



Open Research Online

Citation

McIntosh, Zoë (2024). The Reconceptualization of Dialogic Pedagogy for Early Years to Support Communication Development: an extended literature review and case study proposal. Student dissertation for The Open University module E822 Masters multi-disciplinary dissertation: education, childhood and youth.

URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/102716/>

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.00102716>

License

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0) Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding

Open University
MEd Learning & Teaching Pathway
E822 Masters' Dissertation
Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal

“The Reconceptualization of Dialogic Pedagogy for Early Years to Support Communication Development: an extended literature review and case study proposal.”

Zoë McIntosh

2024

Contents

Abstract.....	3
Part A.....	4
Chapter 1. Introduction and Rationale	4
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 Dialogic Pedagogy.....	5
Chapter 2. The Literature Review	8
2.1 Literature Search Process and Outline	8
2.2 Traditional Dialogic Theory.....	9
2.3 Criteria for Effective Dialogue and Application to Early Years	12
2.4 The Role of Language and Non-Verbal Communication.	16
2.5 Play, Imagination and Self-Regulation	19
2.6 The Role of the Teacher and Supporting Language Development in Practice	21
Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework - Social Constructivism or Situated Learning? ..	24
Part B.....	28
Chapter 4. The Research Proposal	28
Chapter 5. Research Design, Methods and Analysis	31
5.1 Research Design and Paradigm	31
5.2 Ethical Considerations and Research Integrity	32
5.3 Observation and Interviews	34
5.3 Data Analysis, Quality and Dissemination.....	36
Postscript – Narrative Critical Reflection	39
References.....	41
Appendices	52
Appendix 1 – Ethical Appraisal Form.....	52
Appendix 2 – Information for Setting.....	56
Appendix 3 – Information for Participants (parents/guardians).....	57
Appendix 4 – Reflective Evidence Table	59

Abstract

Communication skills on entry to primary school reliably predict later academic success but are declining. Dialogic pedagogies have proved beneficial for developing higher order cognition in schools but their value in Early Years is not widely recognised. This extended literature review explores how dialogic theory can be applied to our youngest learners to support communication development. Key themes emerge including non-verbal communication, off-task dialogue, pretend play and the role of the practitioner. An exploratory case study under a socio-cultural framework is proposed to observe interactions during play in a Scottish Early Years setting, seeking to link theory to practice and inform future research.

Word count 104

Part A

Chapter 1. Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Background

Language and communication skills on entry to primary school are widely recognised as reliable indicators of future academic success (Bleses et al. 2016; Snowling et al. 2011) and are influential in all aspects of subsequent learning (Massonié et al 2022). Specifically, early language ability predicts emotional and behavioural functioning (Clegg et al. 2015), self-regulation (Ramsook, Welsh & Bierman, 2019) and adult mental health and employment prospects (Law et al. 2009). Across the UK, existing trends of declining language skills at school entry age (Carr et al. 2013), have been exacerbated by lockdowns imposed during the global Covid-19 pandemic (EEF, 2022; Jeffreys, 2021; McKie, 2023). Deoni et al (2022) also highlight the impact on wider cognitive development and EEF (2022) underlines the impact on all aspects of development. Such findings emphasise the important role of pre-school education in early communication development. Furthermore, children from low socio-economic backgrounds were impacted more significantly by missed nursery/preschool hours during lockdown than others (Scottish Government, 2022). This has sparked a revision of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to tackle the resulting widening of the attainment gap (a measurement of the difference in achievements between the most and least deprived pupils), and early reports show this gap already returning to pre-pandemic levels. Crucially however, the greatest developmental area of concern is still speech, language and communication skills (Scottish Government, 2023b).

Whilst it is widely acknowledged that home environments are the most important in determining children's later achievements (HM Government, 2018; Scottish Government, 2009), current Scottish policies focus on increasing the number of free childcare hours available to all children (Scottish Government, 2023a) and therefore, it is vital that Early Years' settings can effectively support communication development. A systematic review of UK interventions and approaches to support language development in Early Years, based on a 1998 report of 5.9% of preschool age children showing a communication or language delay, found many programmes in place but little evidence of effective

implementation (Pickstone et al. 2009). Since then, a 2023 UK wide survey of teachers reported a record high of 1 in 5 school-age children having some aspect of language or communication difficulty (Speech & Language UK, 2023), suggesting there is a long way to go to effectively support language development in Early Years settings.

1.2 Dialogic Pedagogy

Dialogic approaches to education can be traced back as far as Socrates who considered spoken language and its contextualised meaning as key to developing cognition (Wegerif, 2019). In the later 20th century dialogic pedagogies became firmly established based predominantly on the ideas of Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Freire. There are key differences in their theories, but they all share the premise that we learn and develop our thinking through the spoken 'dialogue' of social interactions, and hence an individual can achieve more through interaction with others than they can do alone. There have been various interpretations of dialogic pedagogy by Bruner, Alexander, Wells, Mercer and many others, each offering their own criteria for effectively using dialogue to support cognitive development in the classroom. Several programmes have been established as a result including Thinking Together (2023), Dialogic Teaching (Alexander, 2008) and Accountable Talk (Michaels, O'Connor & Resnick, 2008). Despite some implementation problems (Cui & Tui, 2020), these programmes have reported much success (EEF, 2017; Mercer & Littleton, 2007) and provide strong evidence that dialogue supports cognitive development in the classroom.

Dialogic programmes aim to help learners develop higher order cognitive skills such as collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity and self-awareness (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). These are precisely those skills which are valued under a capabilities approach to education, in contrast to the traditional transmission of knowledge associated with a human capital model (Robeyns, 2006). They also closely align with the eight competencies set out by UNESCO (2017) as necessary for a sustainable education for the 21st century, and in addition, the broad premise of dialogic pedagogy mirrors criteria for quality education under the UNESCO's sustainable development goals (2018). In addition, dialogic pedagogies are a good fit with Husbands & Pearce's (2012) criteria for an effective pedagogy incorporating ideas such as long-term skill development, scaffolded learning,

flexibility of approach and metacognition. This clearly illustrates the internationally recognised value placed on such skills for our children's futures and offers a viable explanation as to why dialogic approaches that support their development are becoming increasingly popular (Laird-Gentle et al. 2023).

Vygotsky (1986) proposes that spoken language is the socio-cultural tool through which cognitive development is facilitated. The need for greater emphasis on oral language, particularly in primary education, is highlighted by both Mercer through Oracy Cambridge (2023) and by Alexander (2008), who argue that the focus shifts too quickly to written language and literacy skills once children have started school. Consequently, the value of spoken language is overlooked, especially considering the acknowledged benefits of dialogue. The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2017) and the English National Curriculum (DfE, 2014) both detail the development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills at all levels, however, they are heavily weighted towards reading and writing when it comes to assessment. Amorsen & Wilson (2020) have recognised a similar shift to literacy at the expense of oral language skills in Australia, indicating this is an international trend.

Dialogic programmes, such as those mentioned above, are aimed at learners in primary and secondary schools, suggesting a reasonable competence in oral language skills is assumed for the successful application of dialogic approaches. Systematic reviews of dialogic pedagogy have found little literature applying it to Early Years (Laird-Gentle et al. 2023), echoing this assertion. However, the potential of dialogic strategies to support language development and enhance all learning in Early Years has been recognised by the Educational Endowment Fund (2023), who note it is currently under researched. Exploration of dialogue in Early Years settings has highlighted the need to recognise the role of non-verbal communication (Patterson, 2018; White, 2016). However, the focus is developing cognition, rather than building language and communication skills. Additionally, there is research and practice inspired by Vygotsky's Early Years theory that focuses on pretend play to build self-regulatory skills (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), which aligns with contemporary play-based pedagogies seen in UK Early Years settings. Yet, the focus is still not on developing crucial language and communication abilities.

This extended literature review evaluates the theory behind dialogic pedagogy and explores its application to Early Years. Specifically, it examines dialogic approaches in relation to explicitly supporting language and communication development as well as higher order thinking skills and self-regulation. The research proposal that follows brings together theory and practice, specifically in Scottish Early Years settings with the aim of illuminating the issues described above. The review draws upon literature from across the UK and other comparable contexts in developed countries to gain a wider perspective. For the purposes here, Early Years are defined as 3-5 years before children start school. All children of this age in Scotland are entitled to 1140hrs of free early learning and childcare each year (Scottish Government, 2023a). This period completes the crucial first 5 years of a child's life (NHS, 2024) and culminates with a child starting primary school (typically between 4 ½ - 5 ½ years in Scotland). This is precisely when measures of language and communication skills are shown to be reliable predictors of later achievements.

The first research question proposed is: **“What interpretations of dialogic theory can be applied to Early Years, and how do they relate to language and communication development?”**

Word count 1247

Chapter 2. The Literature Review

2.1 Literature Search Process and Outline

A certain amount of key literature and research had been identified by the author for previous assignments on the Masters's programme and this directed the search initially, however the focus then was directed towards practitioners' own conceptualisation of pedagogy in supporting language development. It was decided that the wide-ranging conceptualisations of the dialogic theory relating to Early Years justified further exploration of the literature to fully consider how it can be applied to younger learners, before beginning to delve into practitioners' individual understanding. The literature search process therefore began by considering the original conceptualisations of Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Freire to enable better understanding of their subsequent interpretations. Searches for early year* OR early childhood education AND dialog* OR dialogic pedagog* resulted in very few results, however substituting dialogic pedagog* with terms such as talk, language, cognitive development and even Vygotsky resulted in many relevant articles. These were filtered to more recent and peer-reviewed works, however some older literature proved instrumental in understanding the background and progress of theory and practice. Key themes emerged of non-verbal communication, as had been highlighted in preliminary reading, and in addition, the role of play in self-regulation, illuminated by Vygotsky's theory of Early Years. Both offered significant insights and so were further searched for to obtain a fuller understanding of their relation to dialogue. Application of research to practice and the role of the teacher were kept in mind throughout, along with different authors' insights regarding a conceptual framework, to inform the subsequent research proposal. Additionally, frequently cited literature was consulted, often relating back to the original theorists, which completed the search process by connecting it all together.

Hence, this literature review commences by outlining the theoretical conceptualisations of dialogic pedagogy by three of its key proponents: Freire, Bakhtin, and particularly Vygotsky. It considers the various criteria that have been proposed for effective use of dialogue in education and explores their application to Early Years. Key themes are addressed in turn: the role of language and non-verbal communication; the role of play in developing metacognition; the role of the teacher and how it relates to current Early Years practice.

2.2 Traditional Dialogic Theory

In his socio-cultural theory, Freire (2017) explains dialogue is the method by which education can bring about social action. In contrast to 'banking education' which is oppressive and occurs through direct transmission of knowledge, he explains that 'problem-posing education' can embrace communication, allow questioning, and encourage creativity, therefore offering space for conscious abstract thought. Freire proposes that such reflective higher order cognitive processes are developed through dialogue. Additionally, Freire emphasises that the relationship between teacher and learner is reciprocal and flexible in that both can learn. Freire's criteria for true effective dialogue include humility, respect for others and critical thinking. Shih (2018) adapted Freire's dialogic theory for teaching practice and noted the right to be silent and the need for humour, illustrating the breadth of contributions valued in dialogue.

Coming from a philosophical background and inspired by talk in literature, Bakhtin defines dialogue as the 'inter-animation of different perspectives leading to mutual illumination' (Wegerif, 2019, p3). Bakhtin's idea of 'heteroglossia' or 'many voices' firmly situates dialogue as a socio-cultural concept (Hirschkop, 2021). Hirschkop explains that for Bakhtin, dialogue exists in the space between individuals and is where meaning is created, and it is therefore through dialogue that we gain an enhanced understanding of others' perspectives. White (2016) notes that although Bakhtin does not aim to explain cognition, he does emphasise the influence of language on thought and creativity and therefore the key role of teachers in guiding a learner. Bakhtin highlights the need for a flexible relationship and balance between the contextually situated heteroglossia, particularly in relation to authority, in order to create independent thinkers (Hirschkop, 2021). Inspired by Bakhtin, White (2016) applies her theory to Early Years practice, particularly focusing on flexible relationships and multiple means of communication, ideas which are considered in detail later. Maybin (2007) also adopts Bakhtin's approach and asserts that through dialogue children evaluate their own responses to experiences and begin to form a concept of themselves in relation to the social world around them. The formation of identity through interaction and dialogue will be explored later in this review.

Vygotsky is arguably the most influential proponent of dialogic pedagogy, however there are many different interpretations of his classic theory (Karpov, 2007).

This is possibly due in part to translation difficulties but also because he died young leaving much of his work unfinished. Vygotsky (1978) believed that all learning and development occurs through social interaction with others and distinguishes development from the process of learning that it results from. Smolucha & Smolucha (2021) note that the Russian word 'obuchenie', typically translated as 'learning', would be more accurately represented as the 'teaching and learning process'. This broader definition makes more sense in Vygotsky's proposal that 'learning' is how we acquire psychological functions and affirms the crucial role of teacher-learner interactions. Vygotsky proposes that all higher order psychological functions begin as external social processes, and are subsequently internalised, as a result of 'learning', becoming internal individual processes. In this way inter-psychological or 'inter-mental' functions become intra-psychological or 'intra-mental' functions. This process varies for each individual and development is therefore dependent on both teacher and learner and the interactions between the two in the 'learning' process (Vygotsky, 1978).

Internalised cognitive processes are defined as higher order because they imply conscious awareness and are abstract in their application, for example being able to analyse, reflect upon and critically evaluate information, rather than just rote learning and recital of facts. Vygotsky differentiates them from lower order instinctive mental processes which are those all children and animals are born with (Karpov, 2007). Karpov suggests that Vygotsky further distinguishes cognitive and metacognitive (thinking about thinking) processes as the two types of higher order functions. This distinction is questionable in its usefulness as all higher order processes require some degree of conscious awareness, so determining what falls under which category is complex. The development of higher order cognitive functions is dependent on dialogue, and therefore language, according to both Freire (2017) and Vygotsky (1978), and is implied by Bakhtin (White, 2016). Vygotsky explains that language is the socio-cultural tool that facilitates cognitive development. For him, language is initially a means to communicate, i.e. a social function, but on internalisation it becomes a means by which to organise thought, or a mental function. At this point language and thought, which are initially separate functions, become interdependent. Vygotsky (1986) goes further and suggests that our ability to internalise our thoughts and consciously use higher level functions is

what sets us apart from animals, who will not achieve our level of consciousness. Essentially, language is what facilitates this distinction.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a popular Vygotskian term that is frequently adopted in dialogic approaches, but there are various interpretations and therefore wide-ranging implementations. Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as the distance between the developmental level a child can achieve independently and that which they can achieve with guidance from others. For Vygotsky, interaction with a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) is what enables developmental progress within the ZPD. The notion of 'scaffolding' was introduced by Bruner, Wood & Ross in 1976 (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), although is often attributed to Vygotsky due to its association with dialogic teaching methods. Bruner understood Vygotsky's teacher's role to be one of transmission, and instead proposes a more active role for both teacher and learner (Smidt, 2011). This clarifies his notion of 'scaffolding' as a flexible and dynamic method of offering support to expand on Vygotsky's theory. Although much of Vygotsky's writing specifically focuses on the processes of a learner's development, he does acknowledge the active two-way nature of social interactions, as both Freire and Bakhtin both did. This is further exemplified in Smolucha & Smolucha's (2021) alternative translation of the word 'learning'. Daniels (2001, as cited in Mercer & Littleton, 2007) explains that the ZPD involves negotiation and a flexible approach to facilitate the right support for each individual and is therefore not a one-way relationship. Karpov (2007), a proponent of Neo-Vygotskian theory, notes that the ZPD gives a more accurate measure of a child's current ability than simply their achieved developmental level because it maps out what they can achieve next, and that 'learning', in the broader definition, needs to target the potential development rather than the actual to be effective. This suggests the teacher is necessarily part of the ZPD and that a different teacher with the same learner might result in a different ZPD. Karpov explains that the role of the teacher or MKO is to 'mediate' a child's social processes during this maturation stage in order for them to be internalised.

Mercer & Littleton (2007) criticise the useability of ZPD in practice, explaining it is based on assessment of a learner's ability at a fixed point in time, contrasting Karpov's (2007) interpretation. They claim it is therefore hard to apply collectively to a whole class and successfully meet each learner's constantly changing

developmental needs. They propose an alternative more dynamic shared space of an 'intermental development zone' (IDZ) that relies on negotiation and dialogue, so scaffolding is more effective. They further emphasise the active nature of both teacher and learner to maintain this space. However, Vygotsky (1978) explicitly acknowledges the dynamic intersubjective nature of the ZPD, explaining the need for flexibility to suit the individual child, and further explains that the ZPD is specifically created by 'learning', or 'learning and teaching', and is therefore dependent on both the teacher and learner working together in a unique relationship. Karpov's (2007) interpretation of ZPD echoes Vygotsky's view and gives a more usable measure for teachers to further the development of each individual learner. This clearer understanding of Vygotsky's concept renders the IDZ as superfluous.

2.3 Criteria for Effective Dialogue and Application to Early Years

Dialogue is more than just talking. Mercer & Littleton (2007) set out their 'exploratory talk' as distinct from 'accumulative talk' and 'disputational talk'. The latter two definitions can be summarised as unchallenged agreement (accumulative), and unconstructive competitive disagreement (disputational). Conversely, exploratory talk is characterised by features such as giving reasons for ideas, challenging ideas, seeking collective agreement, everyone listening actively, everyone being encouraged to contribute and all views being respected (Mercer, 2008). Exploratory talk develops higher order thinking according to Mercer and through Cambridge University's Thinking Together Programme it has used effectively for school age children (Thinking Together, 2023). The specific rules are actively negotiated by each group ahead of peer discussion affording collective ownership of the process.

Paterson (2018) explored the nature of exploratory talk in Early Years compared to primary settings. She found non-verbal interactions were significant in contributing to exploratory talk in Early Years, in a way they weren't for primary age children. Challenges to ideas often were physical actions rather than spoken utterances, and she observed justifications came less spontaneously, often only when prompted by an adult or MKO. Furthermore, not every child contributed verbally, and silence was respected, reminiscent of Shih's (2018) interpretation of Freire's criteria. As a result of these findings Patterson proposes a more relaxed criteria for exploratory talk for Early Years acknowledging these differences. Howe & Mercer (2009) claim that few interactions in an educational setting at any age meet

their criteria for effective exploratory talk without appropriate guidance. Conversely, Howe & McWilliam (2001) observed that preschoolers can readily offer opinions, justify them and demonstrate compromise in free play situations. This counters the view that guidance is always required and offers support for Paterson's relaxed interpretation of exploratory talk. With or without adult guidance, exploratory talk can occur in Early Years settings through a broader range of communication means, suggesting it is the role of the adult or MKO that needs further consideration.

Maybin (2007) conducted research into older primary age children and explored non-educational conversations during breaks, in corridors or at changing times, rather than those as part of a learning task such as those in Mercer & Littleton's exploratory talk. Focusing on such 'off-task' talk where there is no facilitation by adults or negotiation of rules, she still found much evidence of talk that would develop cognitive skills and also support growing identities of young people. Albeit not specifically considering 'exploratory talk', she observed examples of justification of opinions, consideration for other's views, reasoning and reflection. This is significant because the majority of peer interactions within Early Years contexts can be characterized as 'off-task' before formal learning begins, which may offer another explanation as to why 'exploratory talk' is not observed in Mercer & Littleton's original proposed form, and specifically without adult guidance. Even Paterson's (2018) relaxed form requires some guidance from MKOs for younger learners that doesn't fit with informal 'off-task' interactions. Exploratory talk in its original form seems limited in its application to school age children in educational settings, but this doesn't mean dialogue in other contexts does not contribute to cognitive development.

Various other criteria have been proposed by many recent dialogic theorists. Alexander's Dialogic Teaching (2006) proposes five key characteristics for the nature of effective dialogue in the classroom: collective; reciprocal; supportive; cumulative; and purposeful. These ideas align very closely with those proposed by Michaels, O'Connor & Resnick in their Accountable Talk programme (Cui & Teo, 2021). Reznitskaya & Gregory (2013) identify just three key features of dialogic pedagogy: open ended questioning; flexible power relations; and metacognition. Both Reznitskaya & Gregory and Cui & Teo comment that implementation is often hindered in classrooms by misunderstanding or poor conceptualisation of dialogic

pedagogy by teachers. In their review, Cui & Teo suggest consideration of four key components of dialogic approaches to improve implementation: dialogic environment, teaching goal, classroom talk and dialogic moves. However, all these programmes are aimed at school age learners and are set in a more formal classroom 'on-task' context. This limits their applicability to Early Years, not because younger learners are less able to contribute meaningfully to dialogic talk, but that it is not a formal learning environment, and therefore facilitation by adults is necessarily different in nature. A detailed exploration of these school-based programmes is therefore unnecessary, however some of the key ideas are discussed in relation to younger learners to explore the nature of dialogue in off-task contexts.

The notion of flexible power relations echoes the ideas of Freire and Bakhtin that both teachers and learners can learn through playing an active part in the dialogue. White (2016) in particular picks up on this for Early Years', explaining that both must be open and receptive to other's perspectives. This is echoed in Alexander's (2006) idea of reciprocity. Despite Mercer & Littleton (2007) emphasizing the need for flexibility in their IDZ, they do not explicitly discuss power relations. Instead, they assert that to create a dialogic environment learner-teacher relationships must be reimagined, which is done through explicit rule negotiation in Mercer & Littleton's vision. However, this negotiation is predominantly between peer learners with less adult input, so power differences are minimal. Conversely, Cui & Teo (2021) give the example of a learner questioning a teacher's reasoning, which they propose requires a safe environment and rebalance of power. Considering the nature of relationships between child and practitioner in Early Years is typically different to that seen in schools, primarily due to the young age of the learner and the caring role of the adult, any renegotiation of power will be from a different starting point. Additionally, as dialogue is predominantly 'off-task' in Early Years, then the role of the adult will be naturally different to that facilitating effective dialogue in classrooms with older learners. Whilst there must be an element of authority for safety and direction in Early Years, many settings employ a child-led approach to early learning where this balance of power is carefully positioned. Sproule, Walsh & McGuinness (2019) propose the 'locus of control' as one of three key dimensions of effective play-based learning, although they highlight the often insufficient understanding of how to implement such strategies. They suggest the balance

should be negotiated between learner and teacher, and so it follows that flexible power relations between learner and teacher are a key part of the whole Early Years' environment, as well as in dialogue. Such negotiation of power combined with relationships open to learning on both sides together embody a socio-cultural approach to education and strongly oppose the idea of one-way transmission of knowledge.

Alexander's criteria for dialogue to be purposeful is similar to Mercer & Littleton's (2007) idea that a resolution should be sought, and both fit well in their classroom-based dialogic programmes. Yet, Alexander (2006) explains the purpose is set out and steered by the teacher, in contrast to all his other criteria which are dependent on both learner and teacher. This indicates its inapplicability to 'off-task' dialogue where there isn't the same type of adult input and there is no planned outcome of a particular dialogic activity, and therefore purposefulness should not be a requirement for Early Years dialogue. However, Wegerif (2019) comments that Alexander was influenced by Bakhtin's idea that each response in dialogue leads on to further questioning, and so in this sense the 'purpose' can be considered self-fulfilling. This notion could be applied more easily to Early Years dialogue, particularly in a child-led play environment. The second of the three key dimensions proposed by Sproule, Walsh & McGuinness (2019) for successful play-based pedagogy describes the nature of activities from curriculum-based through to emergent. They suggest a balance between the two extremes to reflect the balance of control and allow children choice to pursue their interests within a goal-orientated context.

Metacognition, or conscious reflection of one's own thought, is a commonly assumed outcome of dialogic pedagogy but can also be a prerequisite. It follows on from purposeful dialogue in that it supports personal evaluation of learning and development and can further cognition and motivation and so is a valuable skill (EEF, 2021). Donaldson (2006) states that for a child be in control of their own thoughts, they must be conscious of them. It also relates closely to the concept of theory of mind (TOM), the awareness of others' thoughts and beliefs as distinct from one's own, which typically develops during the preschool years. If a child can be aware of other's thoughts, then they must first be aware of their own. TOM is stated by Mercer (2016) as key to developing intersubjectivity and is the foundation for 'interthinking' in

the Thinking Together programme (2023). It is reasonable to assume that abilities developed during Early Years can be successfully employed in dialogic methods in school, and to then further develop these skills. On the other hand, Hong & Han (2023) found that learners aged just 4 years can consciously reflect on their thinking and express this to others through a variety of multi-modal methods such as drawing and movement. This finding reiterates the need to recognise the role of non-verbal communication, but importantly also shows that children can demonstrate metacognition at a young age whilst they are still developing abstract thought. Using an ability that is still maturing is precisely how children learn many other skills such as language. Observed correlations between language and TOM ability were explored by Astington & Baird (2005) and they suggest their development is both interdependent and concurrent. This suggests the development of both language and metacognition can be effectively supported through social interaction and dialogue, and that both will increase in scope and capacity over time.

White (2016) further comments that metacognition is necessary on both sides, from learner and teacher, to successfully provide effective support for development, which echoes the need for flexible power-relations and reciprocity. Reflective practice is encouraged in Scottish education to facilitate ongoing professional development, and this criterion aligns with current teaching standards (GTCS, 2021) and is also noted as key to effective pedagogy by Husbands & Pearce (2012).

2.4 The Role of Language and Non-Verbal Communication.

Vygotsky (1986) describes the gradual process by which language transforms from social speech on the simplest level in infancy, to ego-centric or self-directed speech and then onto inner speech as language and thought combine. Self-directed speech is part of the internalisation process as a child talks out loud as they think out loud. As these combine, language becomes a medium for rational thought and the two become interdependent and can't be considered separately. Smolucha & Smolucha (2021) comment that language development is therefore part of and concurrent to cognitive development, mirroring the relationship between TOM and language as above. Classroom-based dialogic theories focus on cognitive development because by that stage language and thought are already combined. Yet for our learners in Early Years, this internalisation process is still happening, so the development of both needs separate consideration.

Social interactions are vital to language development and Amorsen & Wilson (2020) observed strong correlation of activities promoting language development with those associated with dialogic approaches. EEF (2022) found that less time spent at Early Years settings during lockdowns resulted in poorer language and communication skills, implying that such social interactions are crucial to early language development. A socio-cultural tool can only be taught through socio-cultural means hence language and communication skills are learnt through participation, akin to a community of practice approach to learning (Mercer, 2013). Boyd (2014) explored use of dialogic strategies for supporting both speech and language development and 'sustained shared thinking' from a teacher's perspective. He found implementation difficulties and conflict with curriculum obligations. Implementation issues were also the main reason behind poor success rates noted by Pickstone et al. (2009) who considered interventions to improve language development in Early Years. As with dialogic pedagogical strategies in schools, this indicates more work needs to be done to support teachers to put these into practice effectively, rather than change the theoretical approach.

Dialogic approaches have evolved based on the premise that oral language is the socio-cultural tool which enables development through interaction with others. However, Vygotsky (1986) explains that the mode of communication is itself a cultural tool and does not have to be spoken language. He states that if the communicative function is the same then "language does not depend on the nature of its material" (1986, p76). Wells (1999) similarly suggests the socio-cultural tool of language is better understood as a toolkit that can incorporate any form of communication, appropriate to the culture of that individual. Graham, Kurz & Batamula (2023) describe how Vygotsky questions the then popular use of 'oralism' to teach deaf babies to speak, as it amounts to rote learning of speech which is not readily accessible to them as a cultural tool. He proposed that they be encouraged to communicate in a way that was more easily accessible and meaningful for them, such as sign language or pictorial symbols. They can then develop higher order functions in a comparable way to how hearing children do through verbal language. This example is outdated but illustrates that language as a means of communication is a culturally dependent tool, and for a young deaf child their culture involves sign language rather than spoken word. For school age children who have a reasonable

grasp of spoken language, speech is the most appropriate cultural tool to use for interaction. For a child in Early Years who is still developing this tool, the most appropriate tools will include a range of communicative methods such as gesture, expression, action as well as speech. Essentially, language of any kind is a tool for interaction, and it is the interaction that facilitates learning.

Wells (1999) explains that adults must adapt their communication methods to respond to the limited capabilities of young learners. In the same way as a teacher uses verbal language that will be understood by the students in their class, an adult communicates with a young child in a way that they will be able to make sense of, which may include non-verbal methods. This further illustrates the reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner and White's (2016) observation that adults must be especially alert to the multi-modal communication of young children to guide interactions appropriately. Patterson (2018) and Hong & Han (2023) both offer evidence in support of acknowledging non-verbal communication to grasp young children's full potential to meaningfully contribute. Flewitt (2006) further highlights the need to acknowledge all modes of communication, suggesting that to limit analysis to verbal language does not do justice to the ability of our youngest learners to make meaningful dialogic contributions. She also allowed young children to watch videos of themselves to elicit further reflection on their interactions. Christie (2002, as cited in Flewitt, 2006, p4) summarises language as "complex sets of interconnecting forms of human semiosis", and it is this understanding of Vygotsky's term 'language' that makes most sense for Early Years.

Following on from this, Petitto et al. (2014) found that deaf children who are exposed to alternate modes of communication from infancy meet their milestones and show equivalent levels of language development to their hearing peers, suggesting that communication development is not dependent on mode. Furthermore, they observed babies 'babbling' with their hands as they learned to sign, much like a hearing baby would babble as they learn to talk. Teaching young babies simple sign language is increasingly popular today as babies can sign considerably earlier than they can speak. This is supported by the finding that babies as young as 6 months old are aware of the communicative function of speech or signing and demonstrate a desire to express themselves (Vouloumanos, Martin & Onishi, 2014; Wells, 1999). This is echoed by White's (2016) observation that young

children have much to express and a desire to do so. The under-developed spoken language of children in Early Years is therefore not a reason that dialogic approaches are not appropriate. Furthermore, both language and cognitive skills will develop through interaction and taking part in multi-modal dialogue.

2.5 Play, Imagination and Self-Regulation

There is not much literature specifically looking at dialogic pedagogy in Early Years settings (Laird-Gentle et al. 2023). However, there is much about the role of play in supporting higher order thinking in Early Years inspired by Vygotskian theory (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Play based Early Years education is well-established in the UK, in both the English National Curriculum Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Early Stage, where play-based strategies dominate into the first year of primary education, around the age of 5 years (DfE, 2023; Education Scotland, 2023). However, in contrast to countries such as Finland where children do not start school until the age of 7 (Halinen, 2018), there is still a notable early shift to more formal education in the UK. Despite their success overseas, UK play-based approaches have been criticised as poorly defined and understood (Stephen, 2010), and BERA-TACTYC's Early Childhood Research Review (2017) found UK wide implementation issues of play-based pedagogies.

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that play, and in particular pretend play, creates a ZPD by allowing a child to act out their imagination and use objects to represent others. This raises questions about the existing understanding of ZPD according to Vygotsky. The progression of imagination can be observed from a young child that requires a very similar object to be substituted for the one in the play, to an older child who can use a much less similar object to represent another (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). However, a ZPD implies social interaction during play, suggesting that independent play would not facilitate development in the same way. Parallels can be seen between self-directed speech and pretend play as a child acts out a scenario as part of the development process. This indicates that the interaction is prior to the pretend play, in the same way interaction precedes self-directed speech. Hence pretend play is part of the internalisation process but doesn't specifically create the ZPD. As with dialogue, it is the interaction that creates the ZPD and facilitates learning.

Imagination matures and is internalised as a higher order process from active pretend or symbolic play for young children, to internal abstract imagination in adolescence (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky further states that abstract thought and internal visualisation or creativity is the key to all artistic, scientific and technological innovation. The appearance of speech or verbal language is a turning point for both thought and imagination because language of some form is required for internalisation of thought, and therefore imagination. In this way Vygotsky explains that all higher order functions originate in guided pretend play, and hence early social interactions facilitate development through such play.

Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong (2013) use Vygotsky's theory to explain how pretend play also allows children to develop self-regulation such as learning to follow social and cultural rules, negotiate and co-operate with others and learn to use restraint on their own behaviour. Bruner explains that pretend play allows children to act out their learning in a meaningful context and this furthers their ability to regulate their behaviours (Smidt, 2011). Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong draw on Elkonin's interpretations of Vygotsky's ideas, as one of his students, to assert that as play matures changes can be observed such as increased reflection, self-regulation and problem-solving. These behaviours illustrate the gradual development and the internalisation of higher order functions. This development of social processes relies on social interactions, from the first words an adult or MKO uses to regulate the child's behaviour for them, to the child beginning to copy the behaviour and the words, and then finally these are internalised as they learn to regulate their own behaviour. It is easier to see how social interactions are key to developing self-regulation through play than for imagination. The same principle of gradual internalisation is illustrated by Mercer & Littleton's (2007) observations of primary age children talking out loud and collaboratively justifying their reasoning as a group, and then learning to reason internally and independently. Crucially for Early Years play, this is not dependent on language ability, but on their social interactions and play opportunities which have been shown to employ a range of non-verbal communication means. It is interesting to note that one particular problem BERA-TACTYC's Early Childhood Research Review (2017) found was the lack of challenge provided by stereotypical role play scenarios, and that most props provided inspire little imagination as they are too like the intended object. This is likely to hinder the

development of both self-regulation and imagination through pretend play as theorised by Vygotsky.

Self-regulation is a form of metacognition which Whitebread & O'Sullivan, (2012) assert can be more widely supported through pretend play. Metacognition was one of Reznitskaya & Gregory's (2013) criteria for dialogic pedagogy, and it is interesting to see it being developed without direct reliance on spoken language. Non-verbal communication is the most appropriate means to interact for children in Early Years and so this backs up the idea that interaction does not need to be verbal to be of benefit for cognitive development. Interestingly, Howe & McWilliam (2001) noted that dialogic features discussed already such as reasons, compromise and justifications occurred most often in symbolic play situations, further adding weight to this argument.

2.6 The Role of the Teacher and Supporting Language Development in Practice

It is evident that interaction does not rely on spoken language for our youngest learners. Interaction enables the development of cognitive skills, and any means of communication can facilitate this process. Language development itself is also facilitated through social interaction with others, in the same way as other higher order thinking skills. Language is particularly important as it is how children's internal thoughts are subsequently organised. How Early Years practitioners interact and guide the play opportunities for young children is therefore crucial to them developing language and communication skills and subsequently, all other learning. Harris (1996) explains that early language development is dependent on language experience, and this includes non-verbal interactions as highlighted above. The huge influence of language and communication skills on academic success and life achievements described in the introduction is not surprising if all learning is reliant on communication skills. Hence, the role of the teacher in providing this language experience is now considered in more depth.

The greatest teacher for young children is their parent or primary care giver, but the increasing number of free childcare hours offered in Scotland, especially for low-income families, means that the role of the Early Years' practitioner is increasingly important. In off-task dialogue seen in Early Years, and in play situations, the role of the adult is somewhat different to that of a schoolteacher and

so must be considered differently. It should be noted that children will also learn from peer interactions so the MKO may be another child rather than an adult. This is more important in Early Years as the variation in development stage will be higher in proportion to the age range due to the pace of early development. Child-led learning and play based learning are very popular approaches for Early Years education in the UK, however research shows they are not well understood or implemented by practitioners (BERA-TACTYC, 2017; Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2002; Stephens, 2010). The play-based Early Years curricula documentation for Scotland (Education Scotland, 2023) and England (DfE, 2023) do not mention the self-regulation and language development benefits of play, suggesting that the poor conceptualisation goes beyond the practitioners. Bodrova et al. (2013) indicate there is a lack of coherence between play and development in Early Years practice and they point to Vygotsky's pretend play in supporting self-regulation to resolve this. Additionally, Sproule, Walsh & McGuinness (2019) suggest a balance of control and emergent/curriculum-based learning as mentioned already, coupled with their third criteria which is a high degree of playfulness. The first two reflect the flexible power relations and reciprocal relationships discussed earlier offering children ownership balanced with appropriate adult guidance. The third aligns with Vygotsky's theory to support cognitive development in Early Years and makes learning more accessible and meaningful for younger children.

The role of teacher in facilitating pretend play, dialogue and language development is not just to ask endless questions. Reznitskaya & Gregory (2013) propose open-ended questions are necessary for effective dialogue in the classroom. Yet, Wasik, Farrow & Hindman (2022) suggest that for Early Years simply asking open-ended questions is not enough. They explain that practitioners need to model the back and forth of interaction, the turn-taking, the listening and waiting to speak, and the many social rules of interaction. Furthermore, practitioners need to model natural spoken language between adults, not just that seen between children or between an adult and a child (Harris, 1996). Providing this feedback builds key skills and lays the foundation for communication and language skills, and hence for subsequent effective dialogue at school. This goes way beyond the idea of scaffolding or facilitating learning through dialogue, as it is supporting the development of the dialogue itself. Such an idea was suggested by Donaldson

(2006) nearly fifty years ago, that the skills for learning instilled by early interactions are then employed in a different manner to support learning and thought at school. Bodrova et al (2013) claim that play is how children try out rules and begin to make sense of them, and therefore this will apply for language just as for other social skills.

The relationship between learner and teacher is therefore key to effectively supporting this development. White (2016) explains that play is meaning laden as children try to express themselves, and that children are co-constructors of meaning through their interactions with those around them. Wells (1999) and Bruner (1983) also emphasize the constructive abilities of young children. The nature of such a relationship contradicts the idea of transmissive education as both parties can learn and be involved in constructing meaning, echoing Freire's (2017) philosophy. White also emphasizes a loving and caring relationship in Early Years is needed to interact appropriately and guide play. She explains that a practitioner needs to be particularly receptive to all forms of communication to fully appreciate the potential of young learners. This is quite different to a teacher-learner relationship facilitating dialogue in schools. It also requires reflective practice and metacognition by practitioners to be able effectively facilitate learning and be open to improving their own practice. Moyles, Adams & Musgrove (2002) found that Early Years practitioners were unable to explicitly discuss their pedagogy, despite it being evident in practice, and Stephen (2010) commented that this means the opportunity for reflective practice is missed.

As children begin to regulate their behaviour and understand social interactions, they evaluate themselves in relation to others and society (Maybin, 2007) and therefore practitioners have a significant early role to play in this. This leads on to the development of identity and a sense of self and so Maybin's concept can be likened to a participatory or situated learning approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The context dependent nature of such identity formation will necessarily rely on interactions within each community of practice, and hence practitioners need to be able to understand their influence to be able to guide early experiences and opportunities effectively. This idea is explored further in the next chapter.

Word count 6208

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework - Social Constructivism or Situated Learning?

It is necessary to consider the conceptual framework that underlies this theory in order to apply it to practice coherently and appropriately. Freire, Bakhtin and Vygotsky all consider dialogic education as a socio-cultural process. Mercer & Littleton (2007) note that socio-cultural approaches cover a range of philosophical assumptions. However, put simply, they all consider that interactions with others are necessarily social and, because of differences in societies, they also have a cultural context (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Specifically, Freire (2017) considers dialogue to be a politically and culturally based phenomenon. Bakhtin expounds his idea of heteroglossia as the many culturally dependent voices that form dialogue (Wegerif, 2019). Vygotsky holds that interactions are social, cultural and also historical (Mercer & Littleton (2007), and Bruner (1983) highlights the importance of recognising the socio-cultural context in order that interactions are meaningful and relevant. Crucially, Vygotsky (1986) further claims that the language used – the tool of interaction – needs to be accessible and meaningful to the individual, and therefore both the interaction and the means of interaction are socially and culturally dependent.

Epistemologically, dialogic pedagogy adopts a social constructivist perspective, in that meaning and knowledge are jointly created by speakers through social interaction. Bruner (1983), Wells (1999) and White (2016) explain their dialogic approach as social constructivism, in that knowledge exists only because it is actively created through us and is therefore subjective and individual, and context specific. Wegerif (2019) states that as dialogue is not just subjective but infinite, then what counts as knowledge is never fixed and is always open to reinterpretation. Vygotsky believed that people are co-creators and active participants in constructing their own knowledge (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). This differs from Piaget (Mercer & Littleton, 2007) whose constructivist approach explains that development occurs through individual construction of knowledge through experience. Children are still active constructors of knowledge, but the context only provides the experience that prompts knowledge construction and does not determine the knowledge itself. Consequently, Piaget's role of the teacher is secondary to that of the child and is just of facilitation, maintaining the child's active role. This contrasts to Vygotsky's conceptualisation where both roles are necessary for dialogue and learning. Whilst

Piaget considers the role of peer learning (De Lisi & Goldbeck, 1999), he still holds that knowledge is constructed individually as a result of collaboration, rather than jointly constructed and therefore context dependent.

Separate to constructivist approaches to learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) propose a participatory view of learning through 'communities of practice' (COP). Mercer (2016) explains dialogue can be understood through a COP approach, in that language used in dialogue is specific to each context or community. Lave & Wenger's situated learning theory explains learning is socially and culturally defined; however, learning is defined as active participation, and in doing so, individual identity is created that is necessarily dependent on the social and cultural context. This framework doesn't involve construction of meaning but meaning occurs because of and is dependent on participation in COP. Epistemologically, learning *is* participation, as opposed to social constructivism where learning occurs *through* interaction. In Vygotskian theory, participation is key as development takes place because of engaging in dialogue, but the development of personal identity is not explicitly mentioned. Maybin (2007) however, expands the notion of social dialogue to consider how it contributes to forming young people's identity, hence making a connection between social constructivism and situated learning theory. Drawing on Bakhtin, she suggests that every utterance is an evaluation. Children are constantly reflecting on their social experiences and indicating their feelings towards them, and concurrently developing their own self-awareness. This combines into a growing identity of their individual thoughts and ideas in relation to those of the society around them. Maybin describes it as "becoming conscious of their positioning in the world... [and]...expressing individual agency" (2007, p4).

The idea of developing identity therefore leads from conscious reflection and closely relates to self-regulation, the development of which has already been considered for youngest learners through pretend play. As children learn the rules and values of their specific cultural context, they adopt their own unique positioning in relation to these norms. The notion of identity development appears more relevant for off-task dialogue and interactions that are part of everyday society. In this way Vygotsky's theory of early learning can be seen to acknowledge the development of self-awareness and consequently identity, as children participate in socially and culturally bound interactions. Wegerif (2019) similarly proposes that the development

of identity occurs through dialogue in the social space between two individuals as he adopts a participatory approach to dialogic learning. Fleer (2003) also adopts a participatory approach to early learning and importantly comments that participation itself is culturally dependent. For example, she explains in some cultures, simply observing peers or elders is participation, and so contributes meaningfully to identity development and counts as learning. This view reflects some of the more flexible ways that young children can contribute meaningfully to dialogue, such as Paterson's (2018) more relaxed criteria for Early Years dialogue, or Freire's (2017) right to be silent, or Flewitt's (2006) need to acknowledge all semiosis. By taking a broader view of what counts as participation, Vygotskian dialogic theory seems to also meet the participatory notion outlined by a situated learning theory framework, bringing that and social constructivism closer together.

The often tacit ontology of constructivist philosophies assumes the mind exists independently of the social world around it, which stems from Cartesian philosophy (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Conversely, Lave and Wenger (1991) infer that the mind is a socio-cultural product of the social world and therefore not independent of it. They claim learning is more than cognition, and is the process of being or becoming, and we don't exist outside of our socially bound identities. However, Tiberghien (2016) criticised Lave & Wenger's explanation because it only considered individual identity formation. If it were truly non-dualistic, all identity would be collective and not just socio-cultural, indicating some sense of mind apart from society. Mercer (2016) bridges this gap with his notion of collective 'interthinking' however he stops short of group identity. Packer & Goicoechea suggest that the differences between social constructivism and socio-cultural theory (referring to situated learning/participatory learning theory) are only epistemological, and that they are ontologically complementary. Vygotsky's (1986) claim that consciousness comes from higher order metacognition and is therefore contextually bound, suggests that our conscious minds do not exist without the socio-cultural environment in which they develop. Coupled with Lave & Wenger's perhaps incomplete explanation, this aligns Vygotsky's social constructivism with their situated learning theory in an imperfect non-dualistic stance and sets Vygotsky further apart from Piaget's traditional constructivism.

In summary, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development implicitly incorporates identity formation as our youngest learners grow and emerge as a product of all the interactions, opportunities and dialogue that they engage in. The tool that enables all this to happen is communication, one of the very skills learnt by participating in the social world. Those involved in early interactions are therefore integral to creating the next generation of conscious minds and social beings, and so how best to support this process is unquestionably deserving of further research and exploration. This should be investigated through a socio-cultural paradigm, however discussion has shown the ontological and epistemological differences between social constructivism and situated learning theory are less clearly defined. Essences of both co-construction of meaning and identity formation are evident in Vygotsky's theory. This aligns the two traditionally distinct approaches under one socio-cultural conceptual framework, which is adopted in the following research proposal.

Word count 1267

Part B

Chapter 4. The Research Proposal

The overall aim of this dissertation is outlined in the title “The Reconceptualization of Dialogic Pedagogy for Early Years to Support Communication Development: an extended literature review and case study proposal”. The first research question explored through the literature review was **“What interpretations of dialogic theory can be applied to Early Years, and how do they relate to language and communication development?”** Dialogic theory was shown to be applicable to Early Years settings if it acknowledges non-verbal communication and off-task dialogue in a way not seen with older learners. This approach sees communication development as interwoven with wider cognitive development and particularly important because it lays the foundation for all future learning.

The initial idea of this dissertation was to explore dialogic pedagogy theory in Early Years settings in relation to language development and propose a survey of how practitioners conceptualise their pedagogy in this regard. Very soon it was clear that dialogic theory had various interpretations that needed considering in greater detail first to understand how it can be applied to Early Years. Research into practitioner’s pedagogy was considered more relevant for subsequent research once the relationship between theory and Early Years practice is better understood. Strategies supporting language development were briefly explored with the idea that they could be aligned with dialogic approaches, however the theory suggests language skills develop alongside cognition through interaction, so this comparison is unhelpful. The significance of non-verbal contributions to dialogue meant that ‘language development’ was replaced by the wider term ‘communication development’. Furthermore, dialogue in Early Years is notably different to the classic interpretations seen with older learners; exemplified by the idea of off-task interactions which dominate in Early Years but are not typically the focus of dialogic approaches in schools. Next, the key role of pretend play in building self-regulation skills and influencing identity formation means that it necessitates inclusion in the research proposal to fully explore these ideas in theory and in practice. Finally, the role of the teacher is again different to that seen in dialogic approaches for older learners and therefore warrants further exploration too.

The resulting proposed small-scale investigation is designed to offer detailed insights on these emergent ideas from the literature. A case study methodology is outlined to explore how non-verbal communication, off-task dialogue, pretend play and the role of the teacher or practitioner relate to dialogue observed in an Early Years setting. This will involve detailed multi-modal qualitative observation of a group of children interacting in a pretend play scenario with practitioners' guidance. Their interactions will be further explored through semi-structured interviews with the practitioners to add depth to the data. The chosen context is a Scottish Early Years setting known to the researcher and a case study design befits the scope of this Masters' Dissertation. This research adopts a socio-cultural interpretivist perspective complementing Vygotsky's conceptual framework as expounded above. The researcher's positionality will be that of an insider due to their familiarity with the setting and the participants. Due to the potential impact on behaviour and hence data of an outsider coming into a setting with young children, it is felt that an insider approach is most appropriate, with due consideration given to any possible bias of analysis.

By linking the theory revealed by the literature review with case study findings, it is hoped that this investigation will illuminate understanding of how dialogue and communication development are manifested in Early Years. It is anticipated that these insights will act as a pilot study to inform future research into practitioners' pedagogical understanding and to support communication development and offer opportunities for improving Early Years practice. This will therefore be of benefit to Early Years practitioners and the children they care for, but also to the wider academic community through contributing to Early Years pedagogical research.

Two further research questions that the research proposal aims to address are:

“How does non-verbal communication contribute to Early Years off-task dialogue in relation to communication development?”

“How does the Early Years practitioner influence multi-modal dialogue during pretend play?”

Word count 674

Chapter 5. Research Design, Methods and Analysis

5.1 Research Design and Paradigm

For any research to be coherent, the methodology, data collection, and methods of analysis must complement the conceptual framework and paradigmatic approach. This research proposal adopts an interpretivist paradigm, and the research questions are phrased to reflect this approach in that they seek to understand not to prove or disprove a theory (Corbetta, 2003). Findings from interpretivist research are not generalisable but can provide insights and increase understanding. The topic under investigation is embedded in socio-cultural theory which assumes knowledge is subjective and context dependent; the qualitative data generated from this investigation will be similarly context specific. Under a socio-cultural framework, participants are co-constructors of knowledge, and this will be explored through their dialogue and non-verbal interactions, specific to the situational context. The notion of identity formation through social interaction and cognitive development according to Vygotsky's theory is assumed, although not explicitly discussed in this proposal. As with all interpretivist research, it is necessary to acknowledge the researcher's own perspective and influence on the data and its interpretation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

An exploratory case study is proposed to suggest possible answers to the above research questions. This is comprised of a qualitative in-depth observation of interactions between a small group (around 5) of children aged 3-4 years in a Scottish Early Years setting, complemented by semi-structured interviews with practitioners and reflective discussions with child participants and their parent/guardian. Case studies can provide rich descriptive data from a unique context that can build understanding and inform future research by guiding questions and offering insights on theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). A case study design was chosen to investigate a specific example of dialogue in Early Years and explore the themes revealed by the literature review in practice. This will be exploratory as it is anticipated to act as a pilot for future research, and a single case study of the observations of one episode of pretend play. Flewitt (2006) explains that to fully understand the multi-modal contributory capabilities of young children requires detailed in-depth analysis, which is inevitably time-consuming, so focusing on one episode is sufficient for a small-scale study. This design is therefore

appropriate for the scope of this dissertation project and aims to catch unique features that may not be seen in larger scale investigations.

The proposed case study will be from an insider perspective and involve participant observation, because this is likely to achieve more natural behaviour from the children. It will also be less disruptive for young learners who may be unsettled by a stranger in their setting. Conducting research in children's natural environment also maintains Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological niche' and therefore produces more authentic data (Aubrey et al. 2000). The researcher will be working in the setting, and therefore have an existing relationship with the staff, children and parents. Bridges (2009) highlights the benefits of both sides of positionality. From the inside a researcher may have knowledge specific to the context that informs detailed analysis, but observing as an outsider allows a researcher to step back and not be biased by their prior knowledge. For young children, it is felt that familiarity outweighs outsider positionality due to the possible disruption to typical play and interactions. In addition, to maintain the integrity of the research, the need to build positive and trusting relationships with stakeholders should include the participants themselves and an insider positionality allows this. The objectivity benefits of an outsider perspective for research under a socio-cultural framework are somewhat limited as qualitative data and its analysis are necessarily subjective.

5.2 Ethical Considerations and Research Integrity

Before any research can be carried out, ethical approval must be obtained from the Open University Ethical Research Panel (Appendix 1), to ensure that the proposal meets ethical guidelines. Stutchbury & Fox (2009) propose a useful tool for researchers to meet these responsibilities by outlining consequential, ecological, relational and deontological ethical considerations. A researcher has a duty to conduct ethical and responsible research that maintains integrity and respect. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that BERA (2018) 'Ethical Guidelines for Ethical Research' are adhered to, and that due consideration is given to every aspect of research from initial planning until dissemination and beyond. This duty to ensure integrity is the deontological perspective of ethics. Ecological ethics relate to all those who may be impacted by the research. Locally, this includes the children and adult participants and the setting leaders. On a wider scale it includes the Open University and academics in an educational field. On every scale, stakeholders

should be treated fairly and with respect to protect the rights of participants and uphold the values and reputation of the institution and international research communities.

To justly consider the consequential ethics of research involves more than just ensuring the benefits outweigh any potential harm (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). Although immediate benefits of this case study may be limited to the setting, its practitioners and children, it is hoped that the long-term benefits will be widespread, by informing future research and contributing to theoretical understanding. Early communication development is a current issue in Scotland and any further understanding is therefore valuable. Any possible harm is minimised by the insider perspective adopted by the researcher and the usual environment being used for the play episode. Anonymity of the participants poses an issue due to planned video recording, however, it is proposed that pseudonyms be used for transcription, and the recording will be not published with the findings to preserve confidentiality of the practitioners and children. The Early Years setting will not be named to avoid possible identification.

To meet relational ethical obligations, the researcher must build respectful and honest relationships and involve all stakeholders at every stage of the research. Gatekeepers for the setting will be approached initially to outline the research and gain permission (Appendix 2). This will be followed by open discussions with practitioners and parents/guardians of potential child participants to answer questions and involve them in the process. Parents/guardians will be provided with all relevant information (Appendix 3) and given the chance to ask questions, before being asked to give their informed consent for their child (due to participants ages) to participate in the planned observation, including details of how their data will be stored and used, and their right to withdraw. However, informed consent from the parent/guardian of each child participant is not sufficient. Oates (2019) suggested the notion of 'valid consent' is required for young participants that cannot give consent themselves. This involves gaining 'assent' through continual awareness of participant behaviour in case of any reluctance to take part, ensuring their rights are respected under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 2022). Every child is not obliged to join in, so not all children whose parents/guardians give informed consent may wish to take part in the play episode.

Additionally, a time limit of a week following the observation will be given for the child and/or parent/guardian to withdraw their data from the study, so as to not substantially hinder the subsequent analysis. The relational side of ethical considerations are further met by inviting the children and parents/guardians to watch the video recording and offer their thoughts. This creates a more balanced power-relationship between participants and researcher and offers reassurance.

5.3 Observation and Interviews

The observation will involve a video recording of the children's interactions during a pretend play episode, alongside the participant observer's field notes. A play provocation will be set up to encourage imagination and interaction, for example loose parts play. Loose parts play is a popular way to inspire creative and symbolic or pretend play in young children (Play Scotland, 2024). It supports imagination development through objects that are less like what they are chosen to represent (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Paterson (2018) used an activity chosen specifically to elicit dialogue for her research on early years dialogue. This is acceptable as it is the nature of the dialogue and non-verbal interactions that are being explored, not the situations under which they occur. Pretend play was selected as it reportedly elicits more dialogic interactions that included compromise and justifications (Howe & McWilliam, 2001), and is integral to developing imagination (Vygotsky, 1978) and self-regulation (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). Dialogic interaction generated by this type of play episode can be categorised as off-task as there is no specific learning goal in mind and the play is child-led within the provocation. The UNCRC (UNICEF, 2022) emphasizes every child's right to choose and express their opinion, so this applies to participation in research but also to their choice of play. This pretend play provocation proposal therefore fits Sproule, Walsh & McGuinness (2019)'s ideal balance of practitioner-led and emergent learning.

One or two Early Years practitioners will interact with the children during the play episode as they would usually to see how they influence the interactions of the children in accordance with the theory discussed. It is anticipated that the observer will be in the room but not directly involved in the play episode. However, because the researcher is known to the participants, if the children invite them to interact, they should, so as not to disrupt flow and distort data, and hence it is described as participant observation to cover such eventualities. The researcher will also make

their own field notes during the play episode to complement the data and inform their own reflexivity.

The interactions during the play episode will be video recorded to allow for detailed analysis. Video can capture not just spoken language, but gesture, expressions, body language, actions and other behaviours that can all contribute to interactions. Audio recording would not capture these non-verbal interactions which are a crucial part of the investigation, and to not record the play episode at all would mean very limited observational data. In her research of the nature of Early Years' interactions, Flewitt (2006) found that video was the best way to gather as much semiotic information as possible and allowed for repeated replaying during analysis, and she comments to not do so would miss vital information. However, the decision to use video comes with many ethical issues. The intrusion of video into the natural environment for young learners could be reduced by introducing the video equipment in advance, letting the children become used to its presence and explaining to them what it does. Anonymity of participants is usual for Early Years research, however, to blur faces to provide this would lose valuable facial expressions. Flewitt mitigated this conflict by involving the parents/guardians and children in the research process from the outset to build respectful and reciprocal relationships. She then invited the parents and children to watch the recordings back and offer their thoughts on what was observed, and even asked the children to choose their own pseudonym for use in the transcription. This approach gave ownership of the process to the participant and their parent/guardian and made them feel more at ease and involved. A similar process is proposed for this case study with the intention of offering reassurance. Furthermore, only the annotated transcriptions or extracts from them would be included in the final research report to maintain anonymity and confidentiality for all participants. Even young children are capable of reflection (Hong & Han, 2023), which could prove insightful, and it is hoped this will add another perspective that will contribute to the analysis. The researcher will make notes on comments made or reflections expressed during this rewatching.

The observation will be complemented by semi-structured interviews with the Early Years practitioners who were present during the play episode. Open-ended questions will be asked with appropriate follow up prompts whilst watching the video recording to elicit responses relating directly to the interactions observed. This is

anticipated to take a conversational form, and data will be collected by the researcher making notes. Such informal interviews need to consider the relationship between researcher and participant and the setting in which it takes place (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). This will be done in the familiarity of the Early Years setting where the play episode took place, and the researcher will have an established relationship as a fellow employee. The practitioner's background knowledge of the children is hoped to enable creation of a rich picture of the interactions and dialogue observed. For example, if a child has a particular way of communicating, or makes references to their life outside the setting, then this may be interpreted more accurately by the practitioners. It also hopes to gain the practitioners' personal insights on their role and influence in the children's play and interactions. Coupled with the researcher's own field notes and knowledge of the participants, and the reflections of the children and their parents/guardians, this interview data will add another subjective perspective to the interpretation and create a fuller picture of the interactions.

5.3 Data Analysis, Quality and Dissemination

This qualitative exploratory case study seeks to elicit rich descriptive data to offer insights into how the dialogic theory relates to observed interactions and Early Years practice. No structured observation schedule will be employed to not limit what data is gathered in accordance with the exploratory nature of the study. Instead, analysis will focus on noticing patterns and themes relating to topics highlighted in the literature review. This may include but is not limited to: non-verbal and semiotic communication; the type of dialogic contributions for example, challenges and justification, compromise and reasoning; the nature of pretend play in supporting dialogue, imagination and self-regulation; learning of social rules and the influence of the practitioner on dialogic interactions.

The video transcriptions will first be transcribed, taking care to annotate them with non-verbal interactions throughout. Prolonged familiarisation with both the recording and the transcription will allow the researcher to become fully immersed in the data before analysis can begin. The play episode is anticipated to last around 5 - 10 minutes, but even this short time span will produce a large amount of multi-modal data. Care will be taken to ensure that all non-verbal communication is captured and included in the analysis. The researcher's field notes, the notes made during the interviews and video rewatching with parents/guardians and children will all be

brought together for joint analysis. Emerging themes will be coded for and cross-referenced from all the data sources. White (2016) notes that it is important to be open and receptive to all possible modes of communication to not miss anything, and Flewitt (2006) notes that interpretation must be similar, so gathering data from various sources is the most appropriate way to do this. Flewitt further notes that as soon as we record, observe or transcribe data it has been interpreted and this comes with an inherent subjectivity, which should be acknowledged during the analysis. As with all interpretative data analysis the researcher must reflect on their own preconceptions and beliefs, so they don't bias the findings. The author here notes her own background in supporting early communication development and use of signing with children showing language delays.

It is hoped that careful analysis of this qualitative data will reveal possible answers to the second and third research questions. The aim of this proposed case study is to illuminate the theory and themes explored in the literature review in relation to Early Years dialogue. These findings will only be relevant to this context and setting, however by increasing understanding, this case study aims to inform future research in this area that may be quantitative in nature and produce the sort of objective findings that policy makers use to inform educational change. Aubrey et al. (2000) note that qualitative research identifies key variables that allows for more refined research questions in subsequent investigations. Theory and practice should always inform each other in a reciprocal relationship, so by exploring how dialogue is manifested in Early Years is important. Odom (2016) explains that whilst theory informs practice to a certain extent in Early Years, first-hand experience also drives change and feeds back to the theory by increasing understanding. This mutual relationship means that both aspects contribute towards progress.

Research must always be rigorous and conducted to a high standard no matter its paradigmatic approach. Qualitative findings cannot be assessed by quantitative measures in any meaningful manner, so notions such as reliability, validity and generalisability are not appropriate here. Lincoln & Guba (1986) propose alternative criteria that can be used to determine quality of qualitative research under an appropriate lens. Just as the paradigm, methodology and methods employed must align, so must the criteria of quality assessment. Lincoln & Guba's criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To meet these measures,

research must be conducted in an authentic and transparent way, and all findings explained and justified from the data presented, acknowledging any potential bias in interpretation. This openness ensures that research is undertaken with integrity, respect and responsibility.

A summary report highlighting key observations and findings will be produced for the setting and stakeholders. It is suggested that setting leaders, practitioners and parents/guardians are invited to an informal presentation evening to discuss the findings and what they could mean for professional development, future practice, and the children attending the setting. A full research report would be written for the Open University. It is hoped that this proposal, if deemed to be of sufficient quality, may be carried out as part of Doctoral research with appropriate modifications in scope, and subsequently be considered for publication.

Word count 2914

Postscript – Narrative Critical Reflection

I relished the opportunity this dissertation offered to explore a topic I am passionate about in greater depth, so the literature review process was exciting and interesting. I set an academic target to improve how I undertook and recorded my literature search (Appendix 4A) as I know I can easily go off on a tangent and lose focus. I managed this well by using my research journal to adopt a more logical organised approach to recording what I found, which meant writing the review was considerably easier. A further consequence of this was that forming a coherent argument and including critical evaluation in my writing came more naturally from my understanding of the key ideas (Appendix 4B). At times it was necessary to step back to see the review as a whole to make sure it flowed well, and feedback from my tutor on draft chapters was a great help with this (Appendix 4C).

Despite not currently working in Early Years, this is where I have gained most of my professional experience and is why I am so invested in this topic. Being able to relate my study to real life issues not only gives meaningful context but gave my research a clear purpose and value. Reflective practice is vital in all educational contexts and the skills taught on this degree programme are transferable. Consequently, I have been able to improve my professional practice through reflection in my current position working with learners with additional support needs at a tertiary college (Appendix 4D). To be continually learning and improving means I see the benefits to my study in daily life.

Whilst this dissertation has focused mostly on theory, I hope to be able to conduct some research in the future, so I can develop my knowledge and skills relating to building respectful relationships, negotiating ethical considerations, carrying out research and analysing data. This will thereby consolidate what I have learnt from module materials and tutorial discussions with practical experience, akin to linking theory to practice as expounded in my research proposal. That said, I feel I have a fair understanding of research processes and ethics and have been able to relate them to my proposal (Appendix 4E).

On a personal level, I further set myself a challenge to improve the way I recorded my PDP reflections (Appendix 4F). I have made progress in this regard on previous modules, but often still left it until the last minute. Determined this time

would be different, I decided to keep it simple rather than set unachievable goals. Doing a PDP audit, reviewed at different stages of the module, meant I could clearly see my progress and the targets I wanted to work on. I am pleased to have completed this dissertation despite many external factors impacting on my time-management. I planned a schedule for each stage of the dissertation and afforded a great deal of flexibility, which was fortuitous. Having studied through the Open University for a number of years, I am used to balancing study, work and homelife, however this year has presented more challenges to this than I have previously experienced. To have come through them and be typing this now is a massive personal achievement. I set high standards for myself in every aspect of life, so I am delighted to have achieved high grades for my Master's degree so far.

Word count 565

Total word count (not including abstract) 12875

References

Alexander, R. (2006). *Towards dialogic teaching: rethinking classroom talk*. 3rd ed. Dialogos.

Alexander, R. (2008). Culture, dialogue and learning: Notes on an emerging pedagogy. In: N. Mercer and S. Hodgkinson, eds., *Exploring Talk in School*. London: Sage, pp.91–113.

Amorsen, A. and Wilson, D. (2020). Intentional teaching to support oral language development. *Practical Literacy*, 25(1), pp35-37. doi:<https://web-p-ebsohost-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=65bfbd63-74f9-42eb-8e34-2f6040df06ac%40redis>.

Astington, J.W. and Baird, J.A. (2005). *Why language matters for theory of mind*. [online] Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/open/reader.action?docID=281341> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2024].

Aubrey, C., David, T., Godfrey, T. and Thompson, L. (2000). *Early Childhood Educational Research*. [online] Routledge. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/open/reader.action?docID=254415&ppg=44> [Accessed 13 Aug. 2024].

BERA (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. [online] Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-for-Educational-Research_4thEdn_2018.pdf.

BERA-TACTYC (2017). *BERA-TACTYC Early Childhood Research Review 2003-2017*. [online] www.bera.ac.uk. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/project/bera-tactyc-early-childhood-research-review-2003-2017>.

Bleses, D., Makransky, G., Dale, P.S., Hojen, A. and Ari, B.A. (2016). Early productive vocabulary predicts academic achievement 10 years later. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 37(6), pp.1461–1476. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0142716416000060>.

Bodrova, E., Germeroth, C. and Leong, D.J. (2013). Play and Self-Regulation:

Lessons from Vygotsky. *American Journal of Play*, [online] 6(1), pp.111–123.

Available at: [https://web-p-ebshost-](https://web-p-ebshost-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c742807a-911b-4f8b-a945-3a7e4cc5f9ff%40redis)

[com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c742807a-911b-4f8b-a945-3a7e4cc5f9ff%40redis](https://web-p-ebshost-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c742807a-911b-4f8b-a945-3a7e4cc5f9ff%40redis) [Accessed 23 Jun. 2024].

Boyd, P. (2014). Learning conversations: teacher researchers evaluating dialogic strategies in early years settings. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(4), pp.441–456. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2014.968532>.

Bridges, D. (2009). Education and the possibility of outsider understanding. *Ethics and Education*, [online] 4(2), pp.105–123.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449640903326714>.

Bruner, J. (1983). Play, thought, and language. *Peabody Journal of Education*, [online] 60(3), pp.60–69. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/01619568309538407>.

Burton, D. and Bartlett, S. (2005). Questionnaires & Interviews. In: *Practitioner Research for Teachers*. [online] Sage Publications. Available at: <https://methods-sagepub-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/book/practitioner-research-for-teachers/d10.xml> [Accessed 26 Mar. 2024].

Carr, J., Law, J., Mroz, M. and Todd, L. (2013). *Early Language Delays in the UK*.

[online] Save the Children's Resource Centre. Available at:

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/early_language_delays.pdf/.

Clegg, J., Law, J., Rush, R., Peters, T.J. and Roulstone, S. (2015). The contribution of early language development to children's emotional and behavioural functioning at 6 years: an analysis of data from the Children in Focus sample from the ALSPAC birth cohort. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 56(1), pp.67–75.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12281>.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011). Chapter 14: Case Studies. In: *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed. New York: Routledge.

Corbetta, P. (2003). Paradigms of Social Research. In: *Social Research: Theory, Method & Techniques*. [online] Sage Publications Ltd, pp.8-29.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209922>.

Cui, R. and Teo, P. (2020). Dialogic education for classroom teaching: a critical review. *Language and Education*, 35(3), pp.1–17.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2020.1837859>.

De Lisi, R. and Goldbeck, S.L. (1999). Implications of Piagetian Theory for Peer Learning. In: A. King and A.M. O'Donnell, eds., *Cognitive Perspectives on Peer Learning*. [online] Taylor & Francis Group. Available at:

file:///C:/Users/tibet/Downloads/Cognitive_Perspectives_on_Peer_Learning_----_(I._Cognitive_Developmental_Bases_of_Peer_Learning_Overview_).pdf [Accessed 24 Aug. 2024].

Deoni, S.C., Beauchemin, J., Volpe, A., Dâ Sa, V. and RESONANCE Consortium (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Early Child Cognitive Development: Initial Findings in a Longitudinal Observational Study of Child Health. *medRxiv: The Preprint Server for Health Sciences*, p.2021.08.10.21261846.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.08.10.21261846>.

Department for Education (DfE) (2014). *National curriculum in England: English programmes of study*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study#spoken-language--years-1-to-6> [Accessed 21 Jul. 2024].

Department for Education (DfE) (2023). *Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework for Group and school-based Providers Setting the Standards for learning, Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five*. [online] GOV.UK.

Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65aa5e42ed27ca001327b2c7/EYFS_statutory_framework_for_group_and_school_based_providers.pdf [Accessed 25 Jun. 2024].

Donaldson, M. (2006). *Children's minds*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Education Endowment Foundation (2017). *Dialogic Teaching Evaluation report and executive summary independent evaluators*. [online] Education Endowment

Foundation. Available at:

https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Dialogic_Teaching_Evaluation_Report.pdf?v=1721482317 [Accessed 20 Jul. 2024].

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2021). *METACOGNITION AND SELF-REGULATED LEARNING: Guidance Report*. [online] Available at: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/eef-guidance-reports/metacognition/EEF_Metacognition_and_self-regulated_learning.pdf?v=1723565456 [Accessed 13 Aug. 2024].

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2022). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence*. [online] Available at: https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/guidance-for-teachers/covid-19/Impact_of_Covid_on_Learning.pdf?v=1719222239 [Accessed 24 Jun. 2024].

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2023). *Communication and Language*. [online] Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/communication-and-language> [Accessed 5 Mar. 2024].

Education Scotland (2017). *Benchmarks: Literacy and English*. [online] Education Scotland. Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/curriculum-for-excellence/curriculum-for-excellence-documents/curriculum-for-excellence-benchmarks/> [Accessed 21 Jul. 2024].

Education Scotland (2023). *Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit*. [online] education.gov.scot. Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/resources/early-level-play-pedagogy-toolkit/> [Accessed 25 Jun. 2024].

Fleer, M. (2003). Early Childhood Education as an Evolving 'Community of Practice' or as Lived 'Social Reproduction': Researching the 'taken-for-granted'. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 4(1), pp.64–79. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2003.4.1.7>.

Flewitt, R. (2006). Using video to investigate preschool classroom interaction: education research assumptions and methodological practices. *Visual Communication*, 5(1), pp.25–50. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357206060917>.

Freire, P. (2017). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. Penguin Classics publication of work originally published in 1970.

Graham, P., Kurz, C. and Batamula, C. (2023). Finding Vygotsky in Early Childhood Deaf Education: Sociocultural Bodies and Conversations. *American Annals of the Deaf*, [online] 168(1), pp.80–101. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/aad.2023.a904168>.

GTCS (2021). *The Standard for Full Registration Mandatory Requirements for Registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland*. [online] Available at: https://assets-global.website-files.com/653fc30601a80aefd5668009/65de1052167fdf3d4d70eeda_GTCS_The%20Standard%20for%20Full%20Registration.pdf [Accessed 13 Aug. 2024].

Halinen, I. (2018). The New Educational Curriculum in Finland. In: *Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe Vol. 7*. Brussels: Alliance for European Network Childhood Foundation, pp.75–89.

Harris, M. (1996). *Language experience and early language development*. Psychology Press.

Hirschkop, K. (2021). *The Cambridge Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, Ny: Cambridge University Press.

HM Government (2018). *Improving the home learning environment; A behaviour change approach*. [online] [gov.uk](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f6753d1d3bf7f72361877f6/Improving_the_home_learning_environment.pdf). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f6753d1d3bf7f72361877f6/Improving_the_home_learning_environment.pdf [Accessed 26 Jun. 2024].

Hong, S.B. and Han, J. (2023). 'Early childhood preservice teachers' learning about children's metacognitive thinking processes and constructivist pedagogy'. *Early Years: Journal of International Research & Development*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2023.2179960>..

Howe, C. and McWilliam, D. (2001). Peer Argument in Educational Settings. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, [online] 20(1-2), pp.61–80. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x01020001003>.

- Howe, C. and Mercer, N. (2009). Children's Social Development, Peer Interaction and Classroom Learning. In: *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys*. [online] Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, pp.170–194. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/open/detail.action?docID=995733#> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2024].
- Husbands, C. and Pearce, J. (2012). *What makes great pedagogy? Nine claims from research Schools and academies Resource Research and development network national themes: theme one Autumn 2012*. [online] National College for School Leadership. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jo-Pearce-4/publication/309384091_What_makes_great_pedagogy_Nine_claims_from_research/links/580cb1c408ae2cb3a5dd4876/What-makes-great-pedagogy-Nine-claims-from-research.pdf.
- Jeffreys, B. (2021). Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills - report. *BBC News*. [online] 27 Apr. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-56889035> Makes reference to research by the Educational Endowment Foundation in England.
- Karpov, Y.V. (2007). *The Neo-Vygotskian Approach to Child Development*. Cambridge University Press.
- Laird-Gentle, A., Larkin, K., Kanasa, H. and Grootenboer, P. (2023). Systematic quantitative literature review of the dialogic pedagogy literature. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-022-00029-9>.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. *Man*, 29(2), p.487. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/2804509>.
- Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I. and Parsons, S. (2009). Modeling Developmental Language Difficulties From School Entry Into Adulthood: Literacy, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 52(6), pp.1401–1416. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2009/08-0142\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0142)).
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (2007). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In: *But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation*. [online] New Directions for evaluation, p.vol

114. pp 11-25. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/10.1002/ev.223> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

Massonnié, J., Llauro, A., Sumner, E. and Dockrell, J.E. (2022). Oral language at school entry: dimensionality of speaking and listening skills. *Oxford Review of Education*, 48(6), pp.1–24. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2021.2013189>.

Maybin, J. (2007). *Children's Voices: Talk, Knowledge and Identity*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

McKie, R. (2023). Children born in pandemic have poorer communication skills, study finds. *The Observer*. [online] 16 Jul. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/16/children-born-in-pandemic-have-poorer-communication-skills-study-finds>.

Mercer, N. (2008). *5 Examples of talk in groups*. [online] *Thinking Together*. Available at: https://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/resources/5_examples_of_talk_in_groups.pdf [Accessed 7 Jul. 2024].

Mercer, N. (2013). The Social Brain, Language, and Goal-Directed Collective Thinking: A Social Conception of Cognition and Its Implications for Understanding How We Think, Teach, and Learn. *Educational Psychologist*, 48(3), pp.148–168. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2013.804394>.

Mercer, N. (2016). Education and the social brain: linking language, thinking, teaching and learning. *Éducation et didactique*, [online] 10(2), pp.9–23. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4000/educationdidactique.2523>.

Mercer, N. and Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A Sociocultural Approach*. London: Routledge.

Michaels, S., O'Connor, C. and Resnick, L.B. (2008). Deliberative Discourse Idealized and Realized: Accountable Talk in the Classroom and in Civic Life. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 27(4), pp.283–297. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-007-9071-1>.

Moyles, J., Adams, S. and Musgrove, A. (2002). *SPEEL Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning*. [online] Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267265074_SPEEL_Study_of_Pedagogical_Effectiveness_in_Early_Learning [Accessed 14 Aug. 2023].

NHS (2024). *Early learning and development - Start for Life - NHS*. [online] nhs.uk. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/early-learning-development/> [Accessed 16 Jun. 2024].

Oates, J. (2019). *Research ethics, children and young people*. [online] Available at: <https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=1730887> [Accessed 10 Feb. 2024].

Odom, S.L. (2016). Role of Theory in Early Childhood Education: Special Education and Early Intervention. In: B. Reichow, B.A. Boyd, E.E. Barton and S.L. Odom, eds., *Handbook of Early Childhood Special Education*. Springer International Publishing.

Oracy Cambridge (2023). *ORACY CAMBRIDGE*. [online] ORACY CAMBRIDGE. Available at: <https://oracycambridge.org/>.

Packer, M.J. and Goicoechea, J. (2000). Sociocultural and Constructivist Theories of Learning: Ontology, Not Just Epistemology. *Educational Psychologist*, [online] 35(4), pp.227–241. doi:https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3504_02.

Patterson, E.W. (2018). Exploratory talk in the early years: analysing exploratory talk in collaborative group activities involving younger learners. *Education 3-13*, 46(3), pp.264–276. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2016.1243141>.

Petitto, L.A., Holowka, S., Sergio, L.E., Levy, B. and Ostry, D.J. (2004). Baby hands that move to the rhythm of language: hearing babies acquiring sign languages babble silently on the hands. *Cognition*, 93(1), pp.43–73. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2003.10.007>.

Pickstone, C., Goldbart, J., Marshall, J., Rees, A. and Roulstone, S. (2009). A systematic review of environmental interventions to improve child language outcomes for children with or at risk of primary language impairment. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 9(2), pp.66–79.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2009.01119.x>.

Play Scotland. (2024). *Loose Parts Play*. [online] Available at:
<https://www.playscotland.org/loose-parts-play/>.

Ramsook, K.A., Welsh, J.A. and Bierman, K.L. (2019). What you say, and how you say it: Preschoolers' growth in vocabulary and communication skills differentially predict kindergarten academic achievement and self-regulation. *Social Development*, 29(3), pp.783–800. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12425>.

Reznitskaya, A. and Gregory, M. (2013). Student Thought and Classroom Language: Examining the Mechanisms of Change in Dialogic Teaching. *Educational Psychologist*, 48(2), pp.114–133. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2013.775898>.

Robeyns, I. (2006). Three Models of education: rights, Capabilities and Human Capital. *Theory and Research in Education*, 4(1), pp.69–84.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878506060683>.

Schreiber, L.M. and Valle, B.E. (2013). Social Constructivist Teaching Strategies in the Small Group Classroom. *Small Group Research*, [online] 44(4), pp.395–411.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496413488422>.

Scottish Government (2009). *The Early Years Framework*. [online] Gov.scot. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/early-years-framework/>.

Scottish Government (2022). *Scottish Attainment Challenge: framework for recovery and accelerating progress*. [online] www.gov.scot. Available at:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-attainment-challenge-framework-recovery-accelerating-progress/> [Accessed 21 May 2024].

Scottish Government (2023a). *Early education and care: Early learning and childcare expansion - gov.scot*. [online] Gov.scot. Available at:
<https://www.gov.scot/policies/early-education-and-care/early-learning-and-childcare/> [Accessed 21 May 2024].

Scottish Government (2023b). *Measuring the attainment gap*. [online] www.gov.scot. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-national-improvement->

framework-improvement-plan-2024/pages/7/ [Accessed 21 May 2024].

Shih, Y.-H. (2018). Rethinking Paulo Freire's Dialogic Pedagogy and Its Implications for Teachers' Teaching. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(4), p.230.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v7n4p230>.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2009). 'Conceptualising progression in the pedagogy of play and sustained shared thinking in early childhood education: A Vygotskian perspective' in *Educational and Child Psychology* 26 (2) June (in press). *Educational & Child Psychology*, [online] 26(2). Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2009.26.2.77> [Accessed 5 Feb. 2024].

Smidt, S. (2011). *Introducing Bruner A Guide for Practitioners and Students in Early Years Education*. Routledge.

Smolucha, L. and Smolucha, F. (2021). Vygotsky's theory in-play: early childhood education. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(7-8), pp.1041–1055.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1843451>.

Snowling, M., Hulme, C., Bailey, A., Stothard, S. and Lindsay, G. (2011). *Better communication research programme: Language and Literacy Attainment of Pupils during Early Years and through KS2: Does teacher assessment at five provide a valid measure of children's current and future educational attainments?* [online]

Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183539/DFE-RR172a.pdf [Accessed 19 Aug. 2023].

Speech and Language UK (2023). *Listening to unheard children A shocking rise in speech and language challenges*. [online] *Speech and Language UK*. Available at:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Listening-to-unheard-children-report-FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 4 Jun. 2024].

Sroule, L., Walsh, G. and McGuinness, C. (2019). More than 'just play': picking out three dimensions of a balanced early years pedagogy. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(4), pp.409–422.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2019.1628011>.

Stephen, C. (2010). Pedagogy: the silent partner in early years learning. *Early Years*, 30(1), pp.15–28. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140903402881>.

Stutchbury, K. and Fox, A. (2009). Ethics in educational research: introducing a methodological tool for effective ethical analysis. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, [online] 39(4), pp.489–504. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640903354396>.

Thinking Together (2023). *Thinking Together*, University of Cambridge. [online] thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk. Available at: <https://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/#>.

Tiberghien, A. (2016). Comments on Neil Mercer paper. Some consequences of the social brain ideas: studies on individual student to those on classroom as a group. *Éducation et didactique*, [online] 10(2), pp.49–55. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4000/educationdidactique.2525>.

UNESCO (2017). *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives*. [online] Unesco.org. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/education-sustainable-development-goals-learning-objectives>.

UNESCO (2018). *SDG Resources for Educators - Quality Education*. [online] UNESCO. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material/04>.

UNICEF (2022). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. [online] UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> [Accessed 30 Aug. 2024].

Vouloumanos, A., Martin, A. and Onishi, K.H. (2014). Do 6-month-olds understand that speech can communicate? *Developmental Science*, 17(6), pp.872–879. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12170>.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, Mass.: Mit Press.

Wasik, B.A., Farrow, J. and Hindman, A.H. (2022). More than ‘Good Job!’: The Critical Role of Teacher Feedback in Classroom Discourse and Language Development. *The Reading Teacher*, 75(6), pp.733–738.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2112>.

Wegerif, R. (2019). *Dialogic Education*. [online] Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. Available at:
<https://oxfordre.com/education/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-396>.

Wells, G. (1999). *The Meaning Makers: Learning to Talk and Talking to Learn*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational.

White, E. Jayne (2016). *Introducing dialogic pedagogy: provocations for the early years*. London; New York, Ny: Routledge.

Whitebread, D. and O'Sullivan, L. (2012). Preschool children's social pretend play: supporting the development of metacommunication, metacognition and self-regulation. *International Journal of Play*, [online] 1(2), pp.197–213.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2012.693384>.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethical Appraisal Form

E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.

For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details

a.	Student name	Zoë McIntosh	
b.	PI	[REDACTED]	
c.	Project title	The Reconceptualization of Dialogic Pedagogy for Early Years to Support Communication Development: an extended literature review and case study proposal.	
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Ray Chatwin	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	X
		Masters in Childhood and Youth	
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Learning & Teaching	
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	N/A	
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	N/A	
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk for advice on travel.</i>	Scotland	

Section 2: Ethics Assessment

Yes

No

1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	X	
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research? ¹	X PVG required, researcher already has this.	
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. ²	X Informed consent forms signed by parents, assent for children monitored throughout observation. Right to withdraw up to one week following observation.	
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)? If so, have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? ³		X
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? ⁴		X
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so, have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	X Video required to capture multi-modal communication. Pseudonyms used for	

¹ You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

² This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

³ Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

⁴ Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

		annotated transcription, recording not released to protect participants identity. Video to be subsequently destroyed.	
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	X Child participant and parent/guardian will be invited to watch recording together and offer reflections. Subsequent summary offered to setting and participants at informal information evening.	
8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?		X Materials used for play episode will be those of setting. Proposal is designed to act as pilot to inform subsequent research.
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?	X – Possibly, anonymity maintained through use of pseudonyms, recording not to be published, only extracts of annotated transcriptions.	
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		X
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		X

12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		X
----	---	--	---

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/committees-and-services/res-and-recs/>).

Appendix 2 – Information for Setting

Example of information for observations. Details of interviews & recording watching not included here but would be added.

E822 Information Letter for Setting: Observations

What is the aim of this observation?

I, Zoe McIntosh] would like to observe an activity you are leading [of Early Years pretend play] and would like to ask whether this was possible and, if so, to negotiate a convenient place, date and time. I am studying for a Masters in Education with the Open University, and this observation is part of the design of my dissertation. My project is investigating the topic of [dialogic interaction in Early Years and its contribution to communication development].

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

This observation is part of my studies on the Open University Masters module E822 'Multi-disciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth'. On this module I have an opportunity to design a small-scale investigation which will generate findings relevant to and of value to practice settings. Outline permission has been granted from [include specific name or title of the Setting Gatekeeper of who has signed the Dissertation Ethical Agreement Form – N/A for proposal].

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as someone who might be prepared to allow your practice and practice setting to be observed to increase understanding about [“How does non-verbal communication contribute to Early Years off-task dialogue in relation to communication development?”and

“How does the Early Years practitioner influence multi-modal dialogue during pretend play?”

].

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?

The observation would last a time, place and date which we will negotiate as the most convenient. I will share with you information about how I hoped that data might be collected through a video recording and multi-modal analysis which we would like to discuss with you. The conclusions from these discussions will inform the information sheet to be shared with

those who will be present for the observed activity and, for those below the age of 18, also their parent/carers/guardians. Those who have queries or concerns will be asked to contact me so that we might consider whether the observation should continue or not. We will need to agree a return date for any such responses, which will allow us to discuss how the wishes of these children and their parents/carers are best responded to.

What will the focus of the observation be?

The focus of the observation will be to find out about [observing non-verbal and spoken language dialogue and interactions, the role of pretend play in the type of contributions seen, and the influence of the practitioner on dialogic interactions].

Will the data collected at the observation remain confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information will be shared with anyone else. I will type up my observation notes and transcribe any recordings collected as soon as practical in a way in which all identifiable features will be removed. Pseudonyms will be used and no recordings will be published, therefore preserving confidentiality. Any original handwritten notes and any original digital files will be destroyed after anonymised records are created and the anonymised digital files stored on password protected devices. I may share the anonymised files with my personal tutor. I will be submitting an analysis of the data collected from the observation as part of my dissertation submitted as the end-of-module assessment. I also plan to present my findings to relevant audiences. Neither you as an individual, those observed or the setting will be identifiable in these reports and presentations.

What happens now?

After reading this information sheet, please review and complete the consent form. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw, even after having given initial consent, up until a week after the observation and data collected during the observation will be destroyed in this case.

What if I have other questions?

If you have any other questions about the study, I would be very happy to answer them. Please contact me on [deleted].

Appendix 3 – Information for Participants (parents/guardians)

Example of information for observations. Details of interviews & recording watching not included here but would be added.

E822 Information Letter for Participants (and parents/carers/guardians if aged under 18): Observations

I, [Zoe McIntosh] would like to observe an activity led by [Early Years Practitioner] in [preschool room on X date]. I am studying for a Masters in Education with the Open University, and this observation is part of my studies.

What is the aim and focus of this observation?

The aim of the observation is to gain a perspective on the activities taking place in [N/A for proposal]. This is to focus on an aspect of education, childhood and youth studies as part of a small-scale investigation for a Masters qualification. The investigation is designed to contribute to knowledge and practice in my chosen area of specialism and the data collected from this observation is designed to help answer *“How does non-verbal communication contribute to Early Years off-task dialogue in relation to communication development?”* and *“How does the Early Years practitioner influence multi-modal dialogue during pretend play?”*

].

Who is conducting the research and who is it for?

This interview is part of my studies on the Open University Masters module E822 ‘Multi-disciplinary dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth’. On this module I have an opportunity to design a small-scale investigation which will generate findings relevant to and of value to practice settings.

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Your child [delete as appropriate] has been invited because they will be present at the activity which has been chosen to be observed on [add date, time] at [add place]. The observation has been agreed with my tutor to be an important part of my small-scale investigation’s design and outline permission has been granted from senior leadership [Setting leader] and the adult/adults leading the activity to be observed.

If I take part in this research, what will be involved?

The observation will last for approximately [5 – 10 minutes] at the time and place indicated above is one which has been negotiated as convenient to those in the setting. I will be sitting at the back of the space or be invited to be present, but not participate unless invited to do so by the children, and will take notes about the activity. For those involved it will therefore not change the activity. If you are reading this as a parent/carer/guardian, please explain this information to your child, if they are below the age of 18. A withdrawal of consent/assent form has been provided, for which only participants (and parent/carers where relevant) who do NOT wish for their child/young person to be included in the observation, are asked to complete and return. If you are happy with all the questions asked on the withdrawal form and would answer YES, there is no need to return the form. If you want to notify us of your desire to withdraw from the observation, please return the form by [one week following the observation taking place]. This will allow the activity leader and I to adapt the observation to accommodate your wishes. A video recording will take place in order to capture non-verbal interaction, however an anonymised annotated transcription will be used for analysis and the recording not published to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Notes will be made during the observation to contribute to the analysis. More information can be provided about this process if you have further questions.

Will the data collected at the observation remain confidential?

Your participation will be treated in **strict confidence** in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). No personal information will be shared with anyone else. I will type up my observation notes (and transcribe any recordings as soon as practical in a way in which all identifiable features will be removed. The original handwritten notes (and any audio or video record will be destroyed and the anonymised digital files stored on password protected devices. I may share the anonymised files with my personal tutor. I will be submitting an analysis of the data collected from the observations as part of my dissertation submitted as the end-of-module assessment. I also plan to present my findings to relevant audiences. I can confirm that neither you as an individual nor the setting will be identifiable in any of these reports and presentations.

What happens now?

If you require more information about this observation, or do not want you/your child or young person to take part in the observation of this activity, please contact me on [deleted]

After reading this information sheet, After reading this information sheet, please review and decide whether you want to complete and return the withdrawal of consent/assent form. Your or your child/young person's participation is entirely voluntary.

Your or your child/young person's participation is entirely voluntary. It will not be possible to withdraw after the observation has started, although the activity leader has the opportunity to withdraw the record of the observation completely for up to a week after the observation and, in this case, all data collected during the observation would then be destroyed.

Appendix 4 – Reflective Evidence Table

PDP Audit & Reflections on my progress throughout E822 – please also see notes below table.	This is new to me	I have some idea about how to do this	I am confident in this area	I am confident and can explain to others how to work in this area
Personal skills				
1.1 Studying by distance learning in terms of accessing the various tools which allow me to engage with materials, my peers and tutors				X XX
1.2 Organising my study notes in order to refer back to them			X – pretty good but could be more organised. X- I need to get better at this for dissertation!	X – improvements made and I found I could find the notes I wanted easily.

1.3 Finding a work-life balance whilst I am studying		X – seems to have gone a bit astray recently – get back on it girl!	X – not bad but need to divide time more effectively this year X – I know how to do this, however external events meant my plans had to be adapted, but I had given myself flexibility in this so it worked reasonably well.	
Any other skill I would like to work on. – making better use of my time whilst studying.			X – focused time slots? X – do this!	X – I have found dedicating certain time to study and sitting in the same place each time has made a real difference to how productive my study time is.
Improving my pdp skills! PERSONAL TARGET F		X – getting better – need to enable more critical meta-reflection!	X – getting better at this, perhaps more structured targets would help progress? X- This table is a good start and I had in mind what I wanted to work on during my dissertation, but there are improvements that can be made moving forward.	
Academic skills				
2.1 Independently searching for and accessing academic publications ACADEMIC TARGET A		X – want to get better at recording of search terms, papers found etc. X – definitely need to figure this out!	X – significant improvements made with this, but I still need to improve my record keeping of what I have found where to streamline my search process.	
2.2 Independently reading academic publications with a critical perspective		X – objectivity and critical eye need developing!!	X – feel I am better at doing this, taking step back to see bigger picture and	X – With more experience I am able to pick out the key information

ACADEMIC TARGET			relating issues across literature.	and assumptions with an objective approach and feel more confident to do this automatically.
2.3 Critically analysing current themes and issues related to learning and teaching		X – improving... X -not confident in this yet but positive feedback from TMA02.	X – again with more experience and a critical eye I find this is becoming more natural.	
2.4 Applying knowledge and understanding of themes/issues from one context to another			X – quite good at this but need to remember to consider other perspectives X	X – I feel I am better able to link ideas from different contexts together and see the differences/issues.
2.5 Formulating an argument in relation to debates about issues related to learning and teaching, showing abilities to synthesise ideas ACADEMIC TARGET B		X – critically building solid argument, objectivity and all sides of argument, possible objections.	X – improving but see above box about all perspectives	x- I feel more confident in bringing ideas together to support a balanced argument -Tutor feedback on draft chapters reassures me I have made progress
2.6. Clearly communicating ideas through written text employing an academic writing style C			X – more concise – every word/sentence needs to count! X – always improving, will never be perfect!	X – it can still take time to reword and revise my writing but I am definitely able to present my ideas in a clearer way now.
2.7 Using references and cite source materials correctly			X – keep references organised as go along. Use mybib – correct harvard cite them right! X- tried Zotero, not got to grips with it yet	X – much happier with Harvard cite them right, and feel I am able to keep a record of them more methodically too.
Research skills				
3.1 Understanding approaches to the practice of applied research and ethical		X – more to learn on this with experience of	X – feel more confident in this, need to apply it to my topic x- still	

issues relating to research and enquiry RESEARCH TARGET E		doing it, theory is fine.	progressing, will feel more confident once I have done more actual research, not just a proposal at this level.	
3.2 Explaining the principles and processes entailed in carrying out a small-scale research enquiry		X – need to improve at applying theory to practical research X	X – again, improving my understanding but still would be supported through practical experience	
3.3 Interpreting, assessing and deploying research methods		X – ditto above, although I have done some research in previous study. X – will be hard doing EP not SSI but plan to go back and cover relevant parts of SSI materials too, when have chance!	X – I definitely have a better understanding of different methods and their positives and negatives, but actually carrying them out would cement this further.	
Application to professional practice				
4.1 Being able to articulate a personal perspective on learning in relation to learning and teaching			X – more concise and clarity in own ideas. X – still improving	X – I feel more certain in my views and able to express them having done such wide research on a topic I care about.
4.2 Critically reflecting on aspects of my own practice (as relevant to learning and teaching) PROFESSIONAL TARGET D			X – those that are relevant.. X – do do this even if not related to topic, being more reflective overall. X – still working on this, and my current practice is a different type of education, but the reflective process applies across the board.	

4.3 Being able to engage critically and creatively with debates relevant to the development of my professional thinking about issues relevant to learning and teaching		X – hopefully after gained better insight to key topics of interest.	X – getting there but more improvement needed.	
--	--	--	--	--

TARGETS set at start of E822 module for each area - personal, academic, research and professional. Progress noted throughout via coloured comments.

Activity 1.8

Yellow – Autumn/TMA01

I have improved at: seeing ideas in different contexts and applying theories to practice, better understanding of research paradigms but still needs work, better academic writing but again still needs work. (academic, research)

I still need to develop: my criticality, objective considerations and analysis, considering all viewpoints, not just arguing towards the point I want to make but rounded balanced arguments (academic)

Goals for the dissertation module: better understanding of ethics and research methods, more organised literature search process and documentation of search process, better balanced arguments and critical thinking, improved pdp process! (research, academic, personal)

Not sure I have a SMART goal....

Green – Spring/TMA02

See also are you on track checklist #1

Key skills to work on:

1. Lit search process, terms/databases, recording of what I have done.
2. Recording of useful/relevant literature, notes etc. (new dissertation notebook to help with this!)
3. Getting head around research design and methods that I will use in proposal – how answer RQS?
4. Organising own time better – seemed to have lapsed on this one recently!
5. Relating research/theoretical ideas to topical issues in early years – what are they (out of touch) and what are my ideas on these?

Pink – Dissertation Preparation and checkpoint – looking back over whole module.

Strengths:

- + Improvements made on process of literature searching, but still need to work on accurate and logical recording.
- + Academic writing skills have definitely advanced, and I feel more confident to be able to pick out key ideas, and synthesize information relevant to my topic and argument. Criticality is coming more easily too, the more I do it.
- + The feedback received for my TMAs and draft chapters was very positive and reassuring that I was on the right track, even with the changes in design and focus as the dissertation progressed. I am grateful for the support and
- + I feel I have developed a good understanding of current topical issues and through reading around the topic and related issues I am able to form my views and link them coherently to professional practice.

Weaknesses:

- Organisation of time still leaves room for improvement. Things external to study had a big impact on my time, so although I created a plan and afforded myself a degree of flexibility, things did not get done at a pace I would have liked. However, I feel I am now back on track to complete my dissertation on time, which is reassuring that I can adapt and recover when things don't go to plan!
- I would also like to actually undertake some practical research, whether on this topic or one related to my current work to further my understanding of research conceptualisation, ethical protocols and methods and analysis. I feel not having done research at this level of study may have held me back in my understanding of the range of issue that a researcher may face. I hope to progress to doctoral study in the future and to have the opportunity to carry out research at this level.