I employed crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) as an approach to data analysis and representation, through which I could acknowledge the multiple understandings we constructed, through the core action research framework, in an authentic and trustworthy manner.

10.3 Research Process

The need to develop services and opportunities which support childminders has been identified throughout research, commencing with early research such as that of the Community Relations Commission (CRC) (1975) and Jackson and Jackson (1979). Childminders have since been studied, through surveys and interviews, to explore: concepts of quality (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Jones & Osgood, 2007; O'Connell, 2011); training and CPD (Gibson, et, al., 1977; Ferri, 1992, Otero & Melhuish, 2015); identity (Greener, 2009; Brooker, 2016); and the role of support networks (Owen, 2003). Furthermore, research has begun to build profiles of childminders (Mooney, et al., 2001; Fauth, et al., 2011), identifying them as holding a distinct pedagogy (Ang, et al., 2017), which is not widely visible within current research.

CPD opportunities in the ECEC sector need to be relevant to early years practice (see Chapter Three: 3.5.5. Relevance, above), and informed from within the workforce (Evetts, 2011; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Campbell-Barr, 2018; Basford, 2019). Nevertheless, it is also recognised that childminders' pedagogy derives from implicit understandings of caring for, and educating children, based upon family values and from within a home environment (Brooker, 2016), which are not reflected in the existing CPD offer. Childminding has been included in developing policy interventions, such as: the

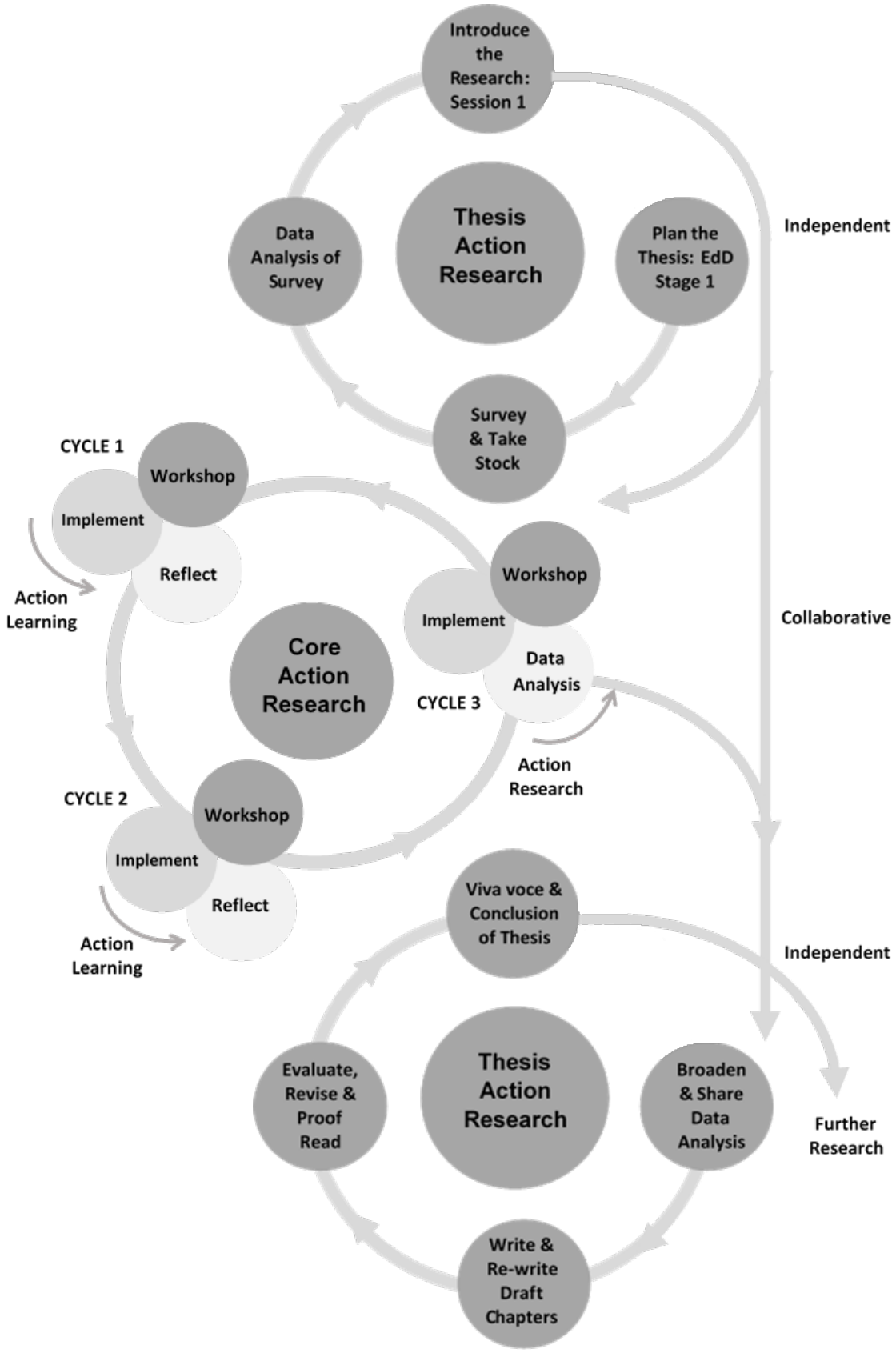
requirement to register with Ofsted (2018); inclusion in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) and in the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017b). There is an increasing awareness of childminding within the broader early years sector, for example, through news items and articles in publications such as Nursery World (2019), and the development of ECEC membership organisations, such as PACEY, to provide support to all types of early childhood settings.

There is a need to develop existing models of CPD with childminders, rather than deliver CPD to them through a transmissive model. Kennedy (2005; 2014) proposed action research as a method that enabled involvement of participants in the research process, further advocating a collaborative enquiry-based approach to CPD to increase professional autonomy and agency within the process. Bleach (2013; 2014) offered an example of an action research approach to CPD, which facilitated the creation of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and 'directly involved the participants as co-constructors of the research process and CPD programme' (Bleach, 2013, p. 376). Consequently, I chose collaborative action research as a methodological approach to the doctoral research, which I conceptualised through a structure of thesis and core action research (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). Further, our enquiry into CPD enabled knowledge and understanding of practice to be socially constructed through reflective discussions, supported through the building of supportive relationships (Townsend, 2014).

10.3.1 Bringing the Thesis and Core Action Research Together

A collaborative action research approach to this enquiry, enabled the formation of a community of practitioner researchers, over a period of ten months, during which time we explored the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders. I drew from the work of Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002), to structure my

doctoral research process into three phases, comprising two independent thesis action research (TAR) stages, which incorporated a central phase of collaborative core action research (CAR). In Fig 10.1 I bring together and update the developments from across the core action research to demonstrate how my conceptualisation of the doctoral research was refined throughout the research process from the first depiction in chapter four (see 4.11. Thesis and Core Action Research Design).



[Fig 10.1 Developed conceptualisation of the thesis and core action research]

‘Central to action research is our experimenting with new ways of working within the complexity in any knowledge-production situation’ (Bradbury, 2015, p. 4). My doctoral research, contributes an example of action research, in which I distinguish between two phases of thesis action research, and a central core action research phase (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). The thesis action research, is identified above in Fig 10.1 to include the independent stages that I progressed through, in my role as a doctoral research student. This process included the first stage of the EdD programme during which I engaged with existing literature, chose collaborative action research as a methodological approach to an enquiry into CPD and applied for ethical approval. Next, I took stock of the childminders’ current experiences of CPD through an online survey, from which I was able to recruit a local group of childminders and begin our exploration of a model of CPD that was more appropriate to meet their requirements.

The core action research, encompassed three individual cycles, which, in turn, comprised three stages of: a workshop session; a stage during which the childminders implemented their new knowledge and ideas into practice, then observed and recorded the changes to their provision; and, finally, an opportunity to come back together to share and reflect on the new practice. The reflection stage of the cycle also included reflection and evaluation of our approach to CPD, thus providing an opportunity to identify what was working well and what could be developed. During these cycles we recorded our reflections and evaluations through generated and naturally occurring data (Creswell, 2014), and developed key features of the emerging model of CPD, such as issues of accessibility and our collaborative approach. During the core action research process we discussed and made practical decisions together, then engaged with the data from the research during the final reflection stage, at the end of the core action research (see Chapter Nine: 9.4. Reflection on Research: Session Seven).

Bleach (2013) describes her action research to have 'operated at two levels' (p. 372), the first was the 'overall development of the programme' (ibid) and the second was the use of the action research process within each ECCE Centre. Similarly, I began to distinguish between two processes that were occurring within the core action research phase. Together we engaged in one cycle of collaborative core action research, during which time, we developed a model of CPD; reflected upon, and evaluated our approach through three cycles of action learning; and engaged collaboratively with the data, to interpret and construct, a broader understanding of the ways in which CPD can be developed to better meet the requirements of childminders.

Within this process, the childminders also engaged in individual cycles of action learning (see Chapter Nine: 9.4.1. Interlude: Action Learning) which is conceptualised by Revans (2011) as a project-based learning approach, involving a group of colleagues who work on real life problems with the intention of developing practice 'but each individual within that group learns from separate experiences' (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002, p. 173). Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) and later Zuber-Skerritt (2015) recognise the integration of action learning, and action research to facilitate the exploration of a specific problem for a particular group, 'with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of the situation' (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015, p. 15), which could work towards a larger change. Subsequently, I modified my conceptualisation of the core action research phase to distinguish between the action learning and action research cycles (see Fig 10.1).

I found it useful to create visual representations of the action research structure, in order to make sense of the mess (Schön 1987; Cook, 2009; Nyanjom, 2018), to inform future applications of the model of CPD and to understand the process that the childminders and I had followed within the research. The final structure diagram (Fig 10.1) enabled the identification, and subsequent depiction, of the varying stages of the process including

those that were independent, and those that were collaborative. However, differentiating between the independent and collaborative elements of the doctoral action research, and the differing roles that we all held at various stages within the research, was a complex process, and our positions were often interchangeable. I undertook independent stages of the research, I had: defined the question; critically engaged with the literature; and, for the purpose of the EdD programme, it was my responsibility to present the research as a thesis and make a contribution to knowledge. The research was also a personal undertaking of my 'journey towards building and extending skills and knowledge about educational enquiry' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 1), through which I developed as a researcher, and worked towards achieving a doctorate in education. My work in collaboration with a group of childminders, was directed towards the development of practical understandings of our experiences of CPD, to support professional change and the ongoing development of the CPD process, to better meet their unique needs.

10.3.2 Trustworthiness and Authenticity of the Research

'Honesty, depth and richness are powerful concepts to be considered' (Burgess, et al., 2006, p. 62) in a doctoral study, usually by questioning the reliability and validity of the research. I asked in what ways CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders; working with a local group of childminders to create, act upon, and explore the findings. Burgess, et al., (2006) consider the comprehensiveness with which the research question has been answered, to demonstrate the overall rigour of the research. The answer to my question is complex, and there are many ways in which CPD could be developed; some of which vary, depending on the specific needs of the individual childminders undertaking the CPD. Our experience through the core action research is distinct. It demonstrates that CPD needs to be developed, can be developed, and it offers suggestions of ways in which this can achieved.

Denzin and Lincoln (2013), suggest the rigour of research within a constructivist paradigm, should be considered across four criteria: 'trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability' (p. 28). In relation, more specifically to action research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) initially put forward trustworthiness as the overarching criteria, later adding 'authenticity' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 166) to their definition. This notion is strengthened further by Zuber-Skerritt and Fletcher (2007), who argued the notion of authenticity to be more fitting to an 'open-ended, collaborative, situation specific' (p. 423) action research project, than the terms validity or reliability. To promote trustworthiness and authenticity in my research, I took a collaborative approach, employing the principles of crystallization when analysing and reporting our experiences (see Chapter Four: 4.13.1. Crystallization).

McNiff (2017) differentiates between trustworthiness and authenticity, attributing the ways in which the data is authenticated to denote the trustworthiness of the action research project. This was achieved, through the core action research, by way of the childminders and I engaging in regular and ongoing opportunities to reflect on and evaluate our approach to CPD, as we progressed through the cycles. We recorded our reflections at the end of each individual session, and utilised the third stage, of each cycle, to engage in a broader evaluation of that cycle. Moreover, we undertook a focused data analysis session at the end of the core action research (see Chapter Nine: 9.4. Reflection on Research: Session Seven), during which time we immersed ourselves in the act of authenticating, interpreting and making sense of the data (McNiff, 2017). As a result of this final session, the childminders were able to put forward suggestions for developments leading on from the core action research (see Chapter Nine: 9.4.6. Developing CPD). These collective views enabled the childminders' engagement with

the data to 'move from individual viewpoints to common ideas' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 130)

After this stage, I collated and represented the findings from the core action research through a dendritic process of crystallization (see Appendix 5: Essential Childminder Magazine), which I shared with the childminders. Ellingson (2009) promotes member checking, to enhance the credibility of claims, as well as serving to continue to acknowledge the 'exciting process of constructing, reconstructing and co-constructing meaning' (p. 42). In addition, this provided another opportunity for the childminders to offer comments and responses to my representation of our findings.

10.4 Contribution to Professional Knowledge

Through my doctoral research I asked the question: 'In what ways can CPD be developed to be more appropriate for childminders?' I acknowledged the various forms of CPD currently available to childminders including: local and online networking; online CPD courses; reading professional news articles; standalone training sessions; and support from the Local Authority (Callanan, et al., 2017). The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requires childminders to engage in 'appropriate…training' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21), and the results of the online survey, in chapter five, demonstrated that standalone training sessions were a model of CPD with which the childminders engaged regularly. Nevertheless, Kennedy (2014) categorises this form of CPD as a transmissive model that can create challenges for childminders (see Chapter Five: 5.5.4. Challenges to CPD).

An action research approach to CPD has a 'long tradition' (Bleicher, 2014) at school level and is becoming increasingly common within group-based early years settings (Siraj, et al., 2017; Cherrington & Thornton, 2013; Lightfoot & Frost, 2013). However, due to the group structure of their settings, these physical and social environments within ECEC

more easily facilitate opportunities for supportive, community of practice oriented models of CPD. For childminders, who work independently in their own private home-based settings, CPD opportunities need to include a specific focus on bringing these individual practitioners together.

The model of CPD presented through this research, is an example of a process that enables the application of legitimised knowledge to practice as we 'evaluate the knowledge that is useful and how it is best applied' (Campbell-Barr, 2018, p. 85). Whilst it has been created in a specific context with an engaged group of childminders, it demonstrates CPD as a process that can facilitate opportunities for change, reflection and documentation of practice. Thereby demonstrating, through this research, that it is possible to work collaboratively within a given context, to develop an approach to CPD that is appropriate and that can construct new insights into practice. CPD then becomes a 'tool' (Bleach, 2013, p. 370) through which to mediate a developing understanding, in this case, of the childminding approach to the care and education of children, and reconstruct notions of quality (Elwick, et al., 2018; O'Connell, 2011), within the social and political context in which they work (Basford, 2019). I argue for an action learning model of CPD for childminders underpinned by consideration of five dimensions of CPD: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect (Fig 10.2).

[Fig 10.2 Cyclical Model of Action Learning: Framed by five dimensions of CPD]

10.4.1 Model of CPD

Continuous professional development, is a widely used phrase in the early years sector, which incorporates a multitude of activities, designed to support the development of knowledge and practice (Hordern, 2012). In chapter three (see Chapter Three: 3.4. Professional Development), I differentiated between professional development through formal means, such as qualifications and initial training courses, and professional development through informal opportunities. Further, I identified standalone training sessions as a common form of CPD within the ECEC sector (Waters & Payler, 2015), offered, ordinarily, through Local Authority provision.

By working together, and taking on multifaceted roles, I am able to propose a model of CPD that is appropriate to meet the requirements of childminders. Underpinned by a social constructivist approach to the creation of knowledge, the three stage cyclical model,

is framed by five dimensions of CPD: approach; content; delivery; affect; and effect, which I used to guide my reporting of the research through this thesis. This model is different from the more common place opportunities for standalone training sessions, which Swim and Isik-Ercan (2013, p. 173) describe as 'divorced from daily practice'. The childminders participated in three cycles of CPD through this model, each cycle focused on a different topic of early years practice.

During this time, the childminders engaged with a cycle of core action research, through which I facilitated opportunities for collaborative decision making. The childminders determined the focus of the sessions and contributed their views, through ongoing reflection and evaluation, which subsequently informed the ongoing and developing process. Ideally CPD should be a continuous process, however it is feasible that existing standalone training opportunities, such as those offered by the Local Authority, could be adapted to incorporate the final two stages of implementation and reflection, to the current offer. This step would work towards developing CPD opportunities to become more appropriate, by facilitating opportunities for childminders to develop their practice, then come back together for shared reflection.

Through 'ongoing democratic evaluation of learning and practices' (McNiff, 2017, p. 48), the question of the ways in which CPD could be developed to be more appropriate for childminders, can continue to be addressed. Continued insights into childminding practice will be possible, by valuing CPD as a collaborative process; further, 'limiting dependency on externally produced research, instead shifting the balance of power' (Kennedy, 2014, p. 347), and advocating for the development of agency for childminders over the process.

10.4.1.1 Transferability of the Model

In its current form, the three stage cyclical model of CPD with the five dimensions by which it is framed, is transferrable for further development through future research with childminders in England (see 10.7 Suggestions for Future Research). It encourages a collaborative approach to the professional development process, in order to better meet the needs of childminders. However, it may not be appropriate in its current form, across different countries, contexts or cultures. The model of CPD has been developed, in this example of a doctoral action research study, within a specific localised context (see 5.3 Articulating the Collective Voice). Whilst elements of the model may be useful to inform future research studies, the three stage cycle and the five dimensions of CPD, warrant further exploration within each future context.

In chapter three (see 3.5 Features of CPD), I established the importance of flexibility in models and forms of CPD, in order to meet the differing needs and variance of contexts, within the early years sector. This flexibility and ongoing exploration also needs to acknowledge further diversity, if considered outside of the early years industry within England. For example, the work of Kennedy (2005; 2014) exemplifies an ongoing approach to the application and review of models of CPD across contexts. My own doctoral research demonstrates that a collaborative action research approach can be successful, to promote participation and engagement from individuals who have an interest in developing approaches to CPD. However, it is also likely that explorations of CPD within other industries, organisations and contexts, nationally and internationally, may find that the model needs to be adapted in order for it to be appropriate for their specific needs.

10.4.2 Crystallization

My doctoral research also offers an example of the way in which the principles of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) can be applied to a collaborative action research study in ECEC doctoral study. Ellingson (2009) provides an understanding of crystallization primarily in terms of ethnography and autoethnography, acknowledging that 'the only position crystallization does not complement is positivism' (p. 4), inviting further examples from across the methodological and qualitative continuum. In my study, crystallization enabled me to understand my writing as a method of enquiry; it allowed our collaborative experience to be considered through 'multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4); and it was a way through which the social construction and interpretation of knowledge could be recognised, and authenticated.

I also found crystallization to be an approach which helped me to acknowledge the additional opportunities available to me during my doctoral journey that formed part of the data analysis and presentation process (see Chapter Four: 4.13.1.1. Dendritic and Integrated Crystallization), for example: conference presentations; posters; seminars; visually; verbally; in written form; as a magazine; a student conference article; and this thesis. The notion of analysing the data through the 3D metaphor of a crystal rather than the 2D process of a triangle, was a strategy through which I could demonstrate the multiple ways in which the childminders and I had analysed and understood the data.

Throughout the thesis, I built the collective story of our enquiry, reporting on the emerging model of CPD, framed by our understandings of the evolving dimensions of CPD, whilst situating the discussion within existing ideas from research. I held such a deep, ethical desire to report the childminders voices in an authentic way, I found it challenging to be

selective and to report *on* their voices, rather than *with* their voices. Therefore, Ellingson (2009, p. 80) provided an opportunity for me to engage 'in serious play' and try what Oliver (2014, p. 170) describes as 'new and innovative ways to include data in the thesis' in as raw a form as possible, thus, I reported *with* their voices (for example, see Chapter Seven: 7.4.4. Reflections and Evaluations on the First Cycle).

Crystallization is defined by Ellingson (2009, p. 10), as 'another way of achieving depth, through the compilation not only of many details, but also of different forms of representing, organizing and analyzing those details'. Consequently, I believe my understanding of the dimensions of CPD that were drawn out from across the different forms of data and representation of that data, were strengthened through the crystallization process. Moreover, crystallization affords the possibility to co-create further representations of the data, after the doctoral study is complete.

10.4.3 Distinctive Pedagogy

In previous studies, such as that of Mayall and Petrie (1983), they summarised that 'the kind of care children get depends a good deal on what policy-makers think and do' (p. 3). Similarly, in recognition of the domestic setting, Ferri (1992) identified the 'greatest influence over a childminder's approach to day care provision is thus the shape and substance of her own family life' (p. 190). More recently, within an educational policy framework (DfE, 2017a), research on childminding has provided insights into varying elements of practice, such as: support networks (Owen, 2003); professional identity and meanings of quality (O'Connell, 2013); and relationships with parents (Brooker, 2016). Research, such as that of Campbell-Barr (2018) and Basford (2019), continue to call for 'a more informed knowledge base about the specificities of pedagogical practices' (p. 782).

The collaborative and practical nature of the core action research, offers a contribution to knowledge of pedagogical practices, by way of making visible the childminders' professional artistry of practice (Schön, 1983). Practical action research is defined by Creswell (2014), to enable practitioners to 'study their own problems' (p. 612). However, this notion takes a largely isolated approach to action research, one carried out by the individual in the context of their own setting. Through our core action research approach, the childminders engaged in cycles of action learning, yet from a collaborative base of practical action research, and through exploration of a collective focus. They implemented their own understanding in their individual settings and developed their individual practice, before coming back together for shared reflection. I shared insights into their practice through this enquiry, which is situated in the current policy context and which recognises childminding, in England, as an Ofsted registered and regulated, home-based setting that requires self-employed childminders to provide education and care, for children aged from birth to five years, in line with government frameworks (DfE, 2017a).

10.5 Limitations of the Research

The childminders and I were involved in an 'interactive, dynamic process whereby each affects the others' (Oliver, 2014, p. 187), and whilst we shared an interest in the research our 'respective orientations to it differ' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 360). In this section, I reflect on some limitations of my research, which I identify as: a localised example of action research; my use of crystallization to distinguish the interpretation of knowledge as inherently constructed, situated and multiple; and in acknowledgement of our multi-faceted roles.

10.5.1 A Local Action Research Study

The reflexive nature of action research, has enabled me to be aware of and address, a number of challenges throughout the core action research process including the messy, layered, and emergent nature of the enquiry. In addition, my adaptation of the doctoral action research structure (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002) supported me to think critically about the way in which the core action research was undertaken and conveyed within the thesis action research. By viewing these challenges, as a doctoral student, I learned to embrace them as opportunities for my own professional development. During the experience I strengthened my understanding of action research as a 'living inquiry' (Wicks, et al., 2008, p. 14), through which, we brought together the 'swampy lowland' (Schön, 1983, p. 42) and the 'high hard ground' (ibid) of knowledge and practice, through the creation and exploration of professional change (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009).

Undertaking a core cycle of action research, framed within a social constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), resonates with the notion of an enquiry 'at a local level, rather than to… be generalised beyond its local origins' (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 216). Our core action research is a context specific example of an enquiry into CPD, which incorporates a three stage cycle of action learning that emerged as an appropriate model of CPD for childminders, when framed by the identified five dimensions of CPD (see section 10.4. Contribution to Professional Knowledge: Fig 10.2). Models of action learning are already utilised across industries (Revans, 2011), yet, when framed by the five dimensions of CPD that evolved throughout our core action research, emphasis is placed on the agency with which participants are involved: the collaborative approach to the process; relevance of the knowledge and learning opportunities; the delivery and style of sessions; and the affect and effect of engagement in the process. These understandings have the potential to be transferable, to inform other inquiries into CPD

within childminding, the wider ECEC sector and beyond (see 10.4.1.1 Transferability of the Model).

10.5.1.1 Population Sample

The childminders I worked with, some of whom I knew, were recruited through a local Facebook page and expressed their interest to participate in the enquiry. Consequently, I understand them to have held an existing, intrinsic motivation to engage, which not all childminders will hold. The profiling information gathered via the survey, situated the group of childminders within the larger context of the workforce, demonstrating this group of childminders to hold a range of levels of experience and qualifications. I did not gather in depth profiling information for the purposes of this enquiry, such as class, gender or ethnicity. Instead, this has been addressed through demographic contextualisation of the local area in England and consideration of current childcare sufficiency data (Appendix 7). Further, due to the collaborative nature of the research, I can acknowledge limitations are present, for example based upon the locality and limited diversity of the research population: for instance, physical appearances allowed me to infer that all members of the core action research group identify as female. I was able to work some way to addressing limitations, for example through my crystallized approach to interpreting and presenting the collective and anomalous voices (Richardson, 1990; Ellingson, 2009; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012), which supported ethical reporting throughout the thesis action research process.

The childminders who participated in this research were not hard to reach and broadly demonstrated their similar approach to the childminding role, by embedding education within their practice (see 8.2 Workshop Four: Life Outside of the EYFS), as well as by valuing their distinctive pedagogical approach to both education and care that is based upon family values and the home environment (see 8.4.2 Distinctive Pedagogy). This

group of childminders are discussed in chapter five (see 5.3 Articulating the Collective Voice) as being difficult to contextualise, due to the diversity of the childminding role.

Nationally, most childminders work within the same regulated, self-employed business model, yet they also retain a degree of autonomy in their approach to their home-based childcare provision and their choice to engage in professional development. Internationally, the concept of childminding differs in terminology, structure, regulation (including unregulated) and approach (see 2.2 Overview of Childminding Internationally and in England). Previous research has made attempts to categorise childminders (Fauth, et al., 2011; Brooker, 2016) and there is scope to develop this research by working with other groups of childminders. For example, those who are harder to reach, that are not engaged in, or place less value on CPD, as well as those who might have differing pedagogical approaches to providing home-based childcare.

10.5.1.2 Role of the Researcher

Whilst exploring my own approach to the action research, I drew insight from Constantino (2012) and McNiff (2017) to realise that my understandings of the research were co-constructed with those of the childminder participants (see 4.8 Positionality and Voice). I was inspired by Ellingson's (2009) writing on crystallization, to weave together our voices, reflections and evaluations throughout the research process (see 9.6.1 Refining the Findings), to demonstrate the emergence of the action research and to share an insight into our experiences. Yet, McNiff (2017, p.217) also encourages action researchers to 'comment on the significance of your own story', which I included, for example in the form of interludes within the findings chapters (see 7.4.3 Interlude; 9.4.1 Interlude) and by taking a reflective approach to the thesis (for example, see 8.6 Informing the Next Cycle). In addition, I began to claim my 'own identity as a writer' (Ellingson, 2009, p.156) and

‘make [our] account of practice public, so that others in their communities and elsewhere can learn and benefit’ (McNiff, 2017, p. 24) through production of the thesis.

My own learning during this process was significant. I followed the advice of McNiff (2017) to monitor my practice by keeping a research journal and making reflective notes on the primary data, as we progressed through the core action research (see 4.12.2 Emerging Data Collection Methods). Nevertheless, I now realise that there were further opportunities for me to engage with the reflective activities alongside the childminders, for instance by completing the reflection tree at the end of each session (see 4.12.1 Documents: Reflection Tree and Evaluation). In hindsight, I had differentiated these types of activities as data collection methods to capture the views of the childminders, whereas, additional documentation would also have been useful to capture my own immediate thoughts within the sessions and to share, to make my learning more visible to readers of the thesis. I acknowledge this as a limitation of my doctoral research and subsequently reflect on my developed understanding of CPD as a process.

10.5.1.3 CPD as a Process

I came to this research with the understanding that CPD was important for various purposes, including raising quality of provision and as a means to access support (see 1.3 Context of my Research). My experience of CPD was similar to that of the childminders; often provided in the form of stand-alone training that is ‘divorced from daily practice’ (Swim & Isik-Ecran, 2013, p.173). Yet my experience through the comprehensive stages of the EdD programme (incorporating in my case both the thesis and core action research), taught me the value of working collaboratively and democratically with the individuals who participate in the CPD. It is through this process

that relationships are built, a sense of value is nurtured, and communities and networks are formed.

My learning, as a facilitator of the CPD sessions, was to place the focus on the collaborative and reflective elements of the process. The workshop sessions (see 7.2 Workshop Two; 8.2 Workshop Four; 9.2 Workshop Six) were, for me, the familiar, comfortable stages of the CPD cycle. During these sessions my role was that of a trainer or teacher, as described by the childminders (see 9.4.5.4.2 Multi-Faceted Roles) and I fell naturally into my Senior Lecturer role, of engaging the childminders in interactive and discursive learning activities on a chosen topic. However, it was the introductory meeting (see Chapter Six), and the reflection sessions (see 7.4 Reflection on Practice; 8.4 Reflection on Practice; 9.4 Reflection on Research) that made me uncomfortable and apprehensive (see, 7.3 Implementation into Practice), and thus resulted in my greatest learning as an action researcher and facilitator of CPD.

During these times, I addressed my discovery of messiness in action research (Cook, 2009; Nyanjom, 2018) and with subsequent inclusion of some of my 'mullings' (Mac Naughton & Hughes 2009, p.97) and 'wonderings' (Ellingson, 2009, p.74) in the thesis, for example in chapter seven (see 7.3 Implementation into Practice). Such opportunities were useful to reflect upon and demonstrate my learning within the messiness. It was in making sense of the less controlled and more unpredictable aspects of the CAR sessions (see 7.3 Implementation into Practice) that the knowledge and insights for reframing CPD occurred (Cook, 2009). The aforementioned stages of the CPD cycle were more unusual in comparison to stand-alone training workshops; they were aimed at promoting a collaborative and democratic approach to the CPD, they relied upon participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991); enquiry (Timperley, 2011); dialogue (Crowley, 2014); they were less directed (Stringer, 2014) and they allowed time for reflection and consolidation of learning.

Consequently, I now understand through my own lived experience, how it felt to be 'exposed and vulnerable' (Taylor, 2010, p.294). I was not in full control of these stages of the cycle, they did not rely on me to plan each moment in advance. Instead, they relied on the creation and facilitation of a safe and comfortable environment (see 6.4 CAR Ethical Considerations), on the social dimensions (Lanigan, 2011) and on building a positive community of practice (see 9.4.5.6.1 Community of Practice). My greatest learning is that CPD is a process and it is the elements that form this process, as demonstrated through this research, that are missing from the current stand-alone CPD offer in the early childhood sector.

10.5.2 Crystallization

'Conveying the depth and richness of qualitative data requires considerable thought' (Ritchie, et al., 2014, p. 372). Therefore, I employed crystallization as an approach to creative analytic practice and representation of voice, further acknowledging the limitations that this approach encompassed (Ellingson, 2009). For example, the depth with which data is analysed, through multiple genres of representation, provides a limitation on the breadth of data that can be collected and analysed in such a way. Nonetheless, this suited the scope of my doctoral study and enabled me to recognise and acknowledge the multiple forms of representation of the findings that I might otherwise have overlooked.

Crystallization takes time (Ellingson, 2009), and I spent a great deal of it presenting elements of the research: compiling the Essential Childminder Magazine (see Appendix 5), creating graphic representations, drafting, re-drafting, mulling, wondering, discussing, independently and collaboratively, with peers, colleagues, my supervisors, and the childminders. However, 'rather than be discouraged by this constraint… [Ellingson urges] researchers to embrace it as an inspiration to produce a variety of works that draw upon

the same data' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 17). As such, I perceive this thesis as one of many genres, through which I have presented the data.

I found my understanding of crystallization to be limited by the number of examples from which to draw, in order to inform my understanding and application. Crystallization was defined by Richardson (2000, p. 934) in recognition of a researcher's 'complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic'. Ellingson (2009) reports that 'few outside of the community of those writing about ethnography and autoethnography use the term crystallization' (p. 3), therefore my application of this approach within an action research enquiry is unconventional. Consequently, I have included a reflexive account of my use of crystallization throughout the thesis chapters (for example, see Chapter Seven: 7.4.3. Interlude), to support my own learning and to provide a trustworthy and authentic insight into how I employed crystallization; in contribution to the already diverse spectrum of the action research 'movement that is committed to alternative models for the creation of transformational knowledge' (Bradbury, 2015, p. 4).

Each time I engage with a different form of representation, I re-engage with the data through new eyes, in a different way, for a different purpose, and therefore with an altered 'less naïve' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 15) understanding. Similarly, I have been quite cautious in my presentation of the data, during the doctoral research, in recognition of my own professional learning, and developing understanding of principles of data analysis and ethical representation. Examples of creative thesis submissions demonstrate the ways in which doctoral researchers have taken a more creative approach, for example; Harris (2010) presented the educational experiences of Sudanese refugee woman, through seven video films as part of her thesis, and Sousanis (2015) presented his doctoral thesis on visual thinking in teaching and learning, as a graphic novel, for which he was later awarded Arts Council funding to publish. Crystallization affords a greater scope for

creativity, which I believe has the potential to be explored further in future research with childminders.

10.5.3 Multi-Faceted Roles

Working with the childminders during the core action research, enabled the documentation of rich, individual and collective experiences, and supported 'shared ownership of decisions and practices' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 360). However, differentiation of the roles we undertook within the research, at times, was difficult to determine and, I believe, would differ in any other iteration of a similar study. I described us all as taking on different roles, at varying times, throughout the action research process including: practitioner, researcher, facilitator, trainer and colleague. Whilst the roles were not easily defined at specific stages, the flexibility afforded through the emergent approach enabled a fluidity within our roles. This was articulated by the childminders as occurring through the building of relationships and our collaborative approach to the process, which I believe to have benefitted the enquiry, by creating a nurturing and supportive environment, evidenced through the childminders final analysis of the data (see Chapter Nine: 9.4.5.5. Affect).

Throughout the core action research, I identified my position as 'practitioner academic' (McNiff, 2017, p. 25), and the childminders' position as practitioner researchers. Whereas the childminders described my position as trainer, teacher, tutor and an advocate for their voice (see Chapter Nine: 9.4.5.3.2. Multi-Faceted Roles). Throughout their reflections and evaluations, they only ever described themselves as childminders. Their voices offered a deeper insight, one which demonstrated an awareness of their varying roles; for instance: they researched into their own practice, contributed to the sessions, took part in analysing the data and offered suggestions for future developments of CPD. In addition, a consistent role, with which we all engaged throughout the process, was that

of a learner. The childminders reported they had *'learnt so much' (K2),* and I feel that this is a step in my own learning journey in the field of research, from which I can offer a number of practical recommendations.

10.6 Recommendations for Practice

My aim was to work with a group of childminders to explore ways of developing a model of CPD to be more appropriate for childminders distinctive requirements. Through a collaborative approach to the core action research, we created a three stage cyclical model of CPD comprising: a workshop session; the opportunity to implement new ideas to practice, observe change; then come back together for a shared reflection stage. This model is framed by five dimensions of CPD that promote consideration of: the accessible, cyclical and collaborative approach to CPD; the relevance of the content; the way in which the CPD cycle is delivered; the positive affect of engaging in appropriate CPD; and the effect of learning through a community of practice. In summary of our insights from the core action research, I propose four practical recommendations for future CPD opportunities for childminders and to support others who might facilitate CPD using this model:

1. External stakeholder and Local Authority CPD activities should be more appropriate for childminders.

The action learning model of CPD incorporates three stages: workshop; implementation into practice; and time for reflection. As a result of this research, I understand these stages to be vital in developing the concept of CPD away from a stand-alone model, to one of action learning that incorporates opportunities for knowledge acquisition, implementation and reflection. My recommendation to others who seek to use this model, is to take note of the underpinning dimensions of CPD that frame these findings (see

9.6.2 Bringing it all Together). The importance has been placed, by myself and the childminders through our collective experiences, on the: approach; content; delivery; effect; and subsequent affect of the way in which the model is applied.

Changing or adapting any of the dimensions might be necessary in different applications of the model (with childminders, within the ECEC sector, or more broadly across other contexts), but this could change the processes, content and the outcomes. For example, a collaborative and cyclical approach was taken through this research, enabling the involvement of the childminders to choose the timing and focus of the sessions, thereby promoting accessibility and building a community of practice. Local Authorities, for example, might consider using the action learning model to develop the current stand-alone CPD offer, yet may be required to denote the focus of any workshop session to meet their own strategic agenda. This might, therefore, result in a different CPD experience for participants.

2. More childminders could upskill to become trainers and facilitate appropriate CPD activities for their colleagues.

This recommendation is not a reflection upon qualification levels or experience. I argue that the diversity of childminding practice and future opportunities for childminders, to define their own professional context and knowledge base (Campbell-Barr, 2018), would be further understood and supported if childminders themselves were in a position to facilitate shared learning experiences and build communities of practice. In chapter three (see 3.5.4 Facilitated), I discussed the inherent challenges for leadership within the ECEC sector, exemplified by the Early Years Teacher status (Murray, 2013). Instead, I surmised that, like Local Authority Early Years Advisors, childminders did not need to hold graduate status in order to lead or facilitate CPD opportunities. I include within this

recommendation, a suggestion that pedagogical leadership is a focus of future CPD and research with childminders.

3. A three stage model of CPD comprising: workshop; implementation; and reflection.

Through this research I have demonstrated that a cyclical model of CPD, particularly if repeated as an ongoing process and framed by five dimensions of CPD, can promote opportunities for childminders to work together, creating their own local networks, and sharing and co-constructing understandings of their practice. Deeper insights into features of childminding, such as the home-based environment, pedagogical approaches, and the experiences of children and parents have the potential to be shared through CPD activities, and documented as a focus of future research with childminders.

4. Future opportunities for CPD with childminders should be framed through the consideration of five dimensions: the approach; the relevance of the content; the delivery and style of the CPD activity; how it affects the participants; and the effect of the CPD to facilitate learning through a community of practice.

These five dimensions of CPD provide a framework to support future opportunities for CPD to be more appropriate for childminders. The approach should be accessible, cyclical and viewed as a process of learning, rather than an isolated activity. The content of the activity needs to be relevant specifically to childminding and delivered or facilitated by someone with lived experience of the childminding approach to providing early years care and education. CPD should aim to inspire confidence and motivation, and take an approach that values the childminding role. Furthermore, a collaborative approach that includes a focus on building relationships, can create a community of practice, which, in turn, works to address the isolated nature of the childminding role.

10.7 Suggestions for Future Research with Childminders

I am keen to continue to work with childminders, building upon our initial collaborative approach to the enquiry, for example: by developing our model of CPD; giving consideration to future opportunities to influence wider social change; and continuing to co-construct an insight into childminders' collective story. In addition. I would like to explore opportunities to reach out to other groups of childminders (see 10.5.1.1 Population Sample), for example those who may not currently engage in CPD activities, who are possibly less involved in networks and more isolated, new to the role, or hold a differing sense of identity within their childminding role.

10.7.1 Building on our Model

The group of childminders involved in this research, were keen to resume their engagement, and continue to develop our model of CPD. We have discussed widening the offer out to all local childminders and to offer the option to engage in individual cycles of action learning, rather than commit to a long term suite of sessions. As suggested through the literature (for example: Evetts, 2011; Hordern, 2012), and through our findings, there is also a need for existing childminders to take a role in developing and facilitating CPD opportunities. This already occurs in an online format, for example as part of the PACEY (2020) offer, and through membership sites such as Childminding UK (2020), which the childminders reported, through their survey responses, to find useful. It is a possibility that future research can explore the effect of participating in CPD; on the development of practice; on children's experiences; and of the development of childminders' agency and subsequent roles within the process.

Engagement in online communities of practice have taken on new meaning, since the first experience of a national lockdown in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The move to online support and provision of CPD is exemplified by Early Education (2020b) who have begun offering training courses through the medium of webinars. They describe the process of engaging in these courses as a staged process:

> ‘All our courses will be run as two-part webinars with each session lasting an hour, roughly a week apart, with a gap task to be completed between the two sessions to help embed your learning. We encourage you to join live where you can, but if you miss a session you can catch up with the video "on demand" afterwards’ (Early Education, 2020b) .

Opportunities for online CPD are likely to continue to develop as a result of the changed social context in which we now live, and there is scope to consider incorporating online opportunities within the model of CPD we developed in this research. Nonetheless, the childminders also emphasised the value they placed on engaging in face to face community networks, and having opportunities to meet with local childminders. Owen (2007) highlighted the significant relationship between training opportunities and childminding networks. The latter were considered to be ‘major contributors to the professionalization of the occupation’ (Owen, 2007, p. 29) and ‘training through the network model has made significant differences in the profession of childminding’ (p. 30). Therefore, a renewed focus is needed, on reforming these support networks, which could be achieved locally or potentially combined with online opportunities, structured as a three stage cyclical model of CPD for childminders.

10.7.2 Action Research for Social Change

Continued engagement in the CPD process, could provide childminders with the experience and confidence, to facilitate and take ownership of CPD activities. I took a practical approach to the core action research; facilitating action research for professional

change (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2009), which I believe to be appropriate, in consideration of my doctoral study as a driver for local developments. My enquiry was the first step in forming collaborative networks (Owen, 2003), and exploring the initial possibilities for developments to the common model of standalone CPD sessions. Future iterations of this action research approach have the potential to develop understandings of what constitutes high quality ECEC provision in home-based settings and to develop further insight into both the practice and the knowledge base of childminding.

10.7.3 Collective Story

I enjoyed the creative verisimilitude afforded through the crystallized approach to data analysis and reporting. Ellingson (2009) encouraged me to 'think of writing itself as an embodied practice' (p. 164). I was not a distanced researcher, set apart from my subjects and tasked with reporting a valid and generalised truth; I was part of the research and the research was part of my life. I would like to continue to work with childminders, creating and developing upon the collective story that has begun to draw out some ways in which childminding is 'distinct from any other type of provision' (Ang, et al., 2017, p. 263). In describing the process of writing, Ellingson (2009) states that 'writing is physical…. It has to do with sight, smell, taste, feeling, with everything being alive and activated… You are physically engaged' (p. 165). I understand my research with childminders in the same way; I came to my topic not just with my 'mind and ideas, but with [my] whole body… heart and gut' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 164).

10.8 Concluding Comments

As a result of her doctoral research, Owen (2006a) identified a 'challenge for childminding in having its own, complex standards identified, recognised and valued in the future' (p. 187). Through this enquiry, the childminders have demonstrated that they actively seek

appropriate opportunities to engage with professional development opportunities. However, as I began to write this concluding paragraph, childminders across the country were in lockdown. Their self-employed and home-based status posing further challenges to the sustainability of the workforce in this unprecedented time. It is unknown what the implications of COVID-19 will be on the ECEC sector, Nursery World (2020b) reports 'there is still a huge potential risk of the immediate loss of thousands of childminders'. Nonetheless, it is with great hope that I retain my belief in the resilience of childminding, as a necessary and enduring service. A service which has already demonstrated the potential to grow from the traditional perception of 'substitute mothers' (Statham & Mooney, 2003, p. 15), through far more than 'a decade of frequent policy changes' (Bonetti, 2020, p. 6).

'Childminders should and could have a voice' (T10) and they will continue to adapt and adjust within an ever changing policy landscape. CPD can work to not only develop practice, but, to inspire and motivate the childminding workforce, to take ownership of their identity and construct a collective understanding of the valuable and distinctive ways in which they support, educate and care for children and their families.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL

20th April 2017

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Kay Aaronricks

Dear Kay,

Re: Application for Ethical Approval

Reference Number	**FHSCE-DREP-16-142**
Project Title	**Developing Professional Practice within the Child minding Sector: Identifying features of effective professional development**
Principal Investigator	**Kay Aaronricks**

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Panel (FREP) under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy (Dated 23/6/14, Version 1).

Ethical approval is given for a period of 3 years from the 20th April 2017.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with Anglia Ruskin University's Research Ethics Policy and the Code of Practice for Applying for Ethical Approval at Anglia Ruskin University, including the following.

- The procedure for submitting substantial amendments to the committee, should there be any changes to your research. You cannot implement these amendments until you have received approval from DREP for them.
- The procedure for reporting adverse events and incidents.
- The Data Protection Act (1998) and any other legislation relevant to your research. You must also ensure that you are aware of any emerging legislation relating to your research and make any changes to your study (which you will need to obtain ethical approval for) to comply with this.
- Obtaining any further ethical approval required from the organisation or country (if not carrying out research in the UK) where you will be carrying the research out. Please ensure that you send the DREP copies of this documentation if required, prior to starting your research.
- Any laws of the country where you are carrying the research and obtaining any other approvals or permissions that are required.
- Any professional codes of conduct relating to research or requirements from your funding body (please note that for externally funded research, a Project Risk Assessment must have been carried out prior to starting the research).
- Completing a Risk Assessment (Health and Safety) if required and updating this annually or if any aspects of your study change which affect this.
- Notifying the DREP Secretary when your study has ended.

Please also note that your research may be subject to random monitoring.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. May I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Jeffrey Grierson (Chair)
For FHSCE Research Ethics Panel (DREP)

T: 0845 196 5322
E: jeffrey.grierson@anglia.ac.uk

Copy to: Paulette Luff

APPENDIX 2: ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Anglia Ruskin University

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Section A: The Research Project

1. **Developing Professional Practice within the Childminding Sector: Identifying features of effective professional development.**

2. **Brief summary of research.**
   This study aims to explore existing opportunities for CPD (Continuous Professional Development) within the childminding sector of early childhood and identify elements of CPD which are suitable and appropriate for the childminding workforce. The study aims to work with childminders to develop an effective approach to CPD.

3. **Purpose of the study**
   The study is being carried out as research for my EdD at Anglia Ruskin University.

4. **First Supervisor:** Dr Paulette Luff

5. **Why have I been asked to participate?**
   You have been asked to participate as you are a childminder in Essex.

6. **How many people will be asked to participate?**
   The questionnaire will be available to all childminders in the Essex local authority. After completion of the questionnaire you will have the opportunity to register your interest to take part in the next phase of the research as part of a collaborative working group. This will be available to a maximum of 15 childminders on a first register, first selected basis.

7. **What are the likely benefits of taking part?**
   In taking part in the questionnaire you will have the opportunity to put forward your views on current and future CPD provision for childminders. The study is part of a Doctoral research programme and therefore is not expected to make any significant changes to early years policy. It will however provide you with the opportunity to put forward your views.

8. **Can I refuse to take part?**
   Completion of the questionnaire is entirely optional, you do not have to take part. Once the questionnaire has been submitted it cannot be withdrawn. All questionnaire submissions are anonymous.

9. **Has the study got ethical approval?**
   The study has gained ethical approval from the ethics committee at Anglia Ruskin University.

10. **What will happen to the results of the study?**
    The research will be written up for my thesis and sections of the research will be submitted for publication in journals. Elements of this Doctoral research may also be presented.

11. **Contact for further information**
    Please contact me on the details below for any further information:

    Kay Aaronricks:

    DD: 01245 684810
    Kay.aaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. **What will I be asked to do?**

   The first phase of the research is to complete the on-line questionnaire. Once this has been completed and submitted you will have the opportunity to email your interest in taking part in phase 2 of the research. If you decide to take part in phase 2 you will be required to attend each of the working group sessions over the course of the study at Anglia Ruskin University. The times, dates and length of the meetings will be decided upon as a group during the first session in order to tailor the study to your needs where possible. The length of the study is anticipated to be no shorter than 6 months and no longer than 12 months. This will also be decided upon as a group during the initial meeting.

   Further details of phase two will be provided upon registering your interest to participate.

2. **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**

   For the purpose of the thesis all data collected during the study will be kept anonymous, using strategies such as pseudonyms. Your participation in the questionnaire will be anonymous as it is submitted electronically via the survey software. Identifying personal data or sensitive personal data will not be required as part of the questionnaire. You will need to click the final 'submit' button in order to submit your questionnaire and this therefore provides you with the option not to submit your views. You may also choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

   People who will have access to the data include my first supervisor Dr Paulette Luff and my second supervisor Dr Geraldine Davies. Wherever possible this will be in an anonymised format.

3. **Use of quotes**.

   Quotes from written statements within the questionnaire may be used in dissemination. Quotes will be anonymised if any identifying information is included within your written statements.

4. **Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?**

   There are limited risks to taking part in phase one of the study. As highlighted above there is a risk to confidentiality and anonymity that you could be identified through the use of your written statements within the final write up of the thesis.

   Agreement to participate in the study does not affect your legal rights.

5. **Whether I can withdraw at any time, and how**.

   You may withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason prior to submitting the questionnaire. This can be achieved by not submitting the questionnaire. Questionnaires submitted during the study will not identify the person who submitted them, therefore data such as individual comments will not be able to be withdrawn after the questionnaire has been submitted. Any identifiable data submitted by you in your questionnaire answers will be anonymised when reporting on the results. It will not be possible to withdraw any data once I have written up the research or published findings.

6. **Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study.**

During the study any information disclosed which identifies you or any other individual being at risk may need to be discussed with my supervisor or relevant authorities, such as immediate safeguarding concerns or information revealed of an illegal nature.

7. **What will happen to any information/data that are collected from you?**

All data collected will be securely held for the duration of the study and until the doctoral research is written up and complete. After this time all data will be destroyed via shredding and by deleting the questionnaire from the software programme. It will not be possible to return your questionnaire information to you as each submission will not be identifiable.

8. Data collected during phase 1 of the research may be shared and discussed during phase 2 of the study for collaborative reflection. All such data will be anonymised.

9. You will have access to a summary of research findings wherever possible. This will be a summary rather than individual data. Research findings will be made accessible during and after phase 2 of the research process, sent out to you via email upon request.

10. **Contact details for complaints.**
In the first instance if you have any complaints about the study, you are encouraged to speak to me or via email: kay.aaaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk or contact my Supervisor: paulette.luff@anglia.ac.uk. Complaints may also be made through Anglia Ruskin University's complaints procedure.
Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

APPENDIX 3: CORE ACTION RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Anglia Ruskin University

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Section A: The Research Project

1. **Developing Professional Practice within the Childminding Sector: Identifying features of effective professional development.**

2. **Brief summary of research.**
   This study aims to explore existing opportunities for CPD (Continuous Professional Development) within the childminding sector of early childhood and identify elements of CPD which are suitable and appropriate for the childminding workforce. The study aims to work with childminders to develop an effective approach to CPD.

3. **Purpose of the study**
   The study is being carried out as research for my EdD at Anglia Ruskin University.

4. **First Supervisor:** Dr Paulette Luff

5. **Why have I been asked to participate?**
   You have been asked to participate as you are a childminder in Essex.

6. **How many people will be asked to participate?**
   The opportunity to take part in phase 2 of the study, the collaborative working group, will be available to a maximum of 15 childminders in the Essex Local Authority area.

7. **What are the likely benefits of taking part?**
   In taking part you will have the opportunity to put forward your views on current and future CPD provision for childminders. You will also have the opportunity to be involved in a CPD study over a maximum course of one year. The study is part of a Doctoral research programme and therefore is not expected to make any significant changes to early years policy. It will however provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your own and others practice, working together to enquire into practice and it may contribute to your professional development.

8. **Can I refuse to take part?**
   Participation in the collaborative working group is per email request and you may leave the group at any time during the study.

9. **Has the study got ethical approval?**
   The study has gained ethical approval from the ethics committee at Anglia Ruskin University.

10. **What will happen to the results of the study?**
    The research will be written up for my thesis and sections of the research will be submitted for publication in journals. Elements of this Doctoral research may also be presented.

11. **Contact for further information**
    Please contact me on the details below for any further information:

    Kay Aaronricks:

    DD: 01245 684810
    Kay.aaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. **What will I be asked to do?**

The first phase of the research is to complete the on-line survey. Once this has been completed and submitted you will have the opportunity to email your interest in taking part in phase 2 of the research. If you decide to take part in phase 2 you will be required to attend each of the working group sessions over the course of the study at Anglia Ruskin University Chelmsford campus. The times, dates and length of the meetings will be decided upon as a group during the first session in order to tailor the study to your needs where possible. The length of the study is anticipated to be no shorter than 6 months and no longer than 12 months. This will also be decided upon as a group during the initial meeting.

During each group meeting, discussions will be facilitated to inquire into professional development opportunities for childminders, requiring participation in the form of views and opinions being shared. These will be recorded through agendas, observational notes, minutes and reflections from the researcher. It is anticipated that initial discussions will identify an area of practice that the group would like to review and this will then form the structure of subsequent sessions. These sessions are anticipated to be made up of a range of activities including discussion, sharing of good practice examples, sharing of knowledge and theory, action planning, observation, evaluation and reflection. Data will therefore be collected using a range of methods, including: reflective note taking; evaluation data; documents shared such as photos, observations, plans and reflective accounts; as well as email communications and meeting agendas.

In addition, you will be given opportunities throughout the study to reflect on and discuss the data as it develops.

2. **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**

For the purpose of the thesis all data collected during the study will be kept anonymous, using strategies such as pseudonyms. Your participation in a group study will involve collaboration with a maximum of 14 other childminders and issues regarding confidentiality and anonymity will need to be addressed during the first group meeting. A participant consent form will need to be completed at the start of phase 2 of the study. Furthermore an ethical agreement will be discussed and drawn up as a group in order to decide on the confidential and professional rules of the group. If at any point you feel these are not being adhered to you have the right to discuss this either with the group or the researcher.

People outside of the working group who will have access to the data include my first supervisor Dr Paulette Luff and my second supervisor Dr Geraldine Davies. Wherever possible this will be in an anonymised format. Data such as photos are not predicted to be needed, however if used will require individual consent.

Personal data or sensitive personal data will not be needed as part of this study.

The results of the study will be written up in anonymised format. Every attempt will be made to ensure anonymity, but it may not be possible to guarantee complete anonymity. It is possible that you may be identified by colleagues or the general public.

3. **Use of quotes**.

Quotes from discussion or written statements such as meeting minutes and evaluations may be used in dissemination, this increases the likelihood that you could be identified. Quotes will be anonymised and this is included as a separate statement on the attached participant consent form (PCF).

4. **Will I be reimbursed travel expenses?**

Attendance at the working group sessions will be required as part of phase 2 of the research study. The research is being undertaken as a non-funded study and therefore expenses will not be able to be reimbursed for such things as travel, childcare, or consumables. There are no direct charges for taking part in the study and the associated workshops.

5. **Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?**

There are limited risks to taking part in the study. As highlighted above there is a risk to confidentiality and anonymity that you could be identified through the use of your written statements and verbal quotes within the final write up of the thesis. You will also be identifiable within the immediate working group to your colleagues. The creation of the ethical agreement by the group will keep these risks to a minimum.

Agreement to participate in the study does not affect your legal rights.

6. **Whether I can withdraw at any time, and how**.

You may withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. This can be achieved either by direct communication with me, or by email. Data collected during the study will be anonymised and therefore data such as individual comments during meetings, evaluations and observations will not be able to be withdrawn. Any identifiable data submitted by you such as photos or documents may be withdrawn from the study at any time. It will not be possible to withdraw any data once I have written up the research or published findings.

During the group meetings you may refuse to take part in any method of data collection such as questionnaires, evaluation forms or discussions.

7. **Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study.**

During the study any information disclosed which identifies you or any other individual being at risk may need to be discussed with my supervisor or relevant authorities, such as immediate safeguarding concerns or information revealed of an illegal nature.

8. **What will happen to any information/data that are collected from you?**

All data collected will be securely held for the duration of the study and until the doctoral research is written up and complete. After this time all data will be destroyed via shredding. If any data is collected which you require to be returned such as setting documents, a time frame for this will need to be agreed during the study and will be returned at the latest time of completing the doctoral research.
Personal identifiable information (e.g. consent forms) will be kept separately from the data. You will be assigned a code number and identifying information separated from the data at the earliest opportunity.

9. Data collected during phase 2 of the research may be shared and discussed during the collaborative working group meetings for collaborative reflection. All such data will be anonymised.

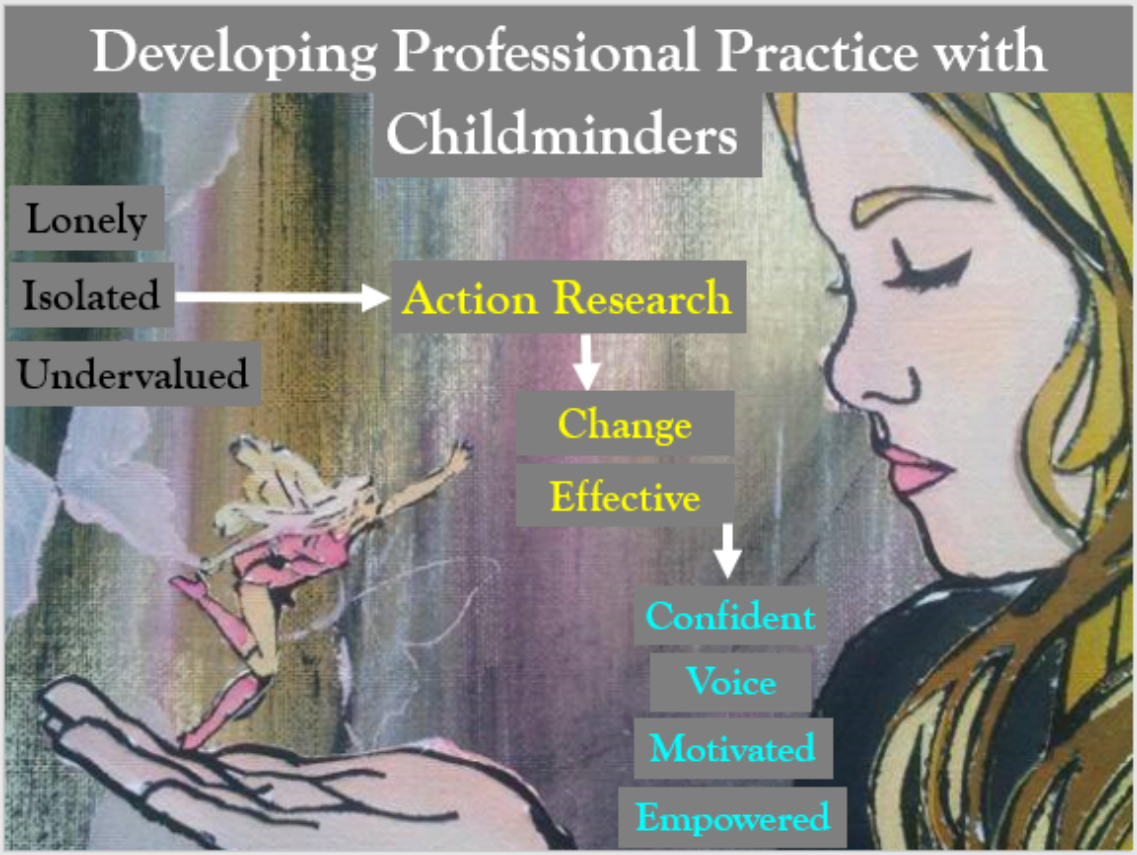
10. You will have access to a summary of research findings wherever possible. This will be a summary rather than individual data. Research findings will be made accessible during and after phase 2 of the research process, through collaborative working group meetings and sent out to you via email upon request.

11. **Contact details for complaints.**

In the first instance if you have any complaints about the study, you are encouraged to speak to me or via email: kay.aaaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk or contact my Supervisor: paulette.luff@anglia.ac.uk. Complaints may also be made through Anglia Ruskin University's complaints procedure.
Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Appendix 4: THREE MINUTE THESIS POWERPOINT SLIDE



APPENDIX 5: EXTRACTS FROM THE ESSENTIAL CHILDMINDER MAGAZINE

APPENDIX 6: CHILDMINDER ONLINE SURVEY

Closed Profile Questions

Q1. How long have you been childminding?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11 years or more

Q2. What early childhood qualifications do you hold? (Please state)

Q3. Do you work in the same childminding setting as any other childminders or assistants?

- Yes (please state how many)
- No (please write '0')

Q4. Are you a member of, or involved in any childminding groups or networks?

- Yes (please give details)
- No (please comment if you wish)

Matrix/Rating Scale

Q5. Do you engage in any of the following professional development activities? (Daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, yearly, never, other)

- Attendance at conferences/events
- Attending face to face training courses
- Accessing on-line training courses
- Group/network meetings
- Browsing early childhood websites
- Reading early childhood publications/texts
- Reading/contributing to online forums
- Engaging in relevant conversations via social media groups/pages
- Discussions with colleagues

- Any other type of professional development activity
- [option included for any other comments]

Open-ended Questions

Q6. Do you feel engaging with professional development activities makes a difference to your childminding provision? Please explain your answer.

Q7. Do you experience any challenges to engaging in professional development activities? Please explain your answer.

Q8. Do you feel professional development is a necessary part of your role as a childminder? Please explain your answer.

Q9. Are current professional development opportunities accessible and relevant to you in your role as a childminder? Please explain your answer.

Q10. Please comment on your experience of the quality of professional development activities you have engaged in.

Q11. What are your current professional development needs?

Matrix Scale

Q12. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below (agree, disagree, sometimes/maybe, n/a).

- I believe professional development is an integral part of my role as a childminder
- I can choose what professional development activities I want to complete
- I identify my own professional development needs
- Current professional development opportunities are suitable to meet my individual needs
- I have opportunities to work collaboratively during professional development activities, sharing practice and ideas with others
- There are adequate opportunities for my own professional development to be ongoing

- Professional development opportunities enhance my knowledge of early childhood theory
- Professional development opportunities enhance my knowledge of practice
- Professional development opportunities help me develop my own leadership and management skills
- I have opportunities to reflect on my practice and knowledge through professional development activities.
- [option included for any other comments]

Open-ended Question

Q13. Please use this final opportunity to add any further comments regarding professional development.

APPENDIX 7: DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Chelmsford is a city located in the county of Essex, in the East of England. It is situated approximately 30 miles from London in the commuter belt, and is largely a commercial city. In this appendix, I provide an overview of the geographical diversity, population gender, socioeconomic classification, ethnicity, and childcare sufficiency within Chelmsford.

[Location of Essex in the East of England] (Pinterest, 2021)

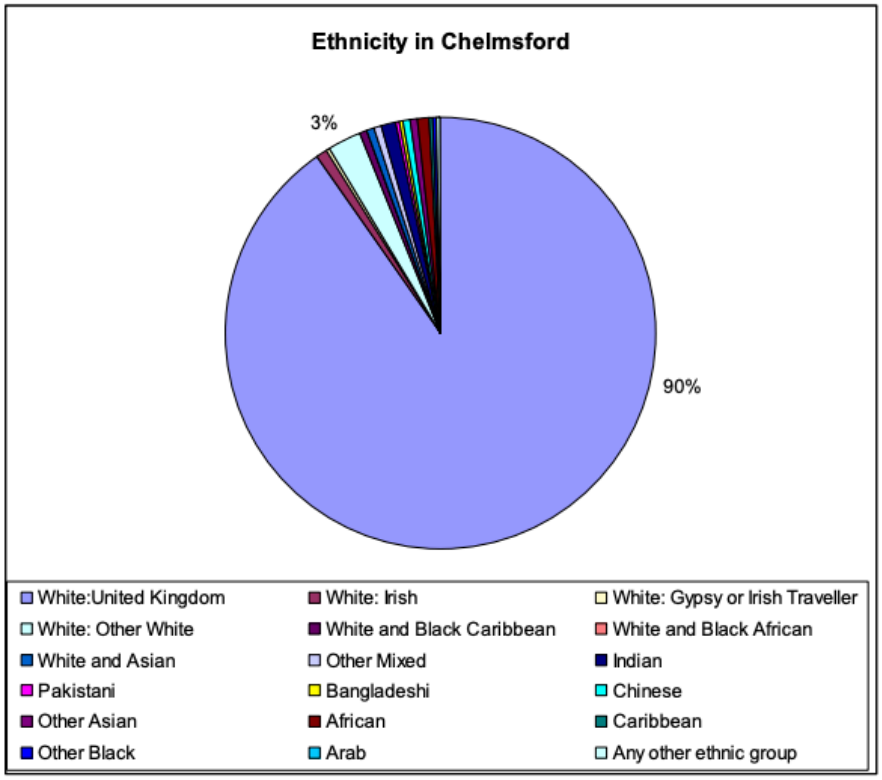
GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY

The geographical diversity of Chelmsford is depicted in the Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan (Chelmsford City Council, 2018), which is broadly grouped into four areas: urban area; river valley landscapes; farmland plateau landscapes; and wooded farmland area (p. iv).

(Chelmsford City Council, 2018, p. 25)

POPULATION, GENDER, SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSIFICATIONS & ETHNICITY

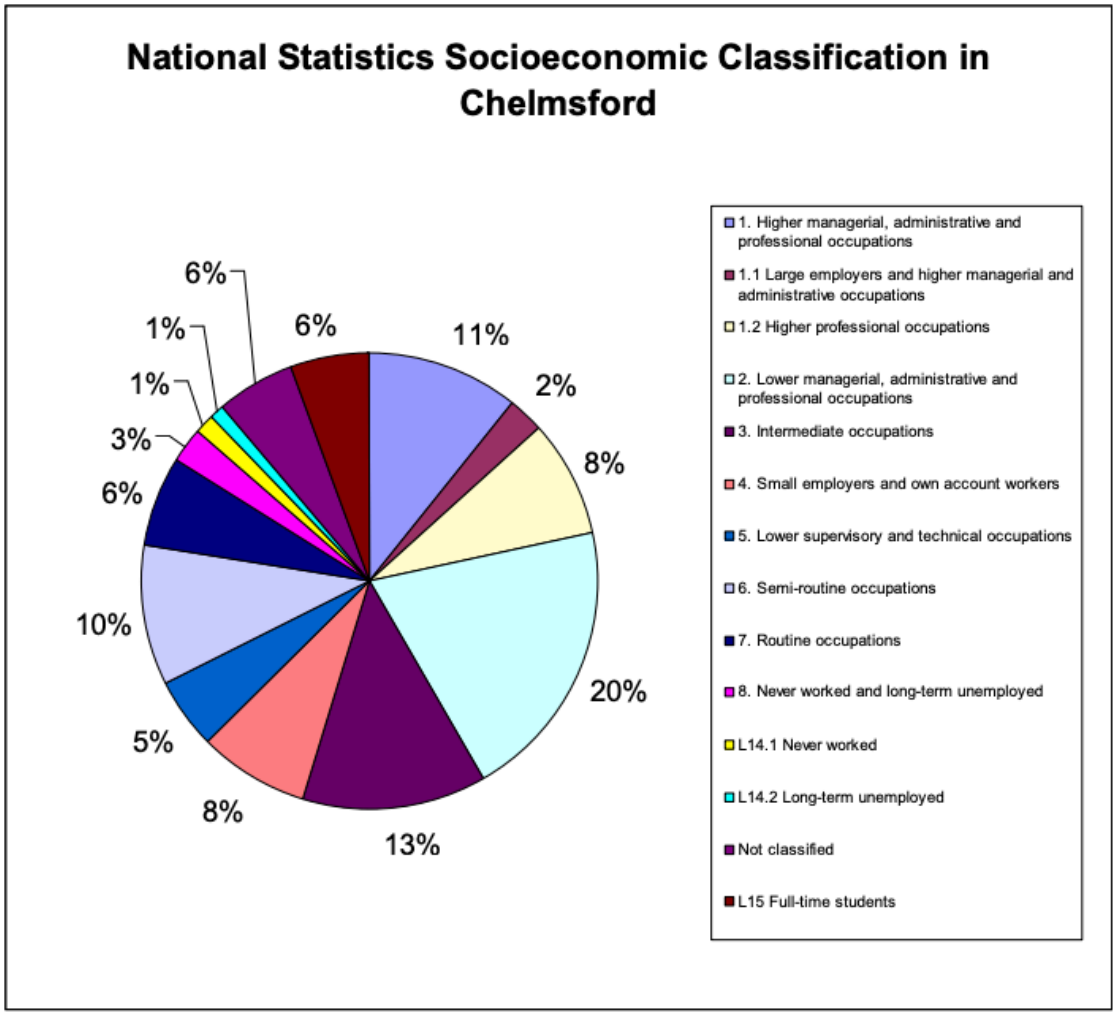
The 2011 census recorded 168,310 residents in Chelmsford (Chelmsford City Council, 2012), of which the child population was found to be fairly evenly distributed in 2019 (Derry & Langrish, 2019) and 49.3% of the population were male, whilst 50.7% were female. In 2011, over 90% of this population of Chelmsford was categorsised as White: United Kingdom.



(Chelmsford City Council, 2012, p. 22)

Essex has relatively high levels of deprivation in comparison to counties across the South East, one area (Tendring) is ranked the 3rd most deprived location in England (Essex County Council, 2019). Nonetheless, the socioeconomic classification in Chelmsford demonstrates that only 3% of the economically active population are unemployed.

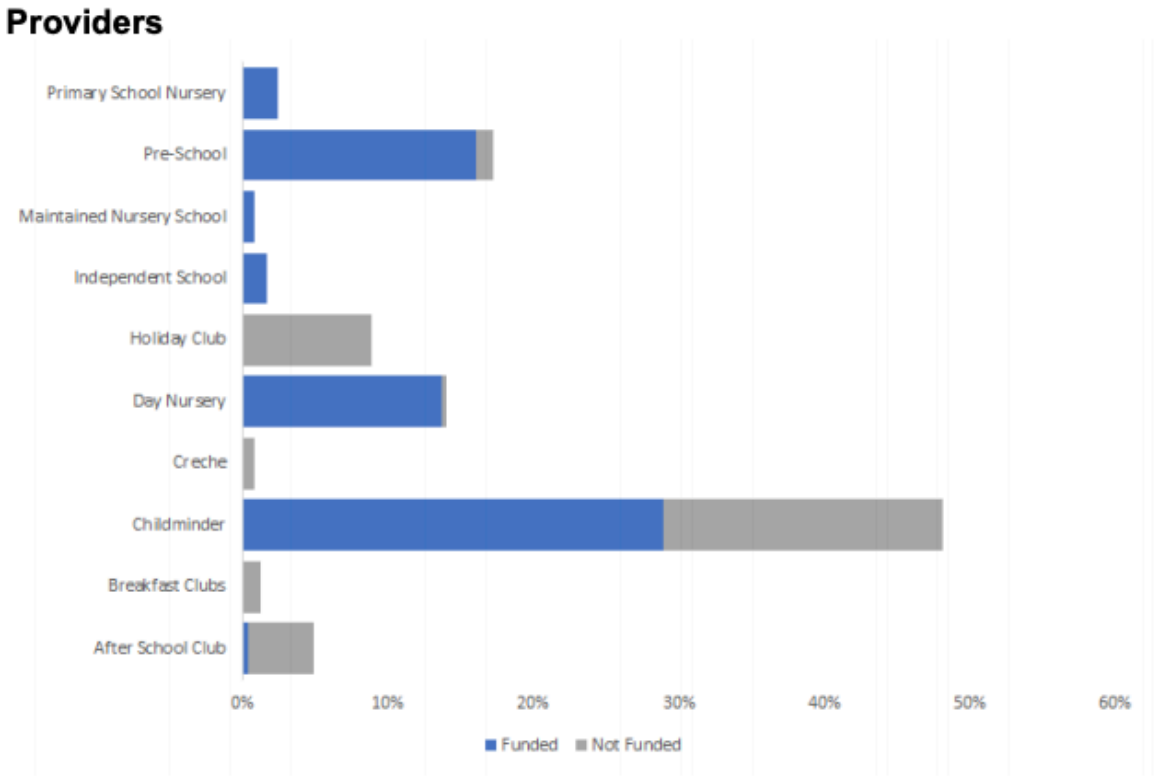
Childminders are self-employed (see 1.2 Regulatory Context of Childminding), and within this data, 8% of the population are working as small employers and own account workers. Yet the representation of childminders within data such as this, depends upon the way in which childminding as an occupation is recorded; it can fall into multiple categories, including self-employment, professional or technical occupations.



(Chelmsford City Council, 2012, p. 21)

CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY

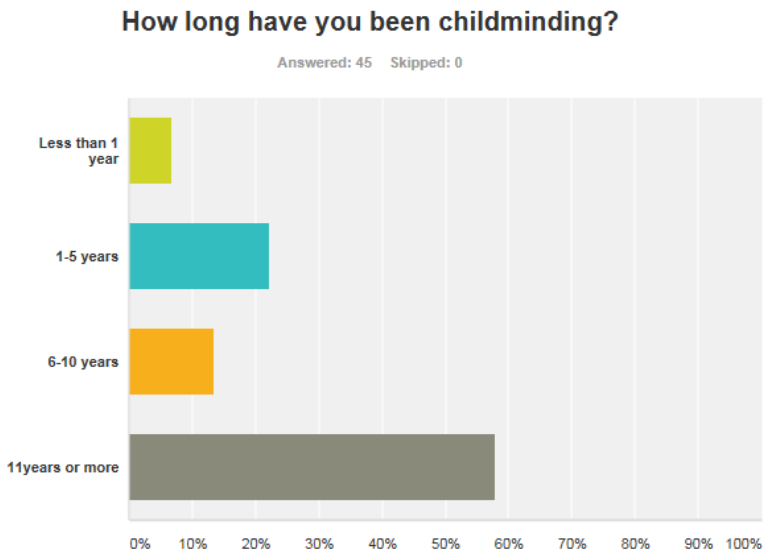
In order to start a childminding business, prospective childminders are required to research the childcare sufficiency in their area, to establish the local needs of the community, viability and sustainability of their proposed business (Essex County Council, 2021). In 2019, there were 1897 Early Years and Childcare providers in Essex, 249 of these were based in Chelmsford (Derry & Langrish, 2019). Over 50% of the childcare providers in Essex were childminders, and there is a high proportion of government funded pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders providing the early education entitlement for disadvantaged three and four year olds (DfEE, 1998) in Chelmsford.



(Derry & Langrish, 2019, p. 15)

CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATING CHILDMINDERS

Through the survey, the childminders indicated the number of years of experience that they had in the role, which I captured by profiling three childminders to narrate the collective voice (see 5.4 Introducing the Childminders). The raw data from the survey depicting length of experience is presented below, to emphasise the specific context of my research (see 1.3 Context of my Research). Ofsted (2021) provides monthly insights that continue to demonstrate more childminders leave the role each month than newly register. The childminders who took part in the core action research group are drawn from this survey and reside within the demographical portrait of Chelmsford presented in this appendix.



Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 1 year	6.67%	3
1-5 years	22.22%	10
6-10 years	13.33%	6
11years or more	57.78%	26
Total		45

[Survey Question 1: How long have you been childminding?]

APPENDIX 8: CORE ACTION RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Anglia Ruskin University

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: Developing Professional Practice within the Childminding Sector: Identifying features of effective professional development.

Main investigator and contact details: Kay Aaronricks. DD: 01245 684810. Email: kay.aaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk.

Members of the research team:

1. I agree to take part in the above research.
2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study.
3. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research, without giving a reason.
5. I understand I can only withdraw from the research until the data analysis phase and that data already collected cannot be withdrawn.
6. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
7. I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research.
8. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.
9. I understand that anonymised quotes from me will be used in the dissemination of the research.

Data Protection: I agree to the University[1] processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant (print)……

Signed……..……..Date……

Name of person witnessing consent (print)……..

Signed……Date……

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY.

---

[1] "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its Associate Colleges.

Developing Professional Practice Kay Aaronricks

V1.2

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please speak to the researcher or email them at kay.aaronricks@pgr.anglia.ac.uk stating the title of the research.
You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.
Please let the researcher know whether you are/are not happy for them to use any data from you collected to date in the write up and dissemination of the research.

Date 12.4.17
V1.2

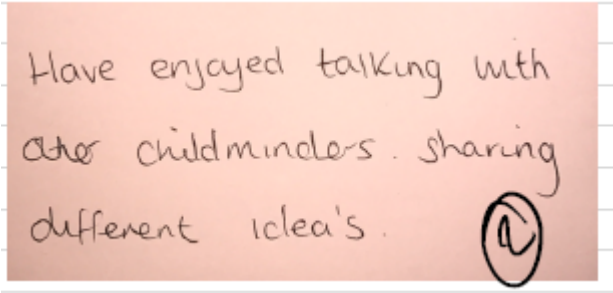
APPENDIX 9 HANDPRINT ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

- Stage 1. Each childminder drew around their hand on a piece of paper. They independently wrote five key words in each of their fingers on the handprint identifying which five factors were most important to them for CPD to be appropriate.
- Stage 2. Each childminder then paired up with another and drew a second handprint between them. Their task was to put forward and debate their individual five key words, with the intention of agreeing upon their combined top five, transferred onto the second handprint.
- Stage 3. Each pair joined up with another pair and repeated stage 2, this time using their stage 2 top five words to create the final stage 3 top five words.
- Stage 4. The childminders were now in small groups of four with an agreed five key features, which were most important to them for CPD to be appropriate. Their final task was to use the key words to collaboratively write a paragraph starting with the phrase 'CPD should be…'

APPENDIX 10: POSITIVE REFLECTIONS FROM SESSION THREE

Grouped thematically and coded (see 7.5.2 Positive Reflections).

NB: Numbered statements are used to indicate the reference, i.e. the second statement *have enjoyed talking with other childminder sharing different ideas (C2)*. The second number in brackets at the end of the statements below, corresponds to the numbered post it note. For example;



Collaboration (C)	1. Have met some lovely people (1) 2. Have enjoyed talking with other childminders sharing different ideas (2) 3. Love meeting other minders. Get lots of feedback from other minders Everyone very friendly, enjoy group chats (4) 4. Listening and talking to other childminders. I find interesting how others operate their settings (5) Working in groups and feeding back your findings is interesting (5) I have met new childminders that I never would have met (5) 5. I like the interaction with other childminders. Being fairly new to the job, I find it useful learning about activities that other childminders do (7) 6. Good to talk to others about children's schemas and behaviour, recognising things you may not on your own (10) 7. It's an ideal time to share how other people run their settings and gives you ideas on different things to do (11) 8. From having the discussion with others, I feel more positive to go away and use more ideas in my practice (14) 9. Good to bond with other childminders (18)
Affect (AF)	10. Thoroughly enjoy coming to the CPD sessions (1) 11. I feel inspired when I leave the session (9) 12. I enjoyed the quiz – fun way to learn (18)
learning (L)	13. I have learnt so much about schemas I can now relate to what children are doing in my setting (1) I feel my knowledge has increased on this subject (1)

	14. Looked at play and schema's everywhere! Tried to incorporate into obs (3) 15. Try new things in my setting. Have enjoyed schemas realise it happening in my setting all the time and I need to record it more. Even though I do right on the bottom of my observations (4) 16. The sessions are thought provoking and I go home with lots of ideas of ways to improve my setting (9) 17. Realising I know more than I thought I did about the topic and how I use schemas as a basis of planning but also how well I know the children in my care (10) 18. Good to see lots of different resources on week 2 to give me ideas (18)
Anomalous response (AR)	19. A shame I missed the second one due to illness (4) 20. Recently had an Ofsted inspection and explained to her how I was going forward with my CPD. She was very impressed that I was doing it monthly and was enthralled to hear we was going over schemas (11)
Approach (AP)	21. It's not just an evening session, here's your certificate and finished (5) 22. Most CPD courses that are offered at the moment are either online, which doesn't give the opportunity to share good practice or face to face where the tutor only provides a PowerPoint presentation with notes and leaves little time to build enthusiasm and interest or share practice. I have come away from this with more enthusiasm and ideas for future planning and activities (6) 23. We have covered schemas, taken it away and then reflected on what our children do that is a schema (13) 24. Training is pointless without the opportunity to implement what you have been introduced to and then reflect on it by coming back together as we've done here (15) 25. I have found the course a great way to learn. I have attended schema training before and have been interested and want to learn more but then the paperwork has been put away in the drawer. This time I have learnt more information and then gone away and reflected and watched the children in my setting, I have found it useful re-grouping again to analyse with others, sharing ideas and gaining lots of new tips and ideas. I have lots of ideas to take away that I'll definitely put into practice (16)

Delivery (D)	26. Not mind numbing like most courses especially online courses which you can skip through and learn nothing (3) 27. Lecturer explains everything really well. I feel that schemas has been explained thoroughly (5) 28. This training has been an excellent mix of tutor led and student participation (6) 29. Kay is very informative in the session, yet it's a very informal environment. The conversation flows easily and Kay is open to any questions (8) 30. I enjoy being involved in a discussion and knowing how I can input. Training days with no follow up/reflection doesn't enable me to do that or feel confident to input (10) 31. I found the reflection session much more informative than the training session. Having to go away and make notes to bring back and discuss gave me a reason to follow it through (12) 32. Not being talked at, and having people reading from a PowerPoint is refreshing (13) 33. Using photos creates and generates lots of discussion and meaningful sharing of ideas. You can't achieve this with one standalone session on something (15) 34. Having time to discuss with other childminders, to share real experiences and reflections together gives you so much more than a handout can (17) 35. 2 hour sessions are a good amount of time and group sizes were practical (18)

APPENDIX 11: HANDPRINT ACTIVITY FROM SESSION NINE

Group Paragraphs Session Seven
As childminders we enjoy networking, sharing practice, gaining new and exciting knowledge and ideas to improve our practice. Through this we feel motivated and therefore we hope to see improvement in the service we provide. Training has to be accessible for all, affordable and relevant.
CPD should be interesting, exciting and fun. We want to be motivated, inspired and left with new knowledge and ideas. CPD has to be affordable and accessible and opportunities to network and share ideas are essential.
CPD should be specific and appropriate to the needs of childminders. Helping them to reflect on their practice and improve in the future. To boost their confidence to develop new ideas. Then to network and meet others. It needs to be current to meet Ofsted/EYFS requirements.