

**“THERE’S A COAT PEG WITH HIS NAME ON IT”:
INVESTIGATING THE TRAINING IMPLICATIONS TO
SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF PRE-SCHOOL
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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ABSTRACT

Set within an interpretive paradigm and influenced by the work of Ball (1990, 1994 & 2008), this study aims to critically examine how national “special educational needs” and “inclusion” policies in the United Kingdom are understood and translated from policy into practice, for a range of pre-school providers across one local authority. The research seeks to explore some of the benefits, challenges and key tensions surrounding “pre-school inclusion”; investigating current and potential training needs for practitioners working within pre-school settings.

Research into this area is timely, due to increasing national and local policy commitments towards improving the quality of early years provision for children and families; aiming to provide more professional development opportunities for early years practitioners, and facilitating the inclusion of a greater number of children into mainstream early educational and childcare settings. Though several studies have examined inclusion of statutory school-aged children of five years and over, very little research appears to have been undertaken into pre-school inclusion with three and four year-olds. Studies at the pre-school phase have all identified a need for further research.

Employing a case study approach, this research looks particularly at national and local policy surrounding early years training and pre-school inclusion for 3 and 4 year old children who have been identified as having special educational needs at 'Early Years Action Plus' (Code of Practice, DFES, 2001). The study examines parental experiences and views of childcare provision for their children with SEN. It then surveys the current and potential training needs of a range of pre-school and childcare providers, across a county with contrasting socio-economic features. The research reveals some of the complexities and dilemmas encountered when trying to achieve “effective” inclusion, leading to the construction and presentation of a research model to illustrate key findings; the reality being that there is much more to including a child with SEN than having “a coat peg with his name on it”.

KEY WORDS *educational policy, pre-school inclusion, special educational needs, parental experiences, practitioner perceptions, training needs*

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“Get on with your homework mum!”

and

“That’s a lot of words to write – do they all have to be different ones or can some be the same!”

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Advisory Centre for Education
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CDC	Child Development Centre
CIS	Children's Information Service
CRS	Congress Research Reports
CSIE	Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
DFE	Department for Education
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
DIIA	Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
DRC	Disability Rights Commission
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESN	Educationally Subnormal
EYDCP	Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
FIS	Family Information Service

IDP	Inclusion Development Programme
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
NAS	National Autistic Society
NASEN	National Association of Special Educational Needs
NCMA	National Childminding Association
NEG	Nursery Education Grant
NFER	National Federation for Educational Research
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

CHAPTER ONE: An Overview of the Study

Introduction

This study investigates how national policy; documents, reports and legislation in relation to “inclusion” and “special educational needs” (SEN) in the United Kingdom are translated into policies and practice at a more local level, in this instance through a case study in one local authority (LA). Situated mainly within an interpretive paradigm, the research seeks to explore meanings and interpretations of the concept of “inclusion”. A critical overview of literature assembles and examines some of the arguments surrounding SEN and pre-school inclusion, with key tensions highlighted. The intention is to describe and analyse some of the day-to-day realities, for parents of children with SEN and for those working within pre-school settings; exploring benefits and challenges associated with pre-school inclusion, and identifying current and potential training needs for practitioners. The term “parents” is used throughout this thesis to incorporate and represent all those parents and/or carers who have prime legal responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children with SEN.

At the time of this study, the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Audit Commission had manifested the British Government’s dedication to supporting earlier intervention, identification and inclusion of children with SEN (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003a, b & c; DFES, 2004). Many policies have been designed to promote good quality childcare, which is affordable and accessible to all families. There has also been an underlying political agenda encouraging parents to return to work, with a range of government grants and funded initiatives being offered to endorse early years provision across all socio-economical regions of the UK (DETR, 2000; CSIE, 2002; DFES, 2002; DFES, 2003b). As explored throughout this thesis, there appear to be tensions arising between these sometimes competing policy agendas. This research seeks to investigate the extent to which such dominant government policies in this area have become a reality; for parents considering “accessible, affordable” childcare options (DFES, 2003b), and for practitioners aiming to provide “quality”, effective early intervention, identification and inclusion (DFES, 2003a).

In addition to the early years education and childcare agenda, another dominant theme of government policy was an increased commitment to collaborative working with families (Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003b). 'Let Me Be Me' (Audit Commission, 2003), was designed to be an "improvement handbook" for services working with disabled children and their families. Research findings that influenced the production of the handbook suggested that families wanted more collaboration and "better coordination" between all support services, in order to enhance the "quality of their lives" (Audit Commission, 2003, p4). SureStart advocates "a strategic, holistic and child-focused approach" (DFES, 2003c, p24), with families and multi-agencies working collaboratively to identify children's needs early and plan appropriate intervention. This study examines some views of "collaboration", as experienced by parents and as interpreted by practitioners in one LA.

In order to improve inclusive provision in early years settings, SureStart aims to raise the levels of staff confidence and expertise:

'The starting point is increasing the confidence and capability of frontline services. Staff should have skills in identification, referral, working with other professionals and parents, and taking interventions that are appropriate and deliverable within the setting' (DFES, 2003c, p24).

To support this approach, LAs in England and Wales are required to provide teams of 'Area Special Educational Needs Coordinators' (Area SENCOs), delivering "appropriate training", which is designed to suit the varying needs of each pre-school setting (DFES, 2003a, p.2 & 9). Developing networks across the LA, the recommended ratio is for one Area SENCO to liaise with twenty non-maintained pre-school settings (DFES, 2003a, p.1). In this way, the intention is to provide specialist SEN support and guidance for all early years settings in receipt of the Nursery Education Grant (*registered, government funded childcare for each three and four year old*).

County W, the subject of this investigation, has a range of early years settings (or pre-school providers) for children under the statutory school age of five. These include both LA maintained and non-maintained settings; LA nursery schools and classes, non-maintained playgroups, private pre-schools, day nurseries and registered childminders.

In order to gain a wider picture of “inclusion”, it is important to consider international influences, which have had significant impact upon policy in the UK. For instance, in 1994, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations were part of a World Conference on Special Needs Education. Held in Salamanca in Spain, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) called upon all governments to endorse inclusive schooling and adopted the ‘Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education’ (UNESCO, 1994).

Governments were asked to regard inclusion as the norm, requiring all children to be “accommodated” in their neighbourhood schools, “regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions” (UNESCO, 1994, p.6). Two of the key recommendations for effective inclusion were to develop “early childhood care and education programmes” (UNESCO, 1994, p.33) and to ensure that teacher training addresses the provision of inclusive education, “taking into account the varied and often difficult conditions under which they serve” (UNESCO, 1994, p.28).

In order to encourage the development of international comparative studies and inclusive research data, UNESCO was also asked to “stimulate the academic community to do more research into inclusive education and disseminate the findings and research” (CSIE, 1994, p.2). On commencement of this study, though research was beginning to be carried out in the school-aged arena for children aged five and over (Garner, 2000 a&b; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanks, 2003), there appeared to be limited research at the pre-school phase (Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). This acted as further incentive for the “pre-school inclusion” focus of this thesis.

Whilst promoting inclusive practice, there was still an acknowledgement that some “special schools” would remain (DFEE, 1997; DFES, 2001). The British Government’s paper, ‘Excellence for All Children’ (DFEE, 1997) looked at the need for specialist provision to still be available for some children, particularly those who may be more vulnerable within a mainstream environment. The paper outlined that;

‘There are strong educational, as well as social and moral grounds for educating children with special educational needs with their peers. We aim to increase the level and quality of inclusion within mainstream schools, while protecting and enhancing specialist provision for those who need it’ (DFEE, 1997, p15).

Following on from the ‘Salamanca Statement’ (UNESCO, 1994), the British Government’s revised Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) produced SEN guidance for schools and early years settings. The Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) emphasises that most children will have their needs met inclusively within mainstream settings, though special school provision is still available for children with severe or complex needs (in consultation with the LA and parents). Though special school provision is not discussed in this study, as the focus is primarily upon inclusion in mainstream settings, it is worth noting that there are six “specialist nurseries” attached to Special Schools in the LA. Subject to parental consent and preference, some pre-school children with “profound”, “severe” or “significant” SEN may be offered places, following the LA ‘Specialist Nurseries Admissions Criteria’ (see Appendix 6). Similarly, those children might also attend their local mainstream settings.

Various studies have investigated inclusion of statutory school-aged children of five years and over (Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Garner, 2000 a&b; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanks, 2003). In 2001, Connor summarised some questions and concerns relating to inclusion of school-aged children with SEN, concluding that inclusion was often regarded as an “ideal” that;

‘has still not been matched by organised research into what constitutes effective practice, by training, and by resourcing’ (Connor, 2001, p.1).

Connor (2001) suggested that training should concentrate more upon helping schools and local authorities to recognise a child's differences; providing an appropriately targeted individual education programme, rather than focusing upon where this actually takes place. Gains (in Connor, 2001) noted that there should be "responsible" inclusion, where schools examine "what works best" (p.4). With schools frequently being measured and driven by their academic achievements, Connor's research implied that there is often less focus upon SEN, organisational and attitudinal ideas of inclusion. Perhaps this is due to academic measures being considered as higher level priorities for schools to focus upon, compared to other matters. As Garner (2000a, p.111) describes, this can lead to a "lack of readiness" to take on inclusion initiatives, particularly amongst newly qualified teachers.

Janko & Porter (1996), Tomko (1996), Odom *et al.* (2000) and Clough & Nutbrown (2004) have examined both the rationale and characteristics of inclusion within pre-school settings. Clough & Nutbrown (2004) looked at "multiple perspectives of preschool educators" in the four countries of the United Kingdom. There were found to be commonalities in ideas, experiences and concerns surrounding pre-school inclusion, but also a variety of ways in which different countries' inclusion policies were "made" into "meaningful realities" (p208);

'there is still much to learn about the ways in which various policies of UK countries are realised in practice and how practitioners' views are embodied in their setting-based work. This is a task for future research' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004, p.208).

As in Connor's findings (2001), Clough and Nutbrown's survey (2004) also raised common concerns that, even in the early years, too much emphasis is often placed on academic achievement, at the expense of children's emotional well-being. The SureStart initiative (DFES, 2003a & c) was recognised (in Clough & Nutbrown, 2004) as a positive step forward, in that it opened up opportunities for more "vulnerable" children and families who might experience multiple difficulties.

Whilst examining the changing cultures and attitudes surrounding inclusion of children with varied SEN, children with “challenging behaviour” were frequently described by early years practitioners as the most difficult to include in childcare settings (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Although early years educators (in Clough and Nutbrown, 2004) were broadly supportive of inclusive practice, it was recognised that successful inclusion depended upon the capacity to meet a range of needs; for instance in terms of recognising family and community needs, providing an appropriate learning environment, staffing and training. Issues regarding the “readiness” (Garner, 2000a, p.111) and capacity of settings to provide effective inclusive practice (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004) are debated further in this research thesis, especially in light of more recent debate surrounding inclusion, behaviour and “exclusion” (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005).

Presenting the Case Study

In this study, some of the realities and practicalities of pre-school 'inclusion' are explored within one local authority (LA), across a county with contrasting socio-economic features. There is an analysis of national and local policy documentation (LA 2001-2004, see Appendix 9). Then following an examination of parental experiences and views of childcare provision for their children with special educational needs (SEN), the study explores the perceived training needs of a range of pre-school providers.

Having managed a pre-school SEN Service within the LA for three years, it was felt that the time had come to investigate how the work of the Area SENCos was impacting upon inclusive practice. Initial questions were framed, which were being reflected in the views of other interested parties, such as LA Managers with Early Years and SEN monitoring responsibilities. How effectively were children with SEN being included in their local pre-schools and to what extent was SEN training influencing the quality of provision in settings? These queries were major research drivers, which helped to formulate the primary research questions (p.14).

Aspects being raised were also reflecting some of the key literature debates. For instance, as in Clough & Nutbrown (2004), it was queried whether the LA's SEN training "packages" were assisting pre-school providers to effectively identify and support young children with SEN, preventing some potential inclusion difficulties later on when children are in full-time school.

When examining a collaborative approach, parental views of inclusive practice are considered vital to this research enquiry (Halliday, 1989; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003), as are the experiences and opinions of pre-school providers across the LA. The pre-school providers are often the "frontline services" who require "appropriate training" to work inclusively with children with SEN and their families (DFES, 2003a, p.2 & 9), so what should this training look like and how accessible is it? These are key issues explored within the context of the study.

In September 2001, national Early Years and SEN initiatives were put forward, promoting professional development opportunities for childcare providers (DFES, 2003a). In the LA of this study, the Area SENCOs were asked to devise an Early Years SEN training programme for the county, in liaison with other agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service, Speech and Language Therapy and Parent Partnership. The training "package" was designed to incorporate legislative SEN and inclusion material (such as the Code of Practice, DFES, 2001 and the Disability Discrimination Act, DRC, 2001), but also aimed to introduce practical ideas and strategies to support settings in their identification and inclusion of pre-school children with SEN. It was felt that guidance was particularly relevant at the 'Early Years Action' stage of the Code of Practice, with the aim of,

'preventative work to ensure that children's special educational needs are identified as quickly as possible and that early action is taken to meet those needs' (DFES, 2001, preface).

In the first years of delivering SEN training (2001 to 2003), pre-school providers with SEN coordinating responsibilities within their settings (SENCOs and/or managers), often came to training courses by themselves and described feeling nervous beforehand. One attendee from a small playgroup admitted,

“This is the first SEN course I’ve been on. I was really nervous. I didn’t want to feel silly. I sat up in bed until two o’clock this morning reading through the Code of Practice with a highlighter pen – highlighting all the bits I didn’t understand” (Code of Practice Training, District S 2002).

Through written comments on course evaluation sheets, many people expressed appreciation when legislative inclusion material was simplified and explained in more “user-friendly” terminology; especially when summarised course booklets were provided to take away. Practical ideas and strategies to support inclusion were also enjoyed. As one person wrote,

“It’s not just children that learn through play!” (Supporting Speech and Language Difficulties Course, District N 2002).

Course registers and written evaluation sheets can provide a basic indication of names and numbers attending courses and can summarise how attendees perceive each course “on the day”. In response, the Area SENCOs can often make adaptations and improvements to the content and delivery of future courses. However, to begin to measure the immediate and longer term impact of training upon pre-school providers and settings, it was felt that further analytical research was needed. Examples of questions needing to be explored included: Does their attendance at SEN courses enhance their inclusive practice? In order to further support inclusion, what additional training requirements and SEN issues need to be addressed?

Prior to commencing this research, a parent telephoned me to complain, saying that she felt that her local school “did not want” her son in their nursery class (*Parent, anon*). She had apparently explained to the Head Teacher that her child had SEN and would need help to settle into the school routine and environment, but had felt discouraged from pursuing a place at the school.

During further telephone discussions about “inclusion”, the Head Teacher commented that;

“Of course we are inclusive here... there’s a coat peg with his name on it” (*Head Teacher, anon. Sept 2003*).

This highlighted the importance of SEN training and awareness-raising for managers and practitioners, particularly regarding collaboration with parents and “readiness” to include children effectively (Garner, 2000a, p.111). It also prompted further investigation into how varied perceptions of “inclusion” might be reflected in pre-school practice. As in Clough and Nutbrown (2004, p.208), the question that needs to be asked is how can training ensure that inclusive policies are made into “meaningful realities” for pre-school providers in this LA?

Theoretical Framework

This study considers the key areas of theory and related research that have helped to form much of the current thinking and understanding of “SEN” and “inclusion”. The review of literature includes the historical recommendations of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and the DES Education Acts of 1981, 1989 and 1993; leading on to discuss more recent developments, such as those articulated in the ‘SEN Code of Practice’ (DFES, 2001), ‘Every Child Matters’ (DFES, 2003b) and ‘Removing Barriers to Achievement’ (DFES, 2004).

Research data is collated from a macro to micro level (as in Layder, 1993). It was felt that an incremental approach was needed, to study the interpretations and implications of “inclusion” at varying stages from policy initiation to pre-school implementation. Considering Ball’s “policy into practice” pathway (Ball, 1990 & 1994), the study aims to examine the shifting models of SEN and educational provision and how (if at all) these have influenced inclusive practice and training in pre-school settings today. As Ball writes,

‘The general effects of policies become evident when specific aspects of change and specific sets of responses (within practice) are related together’ (Ball, 1994, p24).

Ball believes that policies are the “operational statements of values”, where such values are greatly influenced by those in “authority” (Ball, 1990, p.3); being closely related to the social context in which they emerge, with external influences and interests playing a part in their construction and delivery. Ball raises the issue as to “whose values are validated in policy, and whose are not?” (Ball, 1990, p.3). For instance, Ball attempts to track the differing ideological, political and economic constraints and influences upon policy-making. Through mainly qualitative analysis of policy texts, interviews with policy makers and educational practitioners, Ball seeks to;

‘capture the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism in the policy process’ (Ball, 1990, p.9).

Methodological debates surrounding such forms of “interpretive” research (Yin, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Pring, 2000) are discussed further in Chapter Three.

More recently, Mainardes and Marcondes undertook an interview with Ball at an Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2007). Questions were asked in relation to “the policy cycle approach”, to which Ball clarified his approach as being a “method”;

‘it is not about explaining policy. It is a way of researching and theorizing policy It’s not meant to be a description of policy; it’s a way of thinking about policy and how policy gets “done”’ (Ball, at BERA, 2007).

Ball explained his view that policy could not be translated directly into practice in a straightforward “linear” way; but was a very complex and challenging process involving “a shift between modes”;

‘The primary mode of policy is textual, policies are written down, whereas practice is action, it involves doing things. So, the person who enacts policy has to translate between these modes, between the mode of the written word into the mode of action, and that's a very challenging thing to do’ (Ball, at BERA, 2007).

Ball likened the process of putting policy into practice to the “enactment” of a play, where;

‘you have the words in the text of the play, but the reality of the play only comes alive when somebody enacts them, and that’s a process of interpretation and creativity’ (Ball, at BERA, 2007).

In this thesis, there is an examination of such underpinning “values” associated with policies surrounding pre-school inclusion, together with an exploration of influences and interests that impact upon both policy and practice at a national and local level within one LA. Indeed, Ball’s “method” (BERA, 2007) is used to help explore key themes and debates throughout the study. As Ball would suggest, when examining how policy translates into practice, it felt important to capture “what it is that individuals and groups actually do and say in the arenas of influence in which they move” (Ball, 1990, p.9); in this case, examining the perceptions and experiences of parents and pre-school practitioners in relation to “inclusive” practice.

Definitions of “SEN” are sometimes used to determine appropriate provision and support for children. As defined in The Code of Practice (DFES, 2001);

‘Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them’ (DFES, 2001, p6).

The Code outlines what constitutes a ‘learning difficulty’ and ‘special educational provision’ (DFES, 2001, p6). However, there is also an acknowledgement that most children ‘experience rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth’ during their early years (aged three to five), and encourages ‘a flexible response to the particular needs of the children’ (DFES, 2001, p32). Considering Ball’s approach (1990 & 1994), a document such as the Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) would seem to be a key example of “text”, when determining the nature of “the play” (Ball, at BERA, 2007).

In the LA that is the focus of this study, Area SENCos support over 200 pre-school and childcare settings; the majority of whom are located with the non-maintained sector. In addition to providing training relating to SEN and inclusion, each Area SENCo's role includes casework support for the inclusion of individual three and four year old children who have been identified as having special educational needs at "Early Years Action Plus" (DFES, 2001). This is when pre-school providers need 'advice or support from outside specialists', with 'alternative interventions that are additional or different strategies to those already being provided for the child on a day-to-day basis' (as in the SEN Code of Practice, DFES, 2001, p202).

Many of the pre-school providers (staff working within pre-school settings) are in the early stages of their training and professional development, particularly in relation to SEN and inclusion. Most are not qualified teachers and are studying part-time, for example for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), whilst continuing to work in their settings. Experience and age-ranges of pre-school providers varies from sixteen year-old school leavers, to those with over twenty years of childcare experience (including parenting of their own children). When analysing training needs, the variability of expertise and experience amongst practitioners is a key area of debate within this study (Abbott & Pugh, 1998; Eborall, 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Rolfe *et al.*, 2003; Burke, 2004; Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Frances, 2005; Trade Union Congress, TUC, 2006; Foster, 2007).

"Inclusion" has been defined in varying ways (Goffman, 1968; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Hornby, 1996; Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a&b; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanko, 2003; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Differing models of inclusion are explored further in Chapter Two. For the initial purposes of this study, the SureStart (DFES, 2003a, p.1) operational model of "pre-school inclusion" is considered. This concentrates upon the wider availability of free early education provision; combined with an effective support programme of early intervention and identification of needs. Whilst removing any "barriers" to learning, this view of inclusion is felt to open up opportunities for all young children; enabling them to reach their full potential, educationally and socially. Perceptions of such "barriers" are discussed throughout this thesis.

Though this interpretation of pre-school inclusion is a starting point, other definitions arise in light of further research. When considering a theoretical framework and beginning to seek terminology definitions, some key research aims and questions are identified; structuring the process for investigations. These are outlined below.

Research Aims

In addition to an ongoing review of national and local policy documentation, the case study sets out to do three things. Each aim interrelates to contribute to the overriding “pre-school inclusion” focus of the research:

- Firstly, it aims to explore the experiences and views of parents/carers, when considering childcare provision for their children with SEN.
- Secondly (and as the main research focus), it aims to examine current and potential training needs as perceived by practitioners and managers from a range of pre-school and childcare settings. These settings vary from large urban local authority nurseries, to small rural non-maintained playgroups.
- Ultimately, it is hoped that a combination of these elements, will begin to establish a framework for analysis of inclusive practice for pre-school practitioners working with young children within a range of SEN and from differing socio-economic areas of a county.

Research Questions

The overall aims of the research have influenced the construction of the questions for this study. Examining the changing policy to practice context of inclusion, the research questions have arisen from two sources; the literature reviewed, and the experiences of the researcher as an “insider” (Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003; Silverman, 2005). These are discussed in later chapters. Relating to both national and local “inclusion” policies, the following research questions are identified;

- How, if at all, are children, parents and pre-school providers benefiting from the increased early intervention and support from the LA and Area SENCos?
- What aspects of pre-school SEN & inclusion training opportunities can be improved or developed further?
- How can practitioners and managers in settings become empowered to be more inclusive; self-evaluating their individual training needs, each within their own unique set of circumstances?

Proposed Methodology

This research is situated within an interpretive paradigm. As in Robson (1993), the enquiry is “exploratory” and “descriptive”, seeking meanings and interpretations from **stakeholders**. For this study, the **stakeholders** include **parents** of pre-school children with SEN and **pre-school providers** from within one LA.

Using an approach similar to that of Ball (1990 & 1994), the research sequence follows a “policy through to practice” investigation; **exploring** interpretations of inclusion (and inclusion policies) and **describing** some of the background information and practical realities experienced by pre-school providers in one LA. As in Ball (1990 & 1994), the study looks at the macro elements of policy influences (such as SureStart, DFES, 2003a), cascading through to micro elements of policy in practice (Area SENCos delivering training in pre-school settings across one LA). This is outlined further in Chapter Three, when methodology is described in more detail.

Case study research raises questions about validity and reliability (Yin, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000) and debates about such matters are picked up later in this study. It is also recognised that there are particular difficulties in generalising from the findings of a small-scale study (Powney & Watts, 1987; Bryman, 1988; Yin, 1994; Silverman, 2005), which could be described as unique to the particular sample, situation and circumstances of one LA (see Chapter Three). However, it is hoped that research findings will be of value to others considering similar issues surrounding pre-school inclusion.

As an “insider” carrying out research (within and sponsored by the LA), it is also acknowledged that careful consideration needs to be given to enhance the legitimacy and trustworthiness of findings (as in Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003). This is considered further in Chapter Three. It could be asked, “Does the LA steer the aims of the researcher, or can the researcher realistically influence the future policy and practice of the LA?” It is hoped that this study can provide a two-way learning process; with mutual deliberation and informed judgements, based on both current knowledge and the outcomes of research findings. The importance of this two-way collaborative approach features significantly throughout the study.

A mixed methodology is used, with questionnaires to survey wider issues across the LA (mainly quantitative in design), followed up by a smaller sample of qualitative interviews to explore research questions in more depth. In this way, the research follows what Powney and Watts refer to as a,

‘flexible framework, where broad questions are defined and tentative hypotheses grow from data’ (Powney & Watts, 1987, p.2).

In Summary

It could be argued that the success of locally-based pre-school initiatives depends, at least partially, on how the term “inclusion” is defined and perceived by all those involved. By examining the views of both parents and pre-school providers, it is hoped that this study begins to offer an insight into different perceptions of inclusion, with the initial research findings forming a platform for further research. Chapter Two presents a critical overview of literature surrounding SEN and pre-school inclusion. During wider examination of background literature, the arguments surrounding inclusion and the training implications for practitioners are collated and expanded, as key benefits and challenges are highlighted and critically reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO: A Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter explores the emergence of “special educational needs” and “inclusion”, particularly in the pre-school and childcare arena. Reviewing both historical and more recent literature, the key issues are drawn from influential legislation, policy and guidance documents, which have attempted to drive the “inclusion” agenda forwards. Reports and research studies are examined, raising some of the critical debates around SEN and inclusion at each point in time along the continuum.

These key issues and debates will include whether labelling and assessment processes have influenced the allocation of resources for children and families. Also, collaboration with professionals and families are explored over time; reviewing the shifting balance of involvement, rights and influences upon decision-making for SEN provision. Ultimately, when focusing upon pre-school inclusion, the review of literature examines the “policy into practice” implications of early identification and intervention, and what this means in practical terms for local authorities and pre-school providers.

An overview

The chapter begins with a critical overview of literature surrounding SEN and pre-school inclusion. Historical legislation, reports and policy documents are firstly explored; identifying several government educational policies and acts such as Plowden (DES, 1967), Warnock (DES, 1978) and the 1981 Education Act, which have influenced a gradual move from segregated provision for “handicapped” children (Potts, 1983), towards a model of “integration” (DES, 1978). Main debates at the time relate to assessment and labelling procedures, partnerships with professionals and parents, together with emerging implications for provision for children under the age of five (Newell & Potts, 1984).

Looking then at influential documents from 1994 onwards, when the concept of “inclusion” became a focus for international and national government agendas (UNESCO, 1994; DFES, 2001; DFES, 2004), there was an identified need for better coordination and collaboration between services and families in order to improve provision for children with “special educational needs” as early as possible.

Early years initiatives became priorities for Local Authorities; with SureStart (DFES, 2003a) emphasising the need for accessible, affordable childcare, and training needs identified for pre-school practitioners in order to provide earlier identification and intervention for children with SEN. This study examines how national and local policies have sought to remove “barriers to achievement” (DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2004); increasing childcare opportunities for families, especially children with SEN and families from all socio-economic backgrounds. For example, LAs across the UK have been urged to ensure that there are accessible, free childcare places for all three year olds, whilst simultaneously expanding the professional development opportunities for all pre-school practitioners in order to improve their early years’ practice (DFES, 2003a & c). Reflecting upon the increasing ways in which such government policies have aimed to “reform” educational services over recent decades, Ball (2008) describes the SureStart approach as;

‘The cornerstone of the government’s drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion’ (Ball, 2008, p.129)

Some of the political and ideological influences upon “inclusion” are discussed further throughout this study, particularly in Chapters Six and Seven. Additionally, during this review of literature and through analysis of case study findings (chapters four, five and six), this thesis seeks to identify what “barriers” exist for parents and practitioners (DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2004) when attempting to both access and provide “inclusive” pre-school experiences for children with SEN.

To give a flavour of the “inclusion” debate, there is an examination of literature in the decade preceding the commencement of this research and during the time of the compilation of the thesis. Discussions incorporate some of the literature surrounding “inclusion” for school-aged children (Hornby, 1996; Garner, 2000 a & b; Connor, 2001, Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanco, 2003) as well as studies into pre-school provision (Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Issues arise in relation to opportunity, choice and human rights for families and children; examining the ethos and attitude of educational and childcare providers. Some writers reflect upon previous legislation, policy and guidance (Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Tutt, 2002), and consider practice that could be described as “anti-inclusional” or “exclusionary”.

In order to complete the literature review, it was felt important to consider some of the most recent policy influences arising towards the end of this period of research. Therefore, the chapter concludes by briefly outlining some of the government initiatives which have come into effect during the latter stages of undertaking this case study (DFES, 2006; DCSF, 2008; NFER, 2008).

As influenced by Ball’s “policy to practice” trajectory (Ball, 1990 & 1994), this review of literature seeks to provide a shifting overview of inclusion policy, leading towards an examination of pre-school inclusive practice today. The concept and interpretation of “inclusion” has emerged and altered over the years with legislative changes as well as other influences, such as changes in the use of terms like “handicap” and “special educational needs”, “partnership” and “collaboration”. It could be asked whether legislation is a reflection of society or a catalyst for change, or indeed a blend of both. Over time, as policy terminology changes and “new” ideologies emerge (Ball, 2008); how much have ideas and attitudes actually altered surrounding “SEN” and “inclusion”? Are there some underlying themes, which have remained constant throughout? An attempt is made to reflect on these important issues throughout the dissertation.

Historical Issues

Historically in the UK, educational provision for pre-school children with SEN has gradually emerged and developed. This has grown from little or no early years provision in the years preceding the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), towards wide availability of free early education provision, early intervention and identification of needs (DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a & b; DFES, 2004). Similarly, research literature reveals that attitudes towards parental involvement and collaborative working with families have also varied over time (Halliday, 1989; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003). For example “parental partnership” has ranged from parents receiving “advice” and “counselling” from professionals (DES, 1967) towards more active, “collaborative” involvement in decision-making about service provision for their children (Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2004). There now follows a critical overview of some of the key areas of policy, theory and related research that was written during those periods, which has helped to inform much of the current thinking and understanding of “SEN” and “inclusion”.

Pre-Warnock

In the years leading up to the 1960s and 70s, differentiated provision was arranged for those children deemed to be “handicapped”, with it being largely seen as the responsibility of health and medical organisations rather than education authorities. As the dominant discourse of the time, Potts (1983) referred to this arrangement as a “medical model of handicap”, where it was suggested by doctors that disabled people were categorised and treated as “sick” or “diseased” (p.181).

Corbett (1996) suggested that those with severe or profound disabilities were often labelled as abnormal, institutionalised and treated as inferior human beings. Hegarty et al wrote that,

'There were in effect two separate systems running in parallel. Special schools catered for the more seriously handicapped pupils, while regular schools provided for the “non-handicapped” ' (Hegarty *et al.*, 1994, p.83).

The 1944 Education Act (DES, 1944) required each Local Education Authority (LEA) to make provisions for children with any “disability of mind or body”, by providing “treatment”. The term “treatment” referred to “education by special methods appropriate to the child’s handicap” (Phtiaka, 1997, p.8). As educational decision-making related purely to the “handicap” of the child and was usually left to medical professionals, educational needs tended to be conceptualised in terms of disablement using medical criteria or categories (Tomlinson, 1982; Potts, 1983).

Consequently, eleven categories of handicap were then identified in “The Handicapped Pupils and School Health Regulations” (Ministry of Education, 1945): blind; partially sighted; deaf; partially hearing; delicate; diabetic; educationally subnormal; epileptic; maladjusted; physically handicapped; those suffering from speech defects. After considering the medically defined severity of a child’s “handicap”, the LEA was then required to provide special educational “treatment”. “Treatment” was usually provided in special schools, sometimes in mainstream schools; but also at times in hospitals or other institutions, with health professionals taking the lead rather than teachers. For example, Tomlinson (1982) described how some children categorised as “educationally subnormal”, were then referred to mental health authorities, because it was believed that their “low grade” educational levels meant they “could not be educated” in a special school (p.60).

Wolfendale (1993a), Galloway *et al.* (1994) and Hegarty *et al.* (1994) pointed out that the categories of handicap outlined by the 1944 Education Act and subsequently defined by the ‘Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service Regulations’ (1945) were often used when decisions were being made about the allocation of educational resources to children. Hegarty *et al.* (1994) described a growing dissatisfaction at the time, with an increasing process of categorisation and labelling;

‘it ignored individual differences, social backgrounds and developmental stages.... problems arose with the placement of multiply handicapped pupils who did not fit into one category’ (Hegarty *et al.*, 1994, p.79).

Throughout this study, there is an examination of whether categorisation and labelling is an ongoing occurrence, still determining the provision of services for individual children today (Chapters Four and Six). Later in this chapter the debate continues as to whether “labelling” ensures that a child’s difficulties are effectively supported and resourced (Wolfendale, 1993a; Allan, 1996), or whether this leads to a child becoming stigmatised due to his/her differences to other children (Lewis, 1995).

“Partnership” working

Prior to the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), it was noted that legislation was based on a principle of “partnership” between central government, local authorities, religious authorities, governing bodies, teachers and parents (Stacey, 1991; Fabian, 1996). However, Stacey pointed out that although all members of the “partnership” were supposedly working together to support children and their education, “they neither necessarily had the same priorities nor indeed always knew about each other’s responsibilities” (Stacey, 1991, p.28). The differing priorities of parents and multi-professional agencies are explored further as this chapter progresses.

Because it was often the medical, rather than educational professionals who were more significantly involved in decision-making about children, Galloway *et al.* (1994) suggested that parents often felt uninvolved in assessment procedures in that they,

‘...often lacked the knowledge and vocabulary for arguing their views with professionals’ (Galloway *et al.*, 1994, p.67).

The Plowden Report (DES, 1967) was a government inquiry which appeared to acknowledge the important role which parents could play alongside professionals in successfully educating their children, with research showing that parents’ attitudes strongly influenced their children’s progress in school. One chapter entitled “Participation by Parents” recommended that professionals work more closely with parents;

‘one of the essentials for educational advance is a closer partnership between the two parties to every child’s education’ (DES, 1967, p.37).

Elsewhere in the Plowden Report (DES, 1967, Chapter 21), there were particular recommendations for parental involvement with "handicapped" children in schools, though there was no acknowledgement of pre-school experience at this stage. Advocating "teamwork" between everyone concerned with a disabled child; the emphasis of the report was upon a continuous assessment process, with professionals offering "advice" and "counselling" for parents to learn to cope with their distress and anxieties (DES, 1967, p.298 & 299).

However, there was little recommendation as to what form the "advice" and "counselling" should take. Interpretations of "partnership" and "parental involvement" appeared to vary greatly in schools during the 1970s and 80s; from encouraging parent participation in fund-raising and social events, to parents taking part in management and educational decision-making processes (Tizard *et al.*, 1981). Plowden (DES, 1967) suggested a minimum requirement of parental involvement; to include a welcome for new pupils and their parents (upon admission to the school), meetings with the teachers, open days, production of a school booklet/prospectus and annual reports for parents. Nevertheless, problems with parental involvement were anticipated, with the recognition that,

'Progress will not be easy. There are obstacles on both sides' (DES, 1967, p.37).

Several writers considered some of the potential "obstacles" to "partnership" working with parents (Tough, 1977; Tizard *et al.*, 1981; Calliste, 1993; Galloway *et al.*, 1994). As Galloway *et al.* (1994) pointed out, if parents and professionals did not have a shared understanding of the language being used in discussions, this could lead to misinterpretation of information. Tizard *et al.* (1981) also raised the possibility of a large gap existing between the "roles" of professionals and parents (p.99), suggesting that concerns might exist about encroachment upon each other's territory, with potentially differing (and separate) expectations and skills; the teacher's "role" being responsible for children in the classroom, and the parent's role being responsible for children at home.

For example, Tizard *et al.* (1981) felt that “disciplinary methods” may differ, as might levels of confidence when using skills in different environments;

‘A mother who can confidently help her children to make jam tarts at home will not necessarily feel this confidence when given the same task inside the classroom’ (Tizard *et al.*, 1981)

Calliste (1993) referred to the term "professional paranoia" to describe the fear which some educational professionals might have experienced with regard to an increased parental role in schools. Tough (1977) shared concerns about inviting parents into classrooms. She cautioned that,

'... bringing unpaid, untrained help into schools has its problems, and we would not want to give children experiences that were not appropriate and valuable' (Tough, 1977, p.147).

Stacey noted that concern amongst some educational professionals at the time seemed to be that parents should not "run the schools" (Stacey, 1991, p.18). Calliste (1993) recalled the increase in parental involvement in the years following Plowden (DES, 1967) and described the fact that schools were no longer regarded by parents as "forbidding" or "authoritarian". Yet the parental opinions expressed by some writers (such as Fox, in Calliste, 1993), would suggest that parents were still very dissatisfied with their involvement with professionals:

'... They won't accept what I have to say. That's what people in authority are like' (in Calliste, 1993, p.78).

It seemed that parents often believed that their opinions and viewpoints were disregarded by professionals, or considered to be of lesser importance than those of the professionals themselves. Though Plowden (DES, 1967) had promoted “teamwork” (p.298), it appeared that parents did not always feel regarded as important “team members” when decisions were being made about their children.

The Warnock Report

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was set up specifically to review and evaluate the provision for "handicapped children and young people". Overall, it was estimated that as many as 20 per cent of children might experience, at some time during their schooling, educational needs for which some additional provision might be necessary (DES, 1978). However, Warnock acknowledged that children with special educational needs occupy different points on a continuum, ranging from minor and temporary difficulties, to severe and long-lasting. Putting the issue of "integration" onto a national agenda for the first time (placing disabled children alongside their peers in "ordinary" schools), Warnock still envisaged that some disabled children (approximately 2 per cent) would always attend special school (DES, 1978).

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL, 1994) and Hegarty *et al.* (1994) described how the Warnock Report began to refer to individual needs and "special educational needs", rather than categories of handicap. This again, was acknowledging the move from a medically-led assessment, to more of an educational assessment of learning needs.

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) advocated a "parental partnership" with professionals, recommending parental involvement in the identification of their children's needs at the earliest pre-school stages. However, some writers (Newell & Potts, 1984; Stacey, 1991; Calliste, 1993; Galloway *et al.*, 1994), proposed that Warnock's definition of such a partnership was unclear and that the implication of "equality" within the partnership was unintentional.

Indeed, Warnock (1985) expressed her own concerns about this when she reflected upon the contents of her 1978 Report;

'... in educational matters, parents cannot be the equal to teachers if teachers are to be regarded as true professionals ... It is a question of collaboration not partnership' (in Galloway *et al.*, 1994, p.69).

At the time of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), as in previous decades, Cyster *et al.* (in Stacey, 1991) wrote that parents were still seen by many teachers as,

‘an additional and avoidable complication in an already demanding life’
(p.19).

It was felt that if too much time was devoted to fostering relationships with parents, this detracted from time needed to prepare lessons and teach the children in the classroom (Tizard *et al.*, 1981; Stacey, 1991).

Emerging SEN Provision for Under Five’s

Newell and Potts (1984) welcomed the way in which the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) prioritised an increased and improved provision for under-five's with special needs. However, they expressed concern about whether these recommendations were actually being met. They acknowledged an increase in individual support and tuition which was provided by home-visiting professionals, but noted that nursery and day care provision was not meeting the necessary demand for children with special educational needs. For instance, there were very few funded placements specifically for pre-school children with SEN.

Chazan *et al.* (1980) surveyed educational provision for “handicapped” children under five and examined problems faced by parents. It was recognised that although more “handicapped” children were able to attend local nurseries and playgroups, very little research had been carried out into policy and practice, nor into how much special educational provision was required and the “nature” of such pre-school provision (p.3).

Using the example of how children with severe hearing loss made better progress in language development if hearing loss was identified and supported early, Chazan *et al.* (1980) found,

‘a strong case for taking action as soon as a handicap is discovered’
(Chazan *et al.*, 1980, p.3).

Advocating a “team approach” to the assessment and review of a child’s special needs, Chazan *et al.* (1980) advised involving parents and multi-professionals (including health visitors, consultants, therapists, psychologists, teachers, social services and playgroup leaders). They concluded that there was a need for an “explosion of training” and “a degree of attitude changing”, in order to move towards recognising the “benefits of shared expertise”, as well as specific training for their own roles (p.218 & 219). This proves interesting in light of more recent government guidance that has been written over twenty years later, when the need for early years training and collaboration continues to be highlighted as a primary concern (DFES, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003a, b & c).

The 1981 Education Act

As summarised by a number of writers (Wragg & Partington, 1989; Calliste, 1993; Wolfendale, 1993b; Hornby, 1996), the 1981 Education Act followed on from the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) in providing the legislative structure for the development of special educational needs provision. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) had advised that parents should be involved in the identification of the needs of their children from the earliest stages and this was endorsed in the assessment arrangements made through the 1981 Education Act (DES, 1981).

In a statutory assessment under the 1981 Act, there was an increased emphasis on consultation with parents at all stages, on clarity of communication with parents and on the completion of formal procedures within a six month period. The 1981 Act advocated the extension of parental rights, to include involvement in referrals, assessments, contributing to the special needs statements, decisions over types of placement and provision and the review processes.

It was suggested that, by legislating parental participation, the 1981 Act was positively encouraging the previously undervalued role of parents in educating their children (Newell & Potts, 1984; Au & Pumfrey, 1993; Wolfendale, 1993a).

However, as with the previous government legislation and recommendations mentioned earlier in this chapter, several writers (Bastiani, 1989; Webster *et al.*, 1990; Rabinowicz, 1992; Calliste, 1993) still questioned whether increased parental involvement actually occurred or was actively encouraged by many professionals in practice. Bastiani (1989) described home-school relationships as "problematic", with "underlying tensions" such as differences in parent/teacher anxieties about the children, commenting that,

'Good intentions are not a guarantee of effective practice' (Bastiani, 1989, p.8).

Tomlinson (1986) and the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE, 1982) suggested that parents were unsure and unfamiliar with assessment procedures. ACE (1982) recorded parental opinions about the 1981 Act, stating that parents of children with special educational needs wanted their own roles in assessment to be "valued", "active" and "integral" (p.20). To fulfill this type of role, ACE (1982) described how parents expressed a desire for more explanatory details about the process and aims of assessment procedures - before, during and afterwards;

'Ideally "assessment" should be a term which covers an ongoing and comprehensive process throughout our children's lives' (ACE, 1982, p.20).

Again the need for clarity and consistency of communication was being identified, with a shared common language being used by everyone concerned. Although the 1981 Education Act (DES, 1981) emphasised the importance of assessment, some writers (Tomlinson, 1986; Gross, 1993; Wolfendale, 1993a; Galloway *et al.*, 1994) suggested that Warnock's abandonment of categories (DES, 1978) made this task very difficult, as it became difficult to allocate appropriate resources and support to children effectively. In later years Warnock reflected upon this decision and the Code of Practice documents (DFES, 1994; DFES, 2001) and began once more to describe SEN "in categories".

Tomlinson (1986) noted that the 1981 Act's assessment involved Local Education Authorities making and maintaining statements in order to arrange provision for children with special educational needs, but;

'Much of the Act was concerned with assessment, - how to separate out and identify what quickly became the "SEN child".... It had nothing to say about children whose learning difficulties or special educational needs did not require such a statement' (Tomlinson, 1986, p.52).

Galloway *et al.* (1993), Gross (1993) and Russell (in Wolfendale, 1997) suggested that funding problems were created, because the term "special educational needs" had been extended to include up to 20 per cent of children rather than the previous 2 per cent,

'It ... aroused parental expectations which LEAs were unable to meet and which the government had no intention of resourcing' (Galloway *et al.*, 1994, p.34).

Russell (in Wolfendale, 1997) felt that the abandonment of categories meant that the needs of many children were left underrepresented and unsupported. Concerns were raised at the time (Gross, 1993; Galloway *et al.*, 1994; Corbett, 1996) about generalisation of attitudes and provision, which the label of "special educational needs" might create.

Labelling processes: the detrimental effects upon children and their families

In the years following the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) various issues arose in relation to labelling children with “SEN”. Galloway *et al.* (1994) suggested that special education carries with it many negative categories, labels and stereotypical images. Moreover, Gross (1993) and Corbett (1996) suggested that special needs terminology should be abandoned altogether, with Gross (1993) emphasising that the most significant implication for educational provision should be the concern for provision for needs, rather than an obsession with labelling the children concerned.

Premature “labelling” was sometimes said to have been inaccurate or limiting (Gross, 1993; Corbett, 1996), with children receiving inappropriate educational provision and support as a result. For example, from 1945 up until 1981 (in Tomlinson, 1982) research found that children were often labelled as “educationally subnormal” (DES, 1967) or “ESN” and sent to specialist ESN educational provision accordingly. However, Tomlinson (1982) argued that although there were various “official descriptions”, there was little consensus of opinion amongst educational and health professionals “as to what constitutes an ESN child” (p.96).

The Warnock Report refers to the notion of educating children with disabilities (SEN) alongside “normal” children in “ordinary” schools (DES, 1978 p.26 & 26). The concept of “normality” has often been discussed. Prior to Warnock, Goffman (1968) suggested that where some members of the population have similar “attributes” and “share a single set of normative expectations” (p.152 & 167), they might consider themselves to be “normal”, but pointed out that,

‘failure or success at maintaining such norms has a very direct effect on the psychological integrity of the individual’ (Goffman, 1968, p.152 & 153).

This suggests that those children who consider themselves to be outside of their “normally” achieving group of peers, perhaps due to their differing learning needs, might feel inadequate or inferior to those who are continually meeting the expected standards or “norms” within the classroom.

Allan (1996) referred to "Normalising Judgements" and the work of Foucault in 1977. Foucault was said to have observed "how the Norm entered education":

'making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another' (in Allan, 1996, p.223).

In examining the notion of "normality", several writers (Goffman, 1968; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996) viewed the stigma which has frequently been attached to the term "special needs"; referring to the detrimental effects upon children with disabilities and their families. Lewis suggested that,

'value judgements associated with "normality" tend to place it as superior to abnormality' (Lewis, 1995, p.7&8).

Corbett wrote that, 'none of us are immune to the force of verbal imagery' and suggested that, 'fear of difference breeds hostility' (Corbett, 1996, p2 & 5). Goffman (1968) suggested that people can become too focused upon an individual's differences, rather than the person as a whole. Lewis (1995) discussed the problematic use of the term "normal" when trying to define children's behaviour and not necessarily recognising diverse "developmental patterns";

'it underemphasises the variability encompassed by what is "normal" normality is assumed to be what typifies the majority - that is, what is usual' (Lewis, 1995, p.7).

In Soder's opinion, "non-labelling" policies such as integration and normalisation were 'fallacies' and 'ideological', in that they tried to make a person's 'disability invisible' (Soder, 1989, p.117). Therefore, in the opinion of Wolfendale (1993a) and Allan (1996) if labels were not used, some children's problems would not be recognised or acknowledged, nor would additional funding and resources be provided to meet their specific needs.

Special schools and children were categorised by their handicapping condition (DES, 1978). Wolfendale wrote that,

'categories appeared at the time to be a rational way of allocating resources to pupils the notion that the child moved to the resource' (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.19).

With more and more labels being added, the categorisation process was said to no longer recognise individual differences, social backgrounds and developmental stages (Hegarty *et al.*, 1994, p.79). Also, as Wolfendale indicated, 'most attention was directed to the supposed within-child deficits' (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.19).

In line with Warnock's recommendations (DES, 1978), some pointed out the need to transfer the emphasis 'away from categories and towards individual needs' (ATL, 1994, p.4). Corbett suggests that the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), 'changed the language of special needs' and that the term "special educational needs", became more about,

'what the subject experienced - placed after them - rather than defining who or what they were' (Corbett, 1996, p.13).

In agreement, Wolfendale seemed to suggest that, instead of focusing on the child's difficulties, the differentiated educational provision put forward in the Warnock Report, 'tended to focus on the nature of the task, its content and presentation as well as style of teaching' (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.19).

The Warnock Report (1978) was very influential and the Education Act of 1981 followed on from this with similar implementations. Tomlinson (1986) felt that,

'In line with Warnock's suggestions, the concept of special educational needs was adopted - which was defined as individual learning difficulties or problems of access to educational facilities' (Tomlinson, 1986, p. 52).

Accessibility is an ongoing theme of this study, with access to education and childcare one of the key strands of the research (see Chapter 4).

Wolfendale suggested that this created complications in that labelling children's needs as "learning difficulties" had the effect of "equalising all the difficulties so that they were potentially of the same severity" (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.23).

Gross agreed, writing that 'the legal definition could embrace anything from a tiny handful to huge numbers of children' (Gross, 1993, p.2).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter (p.24), it was felt that Warnock's abandonment of categories (DES, 1978) made assessment processes more challenging (Tomlinson, 1986). In 1982, Warnock herself began to re-examine the use of the term "special needs" (DES, 1978), reflecting that this concept "carries a fake objectivity":

'For one of the main, indeed almost overwhelming, difficulties is to decide whose needs are special, and what "special" means' (in Gross, 1993, p.2).

Difficulty for professionals at the time seemed to centre on the definition of "SEN" and what percentage of children this would typically encompass in any school. Warnock had suggested that as many as twenty percent of children could be described as having SEN, though many considered the continuum of need within this description to be too broad (Tomlinson, 1986; Gross, 1993), ranging from moderate learning difficulties to very severe and complex needs.

Hegarty *et al.* (1994) pointed out that the differentiated educational provision for special needs which was favoured by the 1981 Education Act was a move towards integration, rather than segregation;

'The Act requires that children with special educational needs should be educated in regular schools must engage in the activities of the school alongside other children who do not have special educational needs to the greatest extent possible' (Hegarty *et al.*, 1994, p.86).

Soder wrote that placing disabled children alongside their non-disabled peers did not necessarily “lead to positive social contacts” in that;

‘The self-images of disabled children are not automatically improved by being placed in an integrated setting nor are the attitudes of non-disabled peers’ (Soder, 1989, p.122 & 123).

Wolfendale noted that even though there was an increased commitment to integration, it was often still necessary to label the “integrated” children in order to allocate the additional resources that were required (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.20). Therefore, was it possible that despite an attempt in the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and the Education Act (DES, 1981) to move away from labelling and categorising children, this process still prevailed? Galloway *et al.* (1994) would appear to uphold this view;

‘ ... post-1981, descriptive labels for children continued to proliferate and behaviours continued to be ascribed to children once they had been placed in a category’ (Galloway *et al.*, 1994, p.109).

Before its implementation took place, there were concerns that the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994a) would be too “idealistic, envisaging difficulties in implementation when there were no additional resources being allocated to do so” (ATL, 1994, p.4). Booth (1994) also queried the ‘continua of “needs” and “provision” in the draft Code of Practice and their possible implications for the integration of pupils into mainstream schools’ (Booth, 1994, p.21). He considered the definitions of the labels ‘special educational needs’ and ‘learning difficulty’ to be confusing and wrote that they ‘obscured the issue of integration in particular’ (Booth, 1994, p.21). He felt that these terms were too generalised, with little clarity as to how more specific individual needs could be met within an integrated learning environment.

Just as there have been discussions around what constitutes “integration”, similar arguments have surfaced regarding “inclusion” of children with SEN. Considering the discourse around “SEN”, “inclusion” and “normality”, this study aims to explore the extent to which the nature of a policy, “projects an image of an ideal society” (Ball, 1990, p.3), perhaps where there is no need for integration. These issues are explored further in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

“Market Forces” and “Consumerism”

When describing the legislation of the 1980s and considering the availability and accessibility of educational provision, many writers (Bastiani, 1989; Ball, 1990; Stacey, 1991; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991; Ball, 1994; Fabian, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997; Ball, 2008) have referred to parents of children with special educational needs as “consumers” in an educational system of “market forces”. As Stacey noted, this meant that “schools and authorities have had to become increasingly competitive in attracting pupils and funding” (Stacey, 1991, p.31). Ball (2008) describes this type of policy “market” as “a new moral environment” for both educational providers and parents, where “competing” schools often develop a “culture of self-interest” (p.45);

‘Self-interest is manifest in terms of *survivalism* –an increased, often predominant, orientation towards the internal well-being of the institution and its members and a shift away from concern with more general social and educational issues within “the community” ‘ (Ball, 2008, p.45)

In this way, Ball suggests that some schools, when faced with a “competitive” market, have been tempted to concentrate upon attracting “more able” children rather than those with SEN (Ball, 2008, p.46). However, schools have also had to consider parental rights in relation to selecting their preferred provision (Wolfendale, 1997). Under the Education Reform Act (DES, 1988), parental involvement and “partnership” focused upon parental rights (Fabian, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997); where the intention was for parents to be given new powers, particularly with regard to a choice of educational provision for their children.

Towards the end of the 1980s, educational provision for children with SEN was again under review. Wolfendale described the SEN system as 'becoming unworkable and in need of reform' (Wolfendale, 1993a, p.23). However, as Stacey (1991) and Wragg (1997) pointed out, such "choice" does not necessarily occur in reality, because the availability of places cannot always be guaranteed and the appeals system is often considered off-putting to parents, seen to be lengthy and complicated. Additionally, as suggested by Tomlinson and Ross (1991), Stacey (1991) and Wolfendale (1993b), controversy exists surrounding a notion of "equality". It could be asked whether some parents are more likely to be successful than others in their choice of schools. For instance, Wragg (1989) suggests that parents were more successful if they were,

'well-informed, articulate, persistent and listened to' (in Stacey, 1991, p.32).

This problem appears still to surface in more recent times (Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Ofsted, 2005), with observations of differing levels of support and provision depending upon where families live and how "pushy" their parents are (Smithers & Curtis, 2002). Communication, once more, is identified as a vital component when parents are making and influencing decisions regarding their children.

The 1980's and 90's

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, the importance of educational provision for children under the age of five began to be more recognised by researchers (Halliday, 1989; Robson, 1989; Hornby, 1996). Au and Pumfrey (1993) and Sumner (1990) advocated early professional intervention and support for parents, in order to build up relationships of trust and honesty with both parents and children. However, availability and accessibility of pre-school provision for children with special educational needs was regarded by some as variable (Halliday, 1989; Robson, 1989); depending on the available funding, facilities and priorities of different local education authorities.

Researchers began to consider ways in which educational establishments could encourage and involve parents more effectively (Bastiani, 1989; Halliday, 1989; Robson, 1989; Galloway *et al.*, 1994; Hornby, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997); recognising the expertise and knowledge of parents and the important role which parents have in supporting their child's learning. For instance, Hornby (1996) summarised parental involvement in a diagram which included parental "contributions" and "needs" and acknowledged the time and expertise required by both parents and teachers.

Hornby's "model for parental involvement", highlighted some criteria, which would help to enhance relationships with both parents and professionals and ultimately improve outcomes for children; "Policy, Resource, Collaboration, Information, Communication, Liaison, Education, Support" (Hornby, 1996, p.24).

As raised earlier in this chapter, the importance of the parental role seemed still to be sometimes forgotten. Robson (1989), Mansfield (1995) and McDonnell (in Wolfendale, 1997) referred to "barriers" which hinder successful parental involvement; professional attitudes being one of the major factors. Hornby suggested that educational staff sometimes have the attitude that parents are "problems" or "adversaries", "vulnerable, less able or in need of treatment themselves" (Hornby, 1996, p.4). Sumner (1990) wrote that, from the point of view of a parent with a disabled child, he particularly disliked professional attitudes which led to him feeling excluded from discussions or treated as if he was ignorant of his own child's needs. It seemed that mistrust and anxiety levels were heightened when dealing with the issue of "special needs". Such sensitivities are explored further with the parents and practitioners of this case study (Chapters Four, Five and Six).

Halliday (1989) suggested that professionals should realise that sometimes the parents "know best" in matters relating to their own child. However, as pointed out by Wragg (1997), sometimes it was parental attitudes which created "barriers" to involvement and not all parents wanted to be involved. Some parents were hesitant to get involved or had memories of bad experiences themselves at school, whereas others felt that it was the school's responsibility to educate the children.

As in Plowden (DES, 1967), several writers (Halliday, 1989; Sumner, 1990; Brown & Carpenter, 1995) continued to promote teamwork, but expanded this by recommending that this should involve all educational professionals and parents pooling and sharing information, expertise and advice. Halliday (1989) described this process as “cross-agency collaborative intervention” (p.26 & 27).

The 1993 Education Act (DES, 1993) set out recommendations which the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994a) was then designed to implement. Greater prominence was given to the rights of parents to be involved in "partnership" within educational establishments. Hornby (1996) noted the Act's recognition (DES, 1993) for parents to have greater access to information about their child's special educational needs and to have a say in how those needs should be met (for instance, through school policies and choice of support and provision).

Bowers (1994) acknowledged and valued the increase in parents' rights, particularly in relation to having parental views incorporated into assessment and tribunal procedures. The assessment system in itself was sometimes regarded as a barrier to gaining appropriate support for children, in that it seemed to be a long and complicated process. Paige-Smith (in Wolfendale, 1997) also suggested that if a parent used the tribunal system of the 1993 Act (DES, 1993) to challenge any decisions that were made by a local education authority, this could be a lengthy process, with detrimental effects upon the "partnership" relationship.

With the introduction of the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994a), there appeared to be a recognition of the necessity for a refined definition of "special educational needs". Moving again away from the idea of labelling children (Wolfendale, 1993a; ATL, 1994), the Code referred to SEN as "learning difficulties", requiring special educational provision;

'...educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of the child's age in maintained schools, other than special schools, in the area' (DFE, 1994a, p.5).

Before its implementation took place, several writers (ATL, 1994; Booth, 1994) were concerned that the Code of Practice would be too impractical, because there would not be any extra funding or resources. However, the intentions of the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994a) with regard to assessment procedures for children under the age of five could be considered to be a significant step forward in valuing the pre-school developmental years. For instance, emphasis was given to the importance of early parental involvement and it was suggested that,

'If parents have been fully consulted at the earlier stages of assessment, they are more likely to consider that the proposed statement represents a positive and accurate appraisal of their child's special educational needs' (DFE, 1994a, p.94).

The "S.E.N: a guide for parents" advised that,

'You, as a parent, have a right to take part in decisions about your child's education and to be kept in touch at all stages. Your views and support are very important.... you know your child better than anyone' (DFE, 1994b, p.4 &5).

There was a rapid shift in emphasis during the 1980s and 90s, when parental rights, opinions and ideas were increasingly recognised amongst researchers and policy-makers as having a significant impact upon ensuring appropriate educational provision for children. The role of parents was acknowledged to be essential in educating their children, well before and during their school lives (Halliday, 1989; Mansfield, 1995; Sonuga-Barke *et al.*, 1995). The National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN, 1992) described parents as the child's "first educators", with Mansfield (1995) referring to "joint educators";

'It is often forgotten that children spend far more time with their parents than at school; every experience is part of a child's ongoing education' (Mansfield, 1995, p.19).

Wolfendale (1997) and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA, 1996) welcomed the collaborative information-sharing and assessment processes which were described within the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994a).

The Code (DFE, 1994a) advised professionals to acknowledge and consider the input of parental views, whilst also providing support and advice to assist with parents' anxieties. However, as Russell (in Wolfendale, 1997) pointed out, a collaborative partnership is not necessarily an easy process when multi-agencies are involved; health and social services as well as parents and educational staff, all with differing criteria and priorities.

The “Inclusion” Agenda: Early Identification, Early Intervention and Collaboration

UNESCO and International Perspectives

In 1994, the UNESCO international conference urged governments and international organisations to endorse inclusive practice in schools (UNESCO, 1994). Early childcare and educational opportunities, together with teacher training initiatives, were outlined as essential to promote inclusive practice (UNESCO, 1994, p.28 & 33). The emphasis upon training continued to be at the forefront of inclusion policy in the UK (DFES, 2003a).

Socio-economical issues were also being discussed (CRS, 2003, DFES 2003b), with governments recognising inequalities in service provision for some families, particularly from areas of social deprivation. In the United States of America, ‘Head Start’ had been set up in 1965 to provide “comprehensive early childhood services” to low-income pre-school children and their families (CRS, 2003 p.1). Regulations specified that at least 90% of children attending a Head Start programme should come from low-income families and at least 10% should be children with disabilities (CRS, 2003, p.5). Programmes were designed to meet local community needs, with multi-agencies such as education, health, nutrition and social services, all working together to support families and prepare children for ‘kindergarten’ and long-term achievement through school and beyond.

At a conference for ‘European Early Childhood Intervention’ (EECI, 2005), discussions surrounded some of the challenges of providing “state-of-the-art intervention” programmes for vulnerable children and their families across the world (*but particularly in Europe*). The general view was taken that a

“collaborative”, “transdisciplinary” and “family-oriented” approach was needed (EECI, 2005). Carpenter (EECI, 2005) described the long-term preventative benefits of early intervention (mental health issues, well-being, confidence and social behaviour) for children with disabilities, their families and society.

Recommending “Key reciprocal functions of Early Intervention”, Carpenter outlined these as, “support, education, liaison, communication, provision of information, collaboration, resources and advice” (EECI, 2005). Indeed one of the key messages of the conference was quoted from Lenehan (2004), that “Fragmented services create vulnerable families” (EECI, 2005).

British Legislation and Early Years Initiatives

At the time of this research, the British government sought to extend the opportunities available for children with SEN by placing educational provision within a broader social inclusion agenda and a framework of equal rights initiatives; manifesting its dedication to supporting earlier intervention, identification and inclusion of children with SEN (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2003b, Audit Commission, 2003; DFES 2004).

Relations between parents and educational settings have begun increasingly to figure prominently on the agenda of politicians, professionals and parents alike (DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2003b), with families identifying the need for “better coordination” between all support services (Audit Commission, 2003, p.4). This coordinated approach will be debated more, particularly at a local level, during this case study.

Frederickson and Cline (2002) refer to children, families and schools as the “key stakeholders” in education; each to be considered and valued. However, as Russell (in Wolfendale, 1997) and Frederickson and Cline (2002) point out, a collaborative “partnership” is not necessarily an easy process. They raise concerns that when multi-agencies are involved, there may be several complex difficulties and competing interests encountered; such as budget restraints, communication difficulties, confidentiality issues and differing service priorities.

As Halliday (1989) points out, support services can encourage and involve parents more effectively; by recognising their expertise and knowledge and the important role that they play in supporting their child's learning.

Widdows (in Wolfendale, 2000) favours a holistic approach to inclusion, “embracing families and societies” (p.6). This would suggest the necessity for support services to respect and incorporate the needs of extended family members (not just the child with SEN), considering also the particular community and environment in which families live.

SureStart (DFES, 2003a) was originally modelled on the USA’s Head Start programme (in CRS, 2003), aiming to meet the needs of disadvantaged pre-school children and their families in England and Wales. Sure Start (DFES, 2003c, p.24) advocates “a strategic, holistic and child-focused approach”, with families and multi-agencies working collaboratively to identify children’s needs early and plan appropriate intervention.

In order to achieve effective inclusive practice, SureStart acknowledge that training is needed for a wide range of early years and childcare settings, with differing levels of staff expertise and experience. To support the SureStart model of inclusion (DFES, 2003a), networks of pre-school settings and Area SENCos have been developed in each LA across England and Wales. One such area forms the focus of this research project.

Models of Inclusion

Defining “inclusion”: a starting point

It is important to reiterate here that all strands of this study stem from an understanding of the concept of “inclusion”; definitions of which have varied, sometimes been contested, and emerged over time (Goffman, 1968; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Hornby, 1996; Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a & b; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanco, 2003; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). “Inclusion” is therefore a dominant subject for discussion throughout this thesis, with often competing definitions and interpretations.

Instigating Area SENCo networks across the UK to support the development of inclusive practice in pre-school settings, SureStart’s model of inclusion provides one of the main influences upon this particular study (DFES, 2003a).

SureStart’s model of inclusion (DFES, 2003a) seeks to “remove barriers” and open up opportunities and choices for all young children, including those already identified with SEN; enabling them to reach their full potential, educationally and socially.

Critics of the SureStart approach (Ward, 2005; Wilce, 2008) have described the initiative as being too expensive with minimal results in terms of improved outcomes for low-income families in areas of deprivation; potentially “setting back” or further “alienating” the targeted groups of the population by treating them differently. However, the SureStart model (DFES, 2003a) has been welcomed by many as a positive move towards improving opportunities for more “vulnerable”, hard-to-reach children and families (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). When commencing this study in the latter part of 2003, SureStart was a relatively new initiative. As acknowledged by Wilce (2008) it may take longer to assess the lasting impact of SureStart, particularly when multi-agencies (health, education and social care) are being persuaded nationally to combine and integrate their services more effectively.

There now follows a discussion about some of the differing models of “inclusion”; highlighting the potential for varying interpretations of “inclusion” and some of the actual realities faced by local authorities, practitioners (in schools and pre-schools), children with SEN and their families. Such differing understandings and outcomes are explored further within the LA of this study (Chapters Four, Five and Six).

A Model of Social Inclusion and “Early Intervention”

Carpenter (in Carpenter & Egerton, 2005) describes the challenges faced when trying to include the most vulnerable “at risk” children, where “social exclusion starts very early, long before a child is born” (p.15). It is argued that there are several structural barriers in place, particularly relating to poverty and reduced access to services, which automatically exclude and prevent some families from receiving opportunities that are more readily available to others. As described by Porter (2002), where children have limited early life experiences, they are less likely to acquire the skills and knowledge that ‘typical children can acquire naturally’ (p.47). For example, some children in poor housing environments may experience little variety or stimuli in their everyday play and others may have fewer learning opportunities due to frequent hospitalisation. It is important that such social limitations or early learning “variables” are not overlooked when children are being assessed or “tested” in relation to the “norm” (Porter, 2002, p.47). When children with SEN are born into families experiencing poverty, inadequate housing, chronic ill-health and long-term unemployment, research has shown that they are potentially more likely to be denied resources and opportunities that are available to other children (Mittler, 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Emerson, 2003; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005). Considering the social inclusion agenda, particularly surrounding pre-school children with SEN, these are therefore important areas to consider when collating statistical data for this case study, and will be explored further in Chapter Four.

It is argued that educational researchers need to take note of both social and economical influences upon their area of research (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). Indeed, the Audit Commission (2003) examined access to educational services for children with SEN, where levels of support appeared to vary according to where children lived. Also, Frederickson and Cline (2002) discuss diversity within society and how “family organisation” impacts upon those supporting and working with children with SEN. Examining the findings of Beresford (1995), it was found that where families had children with SEN; family incomes tended to be lower than average, there was higher unemployment, and fewer parents attended support groups (in Frederickson & Cline, 2002). Some parents had difficulties transporting themselves (and their children) to the support groups and others lacked confidence to attend group activities due to the nature of their child’s needs, particularly when a high level of intervention was required to support medical or behavioural needs (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). It was often the case (Day Care Trust, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002) that many parents of children with SEN were not returning to work in order to care for their children at home. Some of the issues surrounding finding and funding childcare for pre-school children with SEN and parents returning to work are investigated in this study (Chapter Four).

The UK government’s ideology around the time of this research was to reduce social deprivation and child poverty, aiming to create positive experiences and opportunities for children in all aspects of their lives, thus maximising their potential (DFES, 2003b; DFES, 2004). As referred to earlier (Ward, 2005; Wilce, 2008), recent research data does not necessarily reflect this poverty reduction, though further examination regarding improved outcomes for children is perhaps required. Studies have identified the need for “early(er) intervention” where “Early Childhood Intervention Services” such as those traditionally provided separately by education and health, work much more collaboratively and take account of family circumstances when planning their targeted support;

‘In any individual family context, there is a unique pattern of need. Early Childhood Intervention services have to be prepared to meet the spectrum of need and be equipped to recognise and respond to it’ (Carpenter & Egerton, 2005, p.23).

One example of such targeted “early intervention” is the National Autistic Society’s EarlyBird programme (NAS, 2008), which aims to provide training and support for parents - bridging the gap between the family receiving a child’s diagnosis of autism and starting school (see Glossary, p.249). Though not the primary focus of this study, such early intervention programmes (and parent support groups) are examined as part of this research (see Chapter Four), as they provide additional examples of pre-school support within the LA.

Sure Start (DFES, 2003 a, b & c) aimed to improve social inclusion and opportunities for all families, through targeted programmes of early intervention and support in some of the most deprived areas of the UK (DETR, 2000). Regarded as a “flagship” government scheme (Carpenter & Russell, 2005), this was seen by many as an ideal approach to provide multi-agency support, whilst actively engaging families to become more socially included in their local communities (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Others (Ward, 2005; Wilce, 2008) have reflected that some families are more able to make the most of the SureStart services that are provided, depriving those of greater need who are perhaps “overwhelmed or turned off” by the support on offer.

The Audit Commission (2003) and SureStart (DFES, 2003), emphasise the need to improve the “quality” of children’s lives and help them to reach their potential. The aim of social inclusion, as mentioned earlier by Wolfendale (2000), would be to “embrace” the needs of the whole family, not just the child with SEN; ranging from individual or group support, to the provision of additional respite care. However, as in Porter (2002), it is important to remember that each home situation is unique; parents have the “right” to be actively involved in decision-making and “be able to remain in command of their family life” (Porter, 2002, p.19).

Warnock’s concept of integrating children with SEN into a common educational framework (DES, 1978), has gradually progressed towards the “inclusion” of all children; reflecting the notion that children with SEN should not just be somehow integrated into the mainstream environment, but that the educational setting should be fully inclusive of all children (DFES, 2004; DFES, 2005).

At the time of this study, perceptions surrounding the concept of “inclusion” seem to vary greatly. Some are fervent advocates of inclusion as a human rights issue (DRC, 2001; CSIE, 2002; Porter, 2002), believing that all children should be included in mainstream educational provision. Others caution that inclusion can be the potential root of many problems in SEN; associating the term “inclusion” to blanket policies of forced inclusion or even exclusion from some educational settings and resources (Thomas & Loxley 2001; Wearmouth 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005). There now follows a discussion around such differing interpretations of “inclusion” that appear to have steered recent understanding of both policy and practice.

A Human Rights Model of Inclusion

Rustemier (in CSIE, 2002) and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC, 2001) examine inclusion using a human rights framework; with children’s rights and “best interests” as the central foci. Rustemier describes a “4-A scheme” of government responsibilities, with children and families having the right to education which is “available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable” (CSIE, p.11). Within these four responsibilities (CSIE, 2002); “accessibility” of provision is based upon anti-discriminatory practice, “access” and “acceptability” relate to every child’s right to high quality educational provision, and “adaptability” requires an educational setting to cope with each child’s individual and diverse learning needs. For the “4-A scheme”, Rustemier writes that,

‘The principle of inclusion is not only consistent with each of these objectives but necessary to their realisation’ (CSIE, 2002, p.11).

The human rights model of inclusion focuses upon every child’s “right” to a mainstream placement in their local pre-school (and ultimately school) provision; where the LA and setting are expected to “make reasonable adjustments” in order that children with SEN can be included effectively (DRC, 2001). For example, for a child with autism this may mean introducing more visual cues into the learning environment (pictures and symbols) to aid their understanding and communication (NAS, 2008).

At the time of this study, some curriculum guidance was also available for early years practitioners to “adjust” their practice, to enable children with SEN to have more effective and independent access to learning resources (QCA, 2000).

There have been many debates as to what constitutes a “reasonable adjustment” in schools as well as other establishments (DRC, 2001). Problems arise when it is difficult to determine whether a “reasonable adjustment” has been made to accommodate a child inclusively in an educational setting, or if discrimination has actually occurred, intentionally or otherwise (Lawson, 2008).

Hegarty *et al.* (1994) write that inclusion can remove the rights of those who may wish to choose segregated provision; those who regard special education as a valued specialist resource. As pointed out by the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001), parents have the right to choose a mainstream educational placement for their child, but a more specialist placement in a special school may also be a consideration. However, with the move towards inclusion (DFES, 2004), much of the “special school” provision has now been removed in many areas of the UK.

This study explores issues surrounding parental “choice” of mainstream educational provision for children with SEN (Chapter Four), in terms of their “right” to access and availability of quality pre-school provision (DFES, 2003 a, b & c). There is also an examination of concerns and anxieties surrounding what can “reasonably” be expected of pre-school providers in order to meet the children’s needs inclusively (Chapters Five and Six).

Hall (1992) describes inclusion as, “the presence of all learners in one shared educational community” (p.20), though many would perceive inclusion to be much more than physically being situated in a shared environment. Tutt (2002) believes that mainstream schools are often “trying, but failing” to include children with SEN, with schools accepting that it is each child’s “right” to be included, but then not feeling totally equipped or prepared to do so effectively. She wonders if “inclusionists” are being unrealistic in “pretending that children are more like each other than they actually are” (p.16). Linked closely to the discussion around “labelling” or “non-labelling” children with SEN (see p.30 - 34), this debate is revisited throughout the study.

Educational Inclusion: Meeting Individual Needs and Differentiated Learning

Considering educational inclusion, Connor (2001) suggests that teacher training should concentrate more upon helping schools and local authorities to recognise a child's differences, rather than focusing upon where this actually takes place. However, it is acknowledged that differentiation of teaching to meet the variety of learning needs within a whole class of children can be very challenging (Garner, 2000a). Additionally, Wolfendale (2000) and Porter (2002) outline the importance of cognitive, social, physical, emotional and linguistic development through a range of early years curriculum and learning opportunities, in order to meet the holistic needs of each child.

The Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) defines children as having SEN "if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them" (DFES, 2001, p6). Although the Code outlines what constitutes a "learning difficulty" and "special educational provision" (DFES, 2001, p6), there is also an acknowledgement that most children "experience rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth" during their early years (aged three to five). The outcome of this is that children's progress should be continually reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that their needs are updated and met appropriately. As the Code suggests (DFES, 2001), there are many developmental aspects to be considered before determining whether a child has special educational needs and how best to support those needs in a childcare environment. This requires 'a flexible response to the particular needs of the children' (DFES, 2001, p32) and a clear understanding of each child's needs before processes and programmes are put in place.

When considering how to support a child effectively, some would aim to identify the child's developmental stage rather than age. Sheridan (1997) sets out detailed descriptions of each stage of development in young children, explaining the variance in age at which different children acquire the same skills and abilities. When assessing a child's overall development, as Sheridan (1988 & 1997), Sayeed and Guerin (2000) describe; it is important to look at social and play behaviours as well as the acquisition of cognitive skills.

However, it is acknowledged there can also be raised expectations associated with developmental “stages” or “milestones”, as some children experience irregular progress in different areas of development and not in others, which does not necessarily follow a continuous pattern (Maynard & Thomas, 2004).

Several writers prefer to look more holistically and ecologically at a child’s development (Maynard & Thomas, 2004), considering the biological make up of each child in addition to environmental influences. As noted by Finch (1999), Rider (2003), Dowling (2003) and Quicke (2003), there are significant motivational influences which a positive self-esteem can have upon a child’s progress. Rider (2003) has researched how “well being” and “involvement” might be measured when examining children’s progress; looking at social interaction and contentment in addition to more cognitive abilities. Additionally, research into children’s “resilience” and “emotional intelligence” has led to the belief that these are closely linked to achievement in both academic and social-emotional learning, from pre-school through to adulthood (Elias & Arnold, 2006).

Common concerns have been raised (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005) that in both school settings and early years, too much emphasis is often placed on academic achievement, at the expense of children’s emotional well-being. Cartwright and Dehaney (2000) emphasise that anxiety can be a “major barrier to learning” and suggest ways in which teachers can create a more “learning-friendly environment”, referring to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Need (1954). The concept of an appropriate “learning environment” for children with SEN is explored further during this study. For example, for children with SEN, Hegarty (CEDAR, 2006) suggested that inclusion should focus more upon “enjoyment”; recognising that children with SEN should be enjoying the “here and now”, through “enhanced learning” as children, rather than preparation for life after school. Hegarty (CEDAR, 2006) expressed his belief that schools should make more use of multi-sensory experiences, such as art and music, which would then promote such “enhanced learning” and “enjoyment”.

When including children with a range of needs in an educational setting, an inclusion model of differentiation is often advocated (DFES, 2001), where individualised teaching programmes and learning activities are devised to suit the differing learning needs and target particular areas for development. However, some would argue that the individual learning needs can be so varied that differentiation to suit every child can become an impossible task (Tutt, 2000). Again, this is worthy of further exploration and is considered in more detail later on (Chapters Five and Six).

An Inclusive Ethos and Approach

As Forest and Pearpoint (1992) write, perhaps inclusion can be measured partially by the responses of everyone involved; how people deal with diversity and difference, as well as by being in the same vicinity as one another. A positive “can-do” approach has been recognised as extremely influential (Rider, 2001; Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Ofsted, 2005), where everyone aims to achieve inclusion, rather than looking for reasons not to. Stakes and Hornby (2000), Hanco (2003) and MacConville (2003) write that inclusion is related to attitudes and needs to be a “whole school issue”, with everyone involved in the process; including children, parents, managers, school staff and the local community. Also, as Wolfendale (2000) advocates, “top down” policies are essential for “on the ground action”, with head teachers and management groups leading by example in their inclusive practices. As acknowledged by Busher (2005, p.3);

‘Moving towards a more inclusive culture within a school takes time. The policies most likely to support inclusion are those which are developmental, reflect current circumstances of the school, set realistic goals for the future and are constructed round strategic steps for getting from one position to the next (Busher, 2005, p.3).

Similarly, to what extent might a pre-school setting be able to demonstrate an “inclusive culture”, through their “developmental”, “reflective”, “realistic” and “strategic” planning (Busher, 2005, p.3)? This study begins to investigate their capacity to do so, as perceived by pre-school practitioners in one LA (Chapters Five and Six).

“Readiness” for Inclusion

Various studies have investigated inclusion of statutory school-aged children of five years and over (Garner, 2000 a & b; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanco, 2003; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004).

SureStart (DFES, 2003a), Connor (2001) and Garner (2000a) identify a need for staff training in schools, describing a “lack of readiness” to take on inclusion initiatives, particularly amongst newly qualified teachers (Garner 2000a, p.111).

This possible “lack of readiness” is an area that will be explored amongst pre-school practitioners and managers within this study (Chapters Five and Six).

Questions will be asked in relation to their understanding of “inclusion” and what they perceive to be staff training needs to effectively include children with SEN.

Research into pre-school inclusion for three and four year olds (Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Janko & Porter, 1996; and Clough & Nutbrown, 2004) looks at both the rationale and characteristics of inclusion within pre-school settings and identifies a need for further research, particularly into the long-term benefits for children and their families. For instance, Odom *et al.*, (2000) examine the extent to which young children with SEN are “actively participating” alongside their peers and whether practitioners are collaborating effectively with support services and parents to ensure that individual needs are being met.

Although early educators in Clough and Nutbrown’s study (2004) were broadly supportive of inclusive practice, it was recognised that successful inclusion depended upon the capacity to meet needs; for instance in terms of recognising family and community needs and providing an appropriate learning environment to meet individual local requirements. Many SureStart initiatives began by considering how to set up services that were within “pram-pushing distances” for local communities (EYDCP, 2003b: Appendix 9), so that transport and accessibility would be less of a problem. Chapter Four examines the outcome of this approach for the LA of this study.

“Responsible Inclusion” or Exclusion

Gains (in Connor, 2001, p.4), notes that “responsible” inclusion is needed, with schools examining “what works best”. When schools are frequently measured and driven by their academic achievements, Connor (2001) implies that there is often less focus upon supporting SEN and effective inclusion. Several writers (Croll & Moses, 2000, Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005) describe school situations, where inclusion has “failed” and some children have been excluded; revealing that many primary schools have made decisions relating to a child’s learning needs, based upon their “inappropriate” behaviour in the classroom, rather than cognitive ability.

In early years’ research, children with “challenging behaviour” were frequently described by practitioners as the most difficult to include in childcare settings (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Wearmouth (2001), Thomas and Loxley (2001) and McNamara (2004) also give illustrations of “anti-inclusional” and “exclusionary” practices in educational settings, particularly when children are displaying “behavioural difficulties”. For example, when everyday behaviour strategies “fail” and certain children are repeatedly removed from classrooms or separated from their peers, those children can gain a reputation for being “badly behaved” (amongst teachers and others around them); ultimately believing themselves to be “bad” with little point in trying to behave otherwise (McNamara, 2004, p.18).

More recently, Avramidis (2005) refers to increasing school exclusions of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, describing the “tensions” which occur when schools are expected to be inclusive, whilst also raising academic achievement;

‘in today’s competitive atmosphere where schools are expected to raise their standards and vie with each other for students and funding it should not be surprising if they become unfavourable places for pupils considered by many teachers as challenging’ (Avramidis, 2005, p.3).

As raised in Wearmouth (2001) and Thomas and Loxley (2001); early intervention with behaviour management support can often lead to reduced incidences of “exclusion” for children later on. Finch (1999), Webster-Stratton (1999) and Olsen & Cooper (2001) look at early preventative measures in relation to factors which influence children’s behaviour, social interaction and emotional competence. The emphasis is upon identifying potential “risks” which might effect behaviour (Olsen & Cooper, 2001, p.121), intervening and diverting children before their behaviour escalates out of control; recognising and praising positive behaviour to raise their self-esteem, whilst withdrawing attention and distracting children when behaviour is not acceptable. For example, Finch (1999) advises that children often seek attention; enjoying praise, but sometimes preferring an angry response rather than gaining no attention at all. Finch (1999) suggests that adults should attempt to give three times as many praise comments as negative comments, encouraging attention-seeking for positive reactions.

Six important “ingredients” of behavioural development are outlined by Finch, which need to be nurtured in order to help prevent such difficulties. Referred to as “SPICES”, these are “social, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional and spiritual” (Finch, 1999, course hand-out). Support groups for parents are recognised as beneficial; with the focused guidance that can be provided by services, plus the mutual parent support, sharing of expertise, ideas and concerns (Halliday, 1989; Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; NAS, 2008). These issues are explored in more detail through the research process in Chapter Four.

Training Needs of Pre-school Providers

In order to effectively identify and support children with SEN and their families, additional training has commonly been identified as a priority need for practitioners (DFES, 2003a; Connor, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Sammons *et al.*, 2006). It is important then to consider some of the implications for those delivering and receiving training; the Area SENCos and the pre-school providers. These matters are explored further in chapters five and six.

Pinnell (2003) writes about difficulties faced by Local Authorities, when providing training for both teachers and non-teaching support staff in schools; to improve levels of qualifications and to “remodel” roles and shared responsibilities within the classroom. Common concerns relate to financial and time constraints. For instance, teachers and support staff frequently identify a lack of time for training and shared planning, due to the fact that teaching assistants (TAs) are paid by the hour and are needed to be in the classrooms supporting children (Pinnell, 2003, p.11).

Local Authorities also reported that even when specific training courses were offered, “they were frequently cancelled due to inadequate take-up”, “schools can be reluctant to release TAs for day time courses” and “there can be inhibiting costs for travel, childcare and books” (Pinnell, 2003, p.11). When teaching assistants were interviewed, comments were recorded, which included:

“I didn’t get anything until I’d been in the job a year. It was too late really; “it was a case of in at the deep end and do your best”; “you don’t get paid for all of it” and “I’d go anyway even in my own time, in case it’s useful” (Pinnell, 2003, p.11)

Concerns about quality delivery, recruitment difficulties and high rates of staff turn-over are often accredited to low levels of pay; for non-teaching support staff in schools (Pinnell, 2003), but more particularly for practitioners working in early years settings (Eborall, 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Rolfe *et al.*, 2003; Burke, 2004; Frances, 2005).

For pre-schools, Burke (2004) commented that, “quality childcare needs a quality workforce”, but pointed out that many early years practitioners felt “underpaid and undervalued”, with the average childcare worker “paid less than a typical supermarket worker” (p.30). It was felt very important to promote the status of early years and childcare as a profession, and also to raise the self-esteem of all early years practitioners (Frances, 2005; Pugh & Duffey, 2006),

When examining early years' provision, questions have been raised, such as;

'Can we ensure quality in children's services when we are paying some of the front-line staff only the minimum wage? It's shocking that some of our most vulnerable children are looked after by our most poorly-paid staff. We need to build up a children's profession that we are proud of because all roles are valued, and staff are trained, competent, feel confident and receive proper salaries' (Frances, 2005, p.13).

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project was a large-scale European study, researching the progress and development of children aged three to seven years in various types of pre-school education (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). Amongst the data that was collated from pre-school settings, the staff qualifications ranged from teaching qualifications – Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) or Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at Level 2 or below (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). “No qualifications” were indicated as the second most common category amongst those surveyed in the study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004, p.21).

Within the key findings of the study, EPPE found that the higher the qualification of staff, particularly the manager of the setting, the more measured progress children made in intellectual and social development (Sylva *et al.*, 2004), with better quality learning environments created for children. It was found that where pre-school settings had qualified teachers in management positions (primarily in local authority nurseries and nursery classes), there were better outcomes for children in terms of their assessed pre-reading, social and behavioural development at the age of 5.

In addition to the EPPE research, the Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs (EYTSN) study, used the EPPE data, but focused more particularly upon the progress of children with special educational needs (Sammons *et al.*, 2006). This included an examination of the “impact” of pre-school provision on those children potentially “at risk” of developing SEN (Sammons *et al.*, 2006, p.5, 7 & 11); for example, children from the most disadvantaged communities.

It was found that staff professional development and training opportunities were crucial ingredients leading to the provision of “quality” pre-school experiences for children, especially those “who are at the lowest end of the attainment spectrum at entry to pre-school” (Sammons *et al.*, 2006, p.19);

‘High quality provision may be seen as an effective intervention that can help improve cognitive development and thus provide more vulnerable children with a better start at primary school’ (Sammons *et al.*, 2006, p.19).

Research literature (Rolfe *et al.*, 2003; Foster, 2007) has also provided an insight into recruitment and retention practices in pre-school settings, commonly identifying high rates of staff turnover and difficulties in recruitment due to low salaries offered. Some comparable findings can be made to those within the LA of this study and these are reported and discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Several writers (Porter *et al.*, 2000; Garet *et al.*, 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Smith *et al.*, 2003) advise upon effective training for teachers. Porter *et al.* (2000) stress the importance of on-going and long-term professional development opportunities rather than one-off activities, enabling teachers to retain and incorporate newly learnt concepts into their teaching. Joyce and Showers (2002) also emphasise that good professional development should include follow-up support to help teachers to take action and develop what they have learnt in their own classroom situations.

On commencement of this study, the Children’s Workforce Development Council (in DFES, 2005a) was beginning to work in partnership with a range of organisations, including LAs; seeking to promote and raise the profile of careers in childcare, and to improve the quality of service provision. The CWDC (DFES, 2005a) also sought to widen professional development opportunities for practitioners and volunteers working with children and young people.

Research was beginning to emerge into the perceived training needs and professional development experiences and requirements of non-teaching staff, especially those working in early years settings (Abbott & Pugh, 1998; Sylva *et al.*, 2004), though this research was not specifically in relation to SEN training. Further investigation was felt necessary (DFES, 2003a; Connor, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004); hence the particular “SEN” focus of this thesis.

For early years practitioners, the establishment of a “climbing frame” approach to gaining professional qualifications (Abbott & Pugh, 1998) was advocated as a positive step towards the development of a more highly qualified and professional workforce. The “climbing frame” model sought to address both the initial training needs of practitioners, but also on-going professional development opportunities; aiming to remove barriers which might prevent access to any levels of the “climbing frame”. In relation to the key issues of training availability and funding (as later described in Eborall, 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Rolfe et al., 2003; Burke, 2004; Frances, 2005); the “climbing frame” approach sought to encourage practitioners “to aim for the top”, but possibly through vocational qualifications, setting-based training and/or part-time study (Abbott & Pugh, 1998).

Early Years Policy Developments

In order to meet national targets for the expansion of childcare across the UK (DFES, 2003c), it was estimated that between 175,000 and 180,000 new practitioners would need to be recruited; some of whom would replace people leaving the workforce, and some to support the growth of provision.

Acknowledging the recruitment and retention difficulties in this field of work (Rolfe *et al.*, 2003), there was a government funded drive to encourage “workforce training and development” for early years practitioners in all local authorities;

‘we estimate that 130,000-150,000 people will need to be trained to levels 2 and 3 over the three years from 2003 to 2006’ (DFES, 2003c, p.27).

“Levels 2 and 3” relates to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs); which can be gained over a period of time, often whilst practitioners remain in full-time employment. NVQs are work-based qualifications which assess and acknowledge the skills that are identified as essential to carry out the job effectively.

There was recognition that many early years' practitioners, though non-qualified and in many cases parent volunteers, had contributed significantly for years to the care and development of pre-school children, building up a bank of valuable experience (Abbott & Pugh, 1998; Rolfe *et al.*, 2003). To encourage these practitioners to gain appropriate professional qualifications which would enhance their early years practice, there were recommendations that qualifications could be acquired over time, through a staged (often part-time) approach.

Though NVQs were encouraged as initial minimum levels of qualifications, the "climbing frame" model (Abbott & Pugh, 1998) was designed to encourage early years practitioners to progress as far as possible "across, round or up the climbing frame" (p.196), through early years foundation degree courses and beyond. However, as noted by Rolfe *et al.* (2003), there were concerns that improving the training and qualifications of childcare workers might lead to practitioners having "increased expectations of earnings, which may be difficult to meet in a largely unsubsidised childcare sector" (p.12). Indeed, Abbott and Pugh (1998) predicted that "the training debate will doubtless continue well into the new millennium" (p.197).

During the research process, there has been a rapidly changing climate surrounding national and LA infrastructure and provision. Many government policies have been introduced aiming to "reform" services for children and families (Ball, 2008); joining up and integrating multi-agencies in order to implement a more coordinated, seamless delivery (DFES, 2003b & 2004). 'Aiming High for Disabled Children' (DFES, 2007) emphasised the need for more varied childcare and respite provision to be available in response to diverse family needs. 'Narrowing the Gap' research (NFER, 2008) found strong evidence that where LAs adopted a more holistic and joined-up approach, this was much more effective; valuing and making best use of the differing perspectives and skills of different services.

Interestingly, the themes emerging from the report (NFER, 2008) have been similarly inherent throughout this review of literature; the need for high quality early intervention with qualified and skilled professionals, together with the collaborative and constructive involvement of staff, parents and children - ultimately aiming to meet the specific needs of each individual child and family. Many LAs have moved towards more integrated locality working, for instance with colleagues from health, social care and education now housed together and operating under a revised single management structure, as is the case in County W

During this period of organisational restructuring for LAs across the UK, the “quality” of inclusive early years education and childcare through professional development has continued to feature prominently on the agenda of policy makers in the UK (DFES, 2006; DCSF, 2008; NFER, 2008). The ‘Transformation Fund’ (DFES, 2006) was specifically designed to provide funded training opportunities in all LAs across the UK; aiming to improve the overall quality within childcare settings and to raise the levels of staff qualifications and expertise, particularly in relation to supporting children with SEN. In the LA of this study, a large percentage of the money was allocated to the Area SENCo team to deliver cross-county SEN courses over a two year period (See Appendix 7).

Though the ‘Transformation Fund’ (DFES, 2006) was introduced after the main period of data collation for this thesis, the strategic plans were partially influenced and driven by some of the earlier case study findings (Chapters Four, Five and Six). As such, a brief summary of how the LA implemented the funding has been included (Appendix 7). Though many pre-school practitioners took advantage of the funded training opportunities and staff cover costs were often met to facilitate attendance (a need identified in literature and in Chapter Five of this study), the long-term benefits have not yet been evaluated.

More recently, taking forward the initiatives from 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (DFES, 2004), the government has launched the 'Inclusion Development Programme' (DCSF, 2008). Tying in with the revised 'Early Years Foundation Curriculum' (DFES, 2007), the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) is intended to deliver a series of continuing professional development opportunities over a four year period. The IDP (DCSF, 2004) appears to be an attempt by the government to put the ideologies of "inclusion" policy into practice in all educational settings. However, with the seemingly increasing flood of policy initiatives (Ball, 2008), only time will tell if this particular initiative is prioritised and taken on board by schools and pre-school settings. It will be interesting to see if the ideas and models of "good practice" that are advocated in the IDP (DCSF, 2004) are consistently adopted and demonstrated in practice over the coming years.

As identified in earlier documents (DFES, 2003a, DFES, 2004), the IDP is also designed to build the confidence and expertise of practitioners in early years settings; ensuring effective inclusive practice, and aiming to effectively identify and meet the individual needs of children with SEN (DCSF, 2008). As with earlier strategies (DFES, 2003a; EYDCP, 2001-2004 & LA, 2002-2003: Appendix 9), many of the training resources are tailored for use by early years managers and SENCos, in conjunction with teams of Area SENCos. Similar to the delivery of 'Code of Practice' training (DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a; LA, 2002: Appendix 9), the roll out of IDP (DCSF, 2008) will be a large task, involving **all** practitioners in settings which are delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (DFES, 2007).

The intention of involving **all practitioners** (DCSF, 2008; NFER, 2008) would appear to embrace a concept of "inclusion" for everyone working with children in early years settings. It will be interesting to see how this unfolds in reality over the coming years.

Summary

This review of literature has uncovered several controversies surrounding the notion of “normality” and the search for the “norm” (Goffman, 1968; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Porter, 2000). Moreover, Ball describes how policies often seek to portray an “ideal society” (Ball, 1990, p.3). In relation to SEN and inclusion for this case study, the research will examine whether such concepts of “normality” and “ideals” have entered the pre-school political and practical arena within one LA.

Research literature has frequently explored the power of policy interpretation (Bastiani, 1989; Ball, 1990 & 1994; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991; Stacey, 1991; Fabian, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Tutt, 2002), where those accessing information could interpret policy in their own way, choosing to focus upon certain elements rather than others. As Ball suggests (1990), individuals are inevitably affected by their own personal opinions and preferences, with differing yet influential “interests” and “conflicts” (p.3). When policy makers are presenting their “ideals”, Ball advises that;

‘Policies cannot be divorced from interests, from conflict, from domination or from justice’ (Ball, 1990, p.3).

Whilst exploring the potential “journey” from policy through to practice (Ball, 1990 & 1994), this study examines some of the influential factors which might surface along the way. As in Ball (2008), the research investigates how the values, attitudes and interpretations of key stakeholders (in this case the LA policy-makers, the parents of children with SEN and the pre-school practitioners) might effect the translation of inclusion policy into “effective pre-school inclusion” (see Chapters Four, Five and Six).

In order to achieve “effective pre-school inclusion” there appear to be many influencing factors; some of which have been recurring themes throughout this review of literature and continue to surface during this research.

For instance, as well as seeking parental collaboration and involvement of families in decision-making processes about their children, there has been an identified need for specific SEN training for those working within early years settings (DFES, 2003a). In light of the “inclusion” and “SEN” debates raised within this chapter; what are the implications for pre-school practitioners requiring such training, and how might LAs and Area SENCos best meet their training needs?

As outlined by Ball (1990, 1994 & 2008), this study seeks to examine the extent to which policy “ideals” are translated into practice, and whether “inclusive” values stated by both policy-makers and practitioners are necessarily evident in pre-schools within one LA. Chapter Three now describes how such issues are investigated through research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter considers methodological and ethical debates, especially surrounding the use of a small-scale case study, when an “insider” is carrying out the research. There is an acknowledgement that there are difficulties in generalising from case studies (Powney & Watts, 1987; Bryman, 1988; Yin, 1994; Silverman, 2005). There is also a discussion about how researcher bias might be reduced (Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003; Silverman, 2005) and whether the use of mixed methods can enhance reliability and validity of case study findings (Yin, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000).

Following on from this discussion and considering the advantages and disadvantages raised in relation to particular research approaches (both quantitative and qualitative), the chapter then describes the research methodology for this study and how the chosen research methods were employed. In the search for “appropriate” and “effective” data analysis (Silverman, 2005, p.64), emphasis is also given to issues concerned with ethics, bias, validity and reliability.

Methodology Overview

Establishing a research framework, using a case study approach

Situated within an interpretive paradigm, it was decided that this study would be both “exploratory” and “descriptive” (Robson, 1993, p.42), seeking meanings and interpretations from both literature and research data. Earlier in the thesis, Chapter One described the theoretical framework for this research; outlining the influences of Ball’s incremental and interpretive “policy to practice” approach to educational research (1990 & 1994). Such “interpretivism” is a view of knowledge that is socially constructed by people in interaction with each other, which recognises that different people in different or the same situations will construct different versions of reality; a philosophy, drawing upon phenomenon, in which the social world is defined by the interpretations and intentions that individuals construct or hold for it (Pring, 2000).

Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggest that a case study approach is most naturally suited to an interpretive framework, where the researcher tries to understand and interpret particular circumstances and people. In this instance, the case study examines issues surrounding pre-school inclusion; seeking the experiences and views of parents of children attending pre-school settings, and those of the providers working within them. As this research is located within some “real-life” situations of one local authority, Yin (1994) would recommend an interpretive case study approach, especially as the research is exploring “how” and “why” questions (p.1). Two of the initial key research questions for this study (as identified in Chapter one) were;

- **How**, if at all, are children, parents and pre-school providers benefiting from the increased early intervention and support from the LA and Area SENCos?
- **How** can practitioners and managers in settings become empowered to be more inclusive; self-evaluating their individual training needs, each within their own unique set of circumstances?

The “why” questions are explored further, as research data is collated, then analysed and interpreted (in Chapters Four, Five and Six). Following a sequential, “policy through to practice” investigation (see Ball, 1990 & 1994); the research seeks to examine interpretations of policy influences at a macro level, cascading through to micro elements of policy in practice. Using Ball’s policy trajectory (1990 & 1994), the study considers how inclusive practice has been constructed and reconstructed at various levels and over time;

- a) at a **macro** level; with national, government funded training initiatives for all Local Authorities to support pre-school practitioners with earlier identification and intervention for children with SEN (DFES, 2003a)
- b) at a **micro** level; with Area SENCos from one LA providing locally-delivered “packages” of training and support for pre-school providers; working in a range of urban and rural settings, with varied levels of experience, knowledge and confidence to support children with SEN and their families.

In order to establish a framework for research, Robson (1993) and May (1993) advise asking questions relating to the research topic in order to focus the inquiry, such as; what, who, where, how and why? However, when considering the research problem and the broad area of investigation, Bell (1993) also suggests that a "first thoughts" list of questions should be drawn together, which may then need to be refined and further questions considered. Silverman (2005) suggests recording a "natural history" during research, a qualitative report, which is continuously being reflective and self-critical of thoughts and ideas during research methodology (p.306-308). In this way, Silverman writes that,

‘by asking readers to engage with your thinking *in process*, they are in a far better position to assess the degree to which you were self-critical’ (Silverman, 2005, p.306).

This idea of including some of the more "informal" and "personal" context of research (Silverman, 2005, p.306) alongside the more formal methodology proved useful advice during the research process. Also, as Ball would appear to advocate when examining "policy into practice" (BERA, 2007), it is important to note the "realities", which "come alive" when they are actually being "enacted". For example in this study, practitioners were asked in questionnaires to gauge the importance they placed upon various training aspects which might support "inclusion" (Appendix 4, question 6). Then semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5) investigated some of their responses further; with practitioners invited to describe "real" examples of "inclusive practice" in their individual pre-school settings (see Chapters Five and Six). In this way, it was hoped that a range of interpretations of pre-school inclusion would "come alive" (BERA, 2007).

For this study, in addition to recording a timetable of research methodology (see Appendix 1), with questions (Bell, 1993; Robson, 1993; May, 1993), it felt appropriate to record some of the contextual situations that arose during the research process; situations which might be considered influential, unexpected, or beyond the control of the researcher. For instance, despite careful planning as to the interview schedule, timing of interviews and having the appropriate

tape recording equipment to hand (Powney & Watts, 1987), when an interviewee had a lot to say and was determined to say it, a ninety minute tape was not sufficient for the researcher to record everything that was said! An emergency in-coming telephone call signalled the eventual end of the interview, as the researcher had to leave.

It was felt that noting such moments of “natural history” (Silverman, 2005) would show consideration of validity and reliability of qualitative research findings; aiming to make situations more real, through illustrative contextual descriptions. It was also felt important to note all unexpected interruptions, pauses and contextual nuances in the interview transcripts (Powney & Watts, 1987), so that analysis of data would not be considered biased or, as in this instance, possibly seen to be “cut short”.

Eisner & Peshkin (1990) suggest that interpretive, qualitative research methods such as those employed by Ball (1990 & 1994) raise concerns around objectivity, validity and truth; implying that it is very difficult for a qualitative researcher to remain detached from the subject of their research. Ball (in Hammersley, 1993, p.43) describes such critics of qualitative educational research as “cynical non-researchers”, emphasising the impossibility for example, of trying to measure attitudes scientifically. Brown (in Hammersley, 1993) refers to the dilemma faced by the researcher when trying to validate qualitative research;

‘....In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. There are no reliability and validity co-efficients for the researcher who is observing and interviewing participants in the natural setting’ (p.43).

A common view is that it is impossible to try to quantify the linguistic interpretations that are made by qualitative researchers into numerical statistics (Sherman & Webb, 1988; May, 1993; Robson, 1993). However, when research is based on linguistics, Becker (1990) describes how interpretations vary in that;

‘we can, of course, make words mean just what we want them to mean’
(in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p.237).

For example, “inclusion” has been expressed in many contrasting ways by both policy-makers and researchers (see Chapter Two); each description containing differing words, themes and emphases. Whereas some writers choose to emphasise a child’s “rights” and “best interests” (DRC, 2001; CSIE, 2002; Porter 2002), others refer to “opportunities”, “support” and “intervention” as their central foci (DFES, 2003a, b & c; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005).

When researchers focus upon depth of meaning and examine the context of *why* not just what, it could be the case that hypotheses are constantly re-defined as their research progresses. However, qualitative researchers (Ball, 1990 & 1994; Dey, 1993) would argue that the ability to make differing interpretations is a particular strength of this type of research;

‘In qualitative analysis there is a strong emphasis on describing the world as it is perceived by different observers. For some this is the hallmark of the qualitative approach’ (Dey, 1993, p.36).

With this in mind, it seemed vital therefore for this study, to examine the differing perceptions of both parents and pre-school practitioners surrounding pre-school inclusion (see Chapters Four, Five and Six).

Grumet (in Eisner & Peshkin, 1990) describes the impossibility of achieving objectivity and validity;

‘We cannot, she says, detach ourselves from the world we study in order to meet a scientific standard of validity. We are a part of what we study’ (p.34).

As in May (1993), one could argue that interpretation is inevitable when dealing with reality. Also, as in Sherman & Webb (1988, p.14 & 23), “all ideas are abstract from experience All knowing, scientific or otherwise, involves interpretation”.

Throughout the research process for this study, efforts were made to consider such debates around objectivity, thus enhancing the validity and reliability of findings. Validity and reliability issues feature strongly in research literature (Bryman, 1988; Gilbert, 1993; Robson, 1993; Yin, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000) and need to be considered throughout the process of devising and conducting case study research strategies. As a starting point, taking Robson's description, validity is described as,

'establishing trustworthiness concerned with whether the findings are "really" about what they appear to be about. Are any relationships established in the findings "true", or due to the effect of something else?' (Robson, 1993, p.66).

In this research, it would be necessary to note that some respondents might know the researcher and may answer in such a way as to "try to please" or "not to offend" (Powney & Watts, 1987, p.136 & 137). This is discussed later on in this chapter, when describing the nature of "inside research". In aiming for more valid research findings, it was felt that a balance would be needed between gaining constructive advice at the start of the research process regarding the sampling process and structure of appropriate questions (Oppenheim, 1966; Drever, 1995 a&b); then seeking more open, honest and less-guarded responses from the final research sample (Powney & Watts, 1987; Lee, 1993).

As suggested by several researchers (Oppenheim, 1996; Powney & Watts, 1987; Lee, 1993; Drever, 1995 a&b), valuable opinions and suggestions were therefore sought to refine the final research questions; maintaining trust and confidentiality with respondents and phrasing questions in such a way as to gain the most valid and reliable data (Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). Robson (1993) emphasises the importance of piloting research in advance, where;

'there is no complete substitute for involvement with the "real" situation, when the feasibility of what is proposed in terms of time, effort and resources can be assessed' (Robson, 1993, p.164).

The “feasibility” of this case study was partially assessed by piloting questionnaires and interview schedules beforehand with some SEN colleagues (educational psychologists) and early years’ managers from the LA. Then, following some of their suggested amendments, questions were again piloted with similar respondents to those of the final sample, though not involved in the actual research (Oppenheim, 1966; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993; Drever, 1995b). Piloting the research prior to implementation with the final case study sample provided a “dummy run”, where “some of the inevitable problems” could be identified before adapting the “design into reality” (Robson, 1993, p.301).

When seeking validity within the final study findings, anonymous and confidential opinions and comments were explored from a wider group of pre-school providers; across five districts of a county (see Chapter Four), each with contrasting socio-economic features (DETR, 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003). More detailed interview comments and opinions were then gained from a smaller sample group that was least familiar to the researcher (Drever, 1995a). This smaller group of respondents were from one district of the county, where the researcher was not actively working on a regular basis as an “Area SENCo” (DFES, 2003a).

Several writers (Oppenheim, 1966; Bell, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; Robson, 1993; Drever, 1995 a&b) stress the importance of careful planning to avoid bias, particularly when preparing the sample to be questioned. However, it was important to note that this smaller group were also representative of the whole research sample (Gilbert, 1993; Robson, 1993); in terms of the data collated from across the county, representing a range of pre-school SENCos and managers, and displaying the types of pre-school settings in which they worked (see chapters four, five and six).

For research purposes, Drever (1995a) considers that a small scale survey is more likely to be used with a more limited population and therefore be of local significance. Though this case study was based within one LA, research data was gathered from the five districts of the county. In this way, a more descriptive range of data could be gained from both rural and urban areas, with contrasting socio-economic features (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; CSIE, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003).

Robson (1993) considers reliability to be a control of quality and links reliability to validity; suggesting that if a measure is unreliable, it is also invalid. Gilbert (1993) illustrates reliability in relation to research questioning and states that,

'A study can be said to be reliable if similar results would be obtained by others using the same questions and the same sampling criteria' (Gilbert 1993, p.99).

In the search for "truth" and "sameness", case study research findings can be difficult to replicate (Yin, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Silverman, 2001 & 2005) and could be described as unique to a particular sample, situation and set of circumstances. In fact, Silverman (2005) describes the difficulty of generalising from case studies as a "perennial worry" for researchers (p.128). It could be argued that case study research has too many uncontrollable variables for generalisations to be made.

In the search for validity and truth, Bassey (1998) notes that generalisations need not be essential outcomes of research, and can be "augmented" and "modified" (p1). It is felt appropriate here to try to interpret Bassey's approach of "augmentation" and "moderation", in relation to this particular case study. The "augmentation" for this study could be a description of several pre-school situations and circumstances, in which similar research findings occur. For example, it might be found that pre-school providers from settings across all five districts of the county, commonly link the term "inclusion" with behavioural difficulties, as in previous studies (Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; Avramidis, 2005).

“Modification” leading to the same research findings could be that, *when prompted or probed about behavioural issues*, pre-school providers commonly link the term inclusion with behavioural difficulties; the added “modification” then resulting in similar findings. With this in mind, questions 4 and 5 of the interview schedule (Appendix 5) asked practitioners about their interpretations of “SEN” and children with SEN who provided the “most challenges for pre-schools”. “Behavioural difficulties” were then listed amongst the possible options. Bassey adopts the view that “fuzzy generalisations” can be made from qualitative case study research; moving away from the need for statements such as, “it is true that....” towards, “it is sometimes true that...” (Bassey, 1998, p1). Hammersley (2001) questions the uniqueness of Bassey’s concept of “fuzzy generalisations”; suggesting that the idea can be applied through a range of scientific generalisations, as well as for dissemination of educational research. Hammersley (2001) also suggests that validity needs careful consideration, as “fuzzy generalisations” could be regarded as an avoidance of the research population and context when validating findings.

Considering Hammersley’s comments (2001) and with Bassey’s view (1998) that “fuzzy generalisations” are more likely to “invite replication” (p.1), the research findings will be supported by descriptive accounts of the research context. For instance, generalisations and comparisons are “invited”, through the study’s inclusion of descriptive profiles; of the pre-school settings (playgroups, nurseries, day-care) and the role and experience of the participants in the research (managers, SENCos or dual responsibility). It is hoped therefore that the detailed findings of this study can be of value to others considering similar issues, in this case surrounding pre-school inclusion. For example, findings might prove valuable to other LA managers charged with compiling county inclusion policies for early years and childcare settings, or devising SEN training packages for pre-school providers.

The “Insider” as Researcher

For this educational research it was felt important to be acutely aware of ethical issues (Powney & Watts, 1987; Burgess, 1993; Hammersley, 1993; Lee, 1993; May, 1993; Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). Watt (1995) emphasises that although there are clear ethical guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) for all stages of educational research, it is very difficult to define specific “rules”, due to the differing nature of the context for each study.

Watt (1995) lists several points for consideration, which proved very useful when identifying ethical issues within this particular case study, especially “at the early planning stage” and “before fieldwork begins” (Watt, 1995, p.1&2). For instance, when parents of children with SEN are asked to comment upon pre-school provision and pre-school providers are questioned about their own inclusive practice and training needs, it was anticipated that sensitive matters would probably arise during the course of the research. Criticisms of childcare provision might be disclosed and controversial comments might be made about named people or organisations. Care would therefore need to be given to matters of **access**, **confidentiality** and **consent** (Powney & Watts, 1987; Lee, 1993; Watt, 1995).

Access was sought via the “gate-keepers” (Powney & Watts, 1987; Lee, 1993; Watt, 1995); in this case the Early Years and SEN Managers of the LA. Draft research proposals, sample questionnaires and interview schedules were circulated for their approval, comments and suggestions. Discussions with the LA Early Years Inspector provided some helpful advice, particularly when phrasing questions to tease out potentially sensitive issues with pre-school providers. For example, in order to discuss anxieties surrounding inclusion, it was felt that opportunity should firstly be given for interviewees to illustrate how inclusion was successfully achieved in their own settings. The following questions were then included in the interview schedule (Appendix 5);

16. Please could you give an example of how your setting aims to include children with SEN?
17. What do you feel are some of the challenges of inclusion in a pre-school setting?

Due to the nature of the research and the fact that the LA agreed to sponsor the researcher, tensions sometimes arose as to the content being explored and negotiations had to be made as to how findings would then be reported. For instance, when one district of the LA was found to have “gaps” in pre-school provision in relation to the numbers of pre-school children, LA managers were keen to influence how this would be reported and to whom.

When feeding back to LA managerial groups for audit and quality assurance purposes, looking at childcare provision in the county, it was agreed that data could be presented in full. However, for wider audiences (including PhD thesis), anonymity and confidentiality would need to be ensured as much as possible. Reassurances about confidentiality and anonymity were essential with all participant stakeholders; as Lee (1993) points out, if attention is given to confidentiality, this can help to legitimise the research;

'It convinces potential respondents that researchers are to be trusted, and presumably encourages accurate reporting' (Lee, 1993, p.164).

All respondents and organisations participating in the study are therefore anonymised, using acronyms such as “County W”, “District S” and “Interviewee A” in order to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, respondents were not pressurised to be involved and were given the opportunity to withdraw (BERA, 2004).

Sometimes it was necessary to remind the “gatekeepers” of the research focus, as they had their own targets and objectives to meet and were keen to share some of these tasks. At times it seemed that a constant stream of LA strategic plans and policies had an “inclusion” or “SEN” section, which needed some input from someone with a “knowledgeable pre-school perspective”! However, as funding was being supplied, agreements were sometimes made to add pieces of related work and additional research questions that were sometimes mutually beneficial (annual reports, audit information, collation and presentation of county-wide SEN data).

For example, the Children's Information Service (CIS) requested some parental feedback on childcare provision as part of their annual LA audit. They agreed to fund postage of the research questionnaires, if some of the findings could then be summarised for their reporting purposes. Often, the work provided useful contextual information for the study. One example was being asked to examine statistics for children with SEN who were approaching school age and going forward for 'Statutory Assessment' (DFES, 2001).

Though very quantitative in nature, relating to numbers of children in each district and their specific SEN as defined in the Code of Practice (DFES, 2001), this gave some background information relating to the needs of similar cohorts of children who were at the centre of the inclusion debate for this particular research (see Appendix 8). The pre-school children referred to in this case study had mainly been identified as having SEN at "Early Years Action Plus", with some then proceeding through statutory assessment (DFES, 2001). Supported by Area SENCos (DFES, 2003a), child data was collated in each of the five districts (see Appendices 8 & 8a). The SEN statistics gained through this research appeared to be broadly representative of the local and national population statistics for pre-school children with SEN at "Early Years Action Plus" (DFES, 2001) and those entering mainstream reception classes with statements of SEN (DFES, 2003d).

At other times during this study, LA work-load "additions" had not been anticipated and were not necessarily part of the case study schedule. Nonetheless, agreeing to complete these tasks meant that the research could take place, with consent and very little cost to the researcher in terms of administration and delivery (Drever, 2005b). For instance, the Early Years managers requested an article about 'Disability Discrimination' and the implications for early years settings (this became attached to one of the research questionnaires in an LA newsletter, Appendix 4). Also some quantitative data was sought on behalf of the Children's Information Service (CIS) in relation to families claiming tax credit; questions were inserted on the postal questionnaire that went out to parents, with contact details for further information should they require it (Appendix 3, questions 2a and 2b).

As all questions on the questionnaire were numbered and explained separately, those not directly related to the case study could be extracted without affecting the validity of findings. However, the findings of the whole parental questionnaire were summarised and reported as part of an annual CIS audit (EYDCP, 2004a: Appendix 9).

Upon the advice of the CIS who had frequent involvement with audits and questionnaires in the LA, incentives were offered to encourage a high return of respondents. In this case respondents were to be entered into a prize draw, with prizes that could be used with children in their pre-school settings (see Appendix 4). It could be argued that this leads to bias (Oppenheim, 1966; Bell, 1993; Burgess, 1993; May, 1993; Fink, 1995). However, as in Drever (1995b), it is one way of maximising the return sample. Attempts to guard against bias in this instance included emphasising confidentiality and anonymity of findings, whilst allowing respondents to give contact details if they wished to be entered in the prize draw, as in the postal questionnaire for pre-school providers (Appendix 4).

It is realised therefore that validity and reliability may be questioned when an “insider” is carrying out research (Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003; Silverman, 2005), for instance a teacher carrying out locally based educational research. Finch (1986) and Pring (2000) examine some of the criticisms of social and educational research, particularly in relation to objectivity and impartiality; noting that the researcher should aim to “distance” themselves;

‘Objectivity suggests that the researcher should be somewhat distanced from what is being researched into. Prejudice, self-interest, familiarity, defensiveness would surely distort the research’ (Pring, 2000, p121).

Weber (in Silverman, 2005) notes that “all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher” (p.257), due to the fact that the initial values and beliefs of the researcher probably prompted the research inquiry in the first place. The focus and drive for this study, could be said to generate from the researcher’s particular interest and managerial involvement in pre-school SEN and inclusion.

Silverman (2005) suggests that ethically, researchers need not “contaminate” their research by divulging too much information, but will be more likely to obtain valid and reliable data from respondents if they gain “informed consent” and “give feedback” (p257-262). These points would need consideration during this research and various attempts were made (see Appendices 3, 4 & 5).

BERA (2004) stresses the importance of “informed consent” where,

‘participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway’ (BERA, 2004, p.6).

“Informed consent” was gained from all participants in the research at each stage of the case study (Lee, 1993; Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). Efforts were made to reassure participants of confidentiality; explaining the purposes of the research and the role of the researcher within the process, together with an explanation of potential implications and proposed outcomes of the research findings, for example;

‘The SEN pre-school team and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership are reviewing the services that we provide for pre-school children and their families in *County W*. To assist with this, we would like to find out your views, ideas and experiences of childcare and pre-school services in your area.... All information will be treated in confidence and any individuals, pre-schools or childcare services will remain anonymous in all reported findings’ (Parent questionnaire, Appendix 3).

An unexpected research outcome was that one of the pre-school practitioners requested a certificate for her professional portfolio, to use as evidence of her participation in the study. Certificates were then made for all interviewees.

As Finch (1984), Ball (1990), Pring (2000) and Hegarty (2003) point out, there are often ethical and/or political considerations to be made when a research project is being sponsored by an organisation, in this case by the LA in which the research is situated. As suggested earlier, it could be asked whether the LA steers the aims of the researcher, or if the researcher can realistically influence the future policy and practice of the LA. Although social research can be described as unavoidably political, Finch (1986) examines the belief that the qualitative research element in relation to policy-making will provide more viability and be “more ethically justifiable”. As noted by Watts (1995), Pring (2000) and BERA (2004), it is envisaged that the research outcomes of this study can be considered more valid and useful if they encompass a familiar set of beliefs, experiences and shared understandings. For example, interviews with a sample of pre-school providers from one district of the LA (Appendix 5) seek to examine the term “inclusion” and what this means to them, following up specific areas raised in earlier more quantitative surveys (Appendices 2 and 4). In this way analysis of data can provide more in-depth detail; describing the context in which respondents are working, and revealing some of the beliefs, ideas and concerns that underpin their answers to research questions.

Using Mixed Methods

Quantitative and qualitative research takes many forms and definitions vary. However, some researchers (Bryman, 1988; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Dey, 1993; Hammersley, 1993; May, 1993) believe that quantitative research deals with numbers and statistics, whereas qualitative research deals with interpretation and meanings. At this point, perhaps it is appropriate to note that whether the aims of the research are quantitative or qualitative, this has implications for the methods employed by the researcher. For instance, as Dey suggests,

'...the way we analyse meanings is through conceptualization, whereas the way we analyse numbers is through statistics and mathematics' (Dey 1993, p.3).

Silverman (2005) notes that qualitative methods can be used to explore “every-day behaviour” (p.6) and “provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data” (p.10). In this case study, it was considered important to explore how parents and pre-school providers perceive inclusive practice within the “every-day behaviours” of a range of pre-school settings. Although fairly small in scale, Silverman writes that the “detail” of qualitative research can be found “in the precise particulars of such matters as people’s understandings and interactions” (Silverman, 2005, p.9).

With the development of a research framework in mind (Powney & Watts, 1987; Bell, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993), it was decided to use a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative research methods as a form of “triangulation”; an analytical overview of contextual primary sources, together with face-to-face surveys, postal questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Denzin (in May, 1993) and Bryman (1988) describe triangulation as the use of combined methodologies to study the same research area.

Bryman (1988) also suggests that,

‘the researcher’s claims for the validity of his or her conclusions are enhanced if they can be shown to provide mutual confirmation’ (Bryman, 1988, p.131).

It can be argued that mixing methods enriches and “validates” research findings; widening the scope of the research, even within a small-scale case study (Bryman, 1988; Brannen, 1992; Burgess, 1993; May, 1993; Silverman, 2001). In this way the central aims and questions of the research can be explored from different perspectives (in this case, parents and providers) and via different sources (postal questionnaires, “face-to-face” surveys and interviews); for example to look for similarities and inconsistencies of opinions and experiences amongst the sample group, and to discover whether ideas and findings are in fact reinforced or contradicted by the same respondents.

Though seemingly quite critical of using mixed or multiple methods, Silverman (2005) suggests that one way to “obtain generalizability” in case study research, is by “combining qualitative research with quantitative measures of populations” (p.128). This was an important consideration for this case study, when seeking detailed comments and opinions from a range of individuals, across five districts of a county. In order to gain some important contextual information (Audit Commission, 2003; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; DFES, 2003a), primary sources were initially examined, such as LA policy documentation and local district socio-economical data. Questionnaires were then used with both parents and pre-school providers to survey wider issues across the county (Drever, 1995b). Key themes and common issues arose during the collation and analysis of questionnaire data. This helped to identify further questions, which could be explored in more depth, by using qualitative interviews with a smaller sample of questionnaire respondents. In this way, it was felt that the research would follow what Powney and Watts (1987) refer to as a “flexible framework, where broad questions are defined and tentative hypotheses grow from data” (p.2).

Booth (in Finch, 1986) discusses the fact that although quantitative data with statistics and surveys can be more influential to policy makers, facts and figures can also be misleading, because of a “lack of colour” (p162). In this case, in addition to the quantitative statistical data from questionnaires, the “colour” would be provided within more descriptive data; the contextual information used to “set the scene” of the research, and the detailed qualitative data from both questionnaires and interviews.

When researching social policy issues, Finch (1986) writes that using mixed methods can help to generalise findings; where qualitative research “compliments other types of data” and provides “the descriptive detail which makes a complex situation comprehensible” (p162).

Silverman (2005) describes triangulation as a way of combining different ways of looking at data, or examining different findings to try to get a “true fix on a situation” (p.212). However, as Silverman also warns, when multiple methods are used and data is aggregated to find the “whole picture”, this can be,

‘an illusion which speedily leads to scrappy research based on under-analysed data and an imprecise or theoretically indigestible research problem’ (Silverman, 2005, p.123).

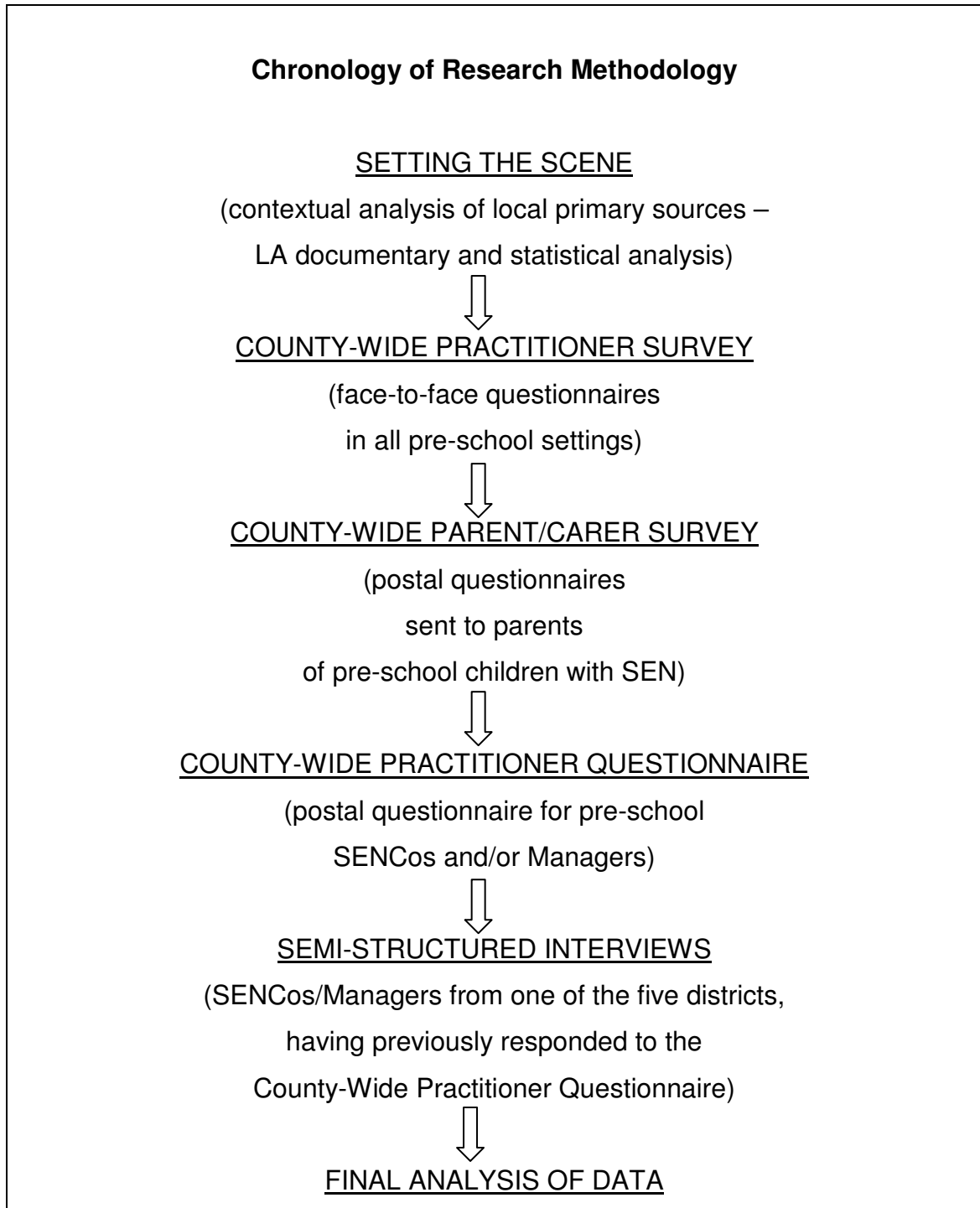
To guard against this, it was felt essential to keep key questions and themes running centrally throughout the research process. As an illustration, one research question related to whether pre-school providers had already attended any SEN training, so this needed to be a continuous thread throughout. When setting the scene and gathering contextual information, numbers of staff attending pre-school SEN courses in one year (2002-03) were collated in each of the five districts across the LA (Appendix 2). Parents of pre-school children with SEN were asked to rate the importance of relevant training and qualifications of childcare staff, when they were considering childcare options (question 4h, Appendix 3). Through questionnaires and interviews, pre-school providers were then asked whether they (or any of their colleagues) had attended any SEN training and which courses they had attended (Appendices 2, 4 & 5).

Further questions were included to seek additional information, for instance asking how pre-school providers found out about training opportunities and how they chose courses to attend. Brannen (1992) suggests that using contrasting methods to examine similar research issues may produce incomparable sets of data. For this case study therefore, it was felt important to consider Silverman’s argument for “simplicity and rigour”. It was hoped that by limiting data as much as possible to key themes (for example, SEN training and inclusion), this would in turn make analysis more “appropriate” and “effective” (Silverman, 2005, p. 64 & 123). Also, as Brannen (1992), Burgess (1993), May (1993) and Silverman (2001) point out, although triangulating research inquiries can be useful, the researcher still needs to be wary of strengths and weaknesses within each research method used.

A Chronology of Research Methodology

To clarify the order in which the research methods were employed, there now follows a diagram (see Fig. 3.1). This illustrates the chronology of the research methodology; more details of which are summarised in Appendix 1.

Fig. 3.1.



Some of the rationale and implications of using these methods are now discussed further.

Setting the Scene

In Chapter Two, it was argued that educational researchers should examine both social and economical influences upon their area of research, particularly as close links have been identified with “deprivation”, poverty and incidences of SEN (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003a; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005). Therefore, it was felt that some local primary sources such as LA early years strategic plans and inclusion policies, would need to be consulted to provide a descriptive background for the research project (LA documentary sources, Appendix 9).

In order to gain such local knowledge for this study, it also seemed appropriate to consult the County’s CIS (Childcare Information Service) and LA websites (LA sources: Appendix 9). Attention focused mainly upon Census information and environmental, social and economic indicators (as discussed in Chapter Two). This involved looking at “area profiles” for the whole county and for each of the 5 districts individually (see Chapter Four); examining the socio-economic context for the sample groups featured within the case study. Illustrative statistics were gathered to measure and compare socio-economic groups, for example relating to numbers of children under the age of four and numbers of working-aged people with long term illness (DETR, 2000; County Census 2001: Appendix 9).

Documentary and content analysis approaches were considered as part of this process (Holsti, 1969; DIIA, 2006; Krippendorff, 1980 & 2004) particularly when looking at how material was worded to describe and portray both national and local “inclusion” policy, and how statistical data was chosen, reported and analysed in relation to “inclusive” early years practice (in chapters four, five and six).

Following on from this (and at the request of the LA sponsoring the research), some data was collated in relation to pre-school children with SEN (Appendix 8 and 8a). As referred to earlier in this chapter, these statistics were representative of children at the centre of this research, attending pre-school settings that were participating in the case study. It was envisaged that this

overview would help to “set the scene”, establishing an outline of background information, and forming a starting point for research questions.

To maintain confidentiality (Powney & Watts, 1987; Lee, 1993; BERA, 2004), data for children with SEN was collated from LA databases, but only following the consent of LA gate-keepers. Children and pre-schools were not named, and statistical data was recorded anonymously in each of the five districts.

Face-to-face Surveys

A county-wide practitioner survey (Appendix 2) was used to gain additional contextual information relating more specifically to the pre-school settings of this case study. At this early stage of the research, it was felt that a “face-to-face” approach in every setting across the county would enable wider coverage of the broader areas of investigation than if a smaller sample of respondents were selected (Bryman, 1988; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993). When collating quantitative data for example, it was hoped to discover how many pre-school settings had an identified SENCo, how long they had been in post, and if they had attended any SEN training (Appendix 2). The more qualitative data relating to practitioner comments and perceptions surrounding SEN training would be summarised in written form on the survey, to gain a flavour of the types of issues that would need further in-depth investigation later on. It was anticipated that the findings of the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2), with both quantitative statistical data and emerging themes from qualitative data, would provide a baseline of information, from which further in-depth research could progress (Powney & Watts, 1987).

As well as gaining LA consent to collate data for this study the face-to-face survey met several of the LA requests for information; contributing to “Gap Surveys” (see Appendix 9), and beginning to measure the attendance rates and commitment of practitioners to early years training. This contextual data is reported and analysed in Chapters Four and Five.

This survey was initiated and guided by the researcher, but then undertaken by a team of 12 Area SENCos (DFES, 2003a), with each practitioner questionnaire implemented on the researcher’s behalf. It is acknowledged that there are

validity and reliability concerns around “team” implementation of surveys; in relation to how questions are regulated - as to the manner in which they are asked and subsequently reported, particularly regarding sensitive information (Lee, 1993, Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). For example, a practitioner may not want to disclose if the setting has not appointed a SENCo. Similarly, an Area SENCo may not feel comfortable asking “why not?” As advised by Lee (1993), the researcher discussed these types of scenarios with the Area SENCos beforehand when the questionnaires were constructed and agreed; with some closed questions (requesting yes/no responses), and other more open questions (inviting further information, through written prompts that had been agreed by the whole team).

In this instance, a team approach was felt to be the most effective way of reaching a wide sample of pre-school providers, within a small time-scale (Bryman, 1988; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993). All pre-school settings were visited within a six week period, during the first half-term of the pre-school year (see Appendix 1). Robson (1993) describes this as a “snapshot” approach, emphasising that;

‘Surveys are often CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDIES. That is, the focus is on the make-up of the sample, and the state of affairs in the population at just one point in time’ (Robson, 1993, p.49).

As the survey had been designed in consultation with the Area SENCos, it was hoped that there was a shared understanding of the areas of investigation and the questions to be used (Lee, 1993, Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). It was agreed to use a semi-structured questionnaire design, with written prompts and probes to refer to (Drever, 1995, a & b). The questionnaire sheet was designed to be simple to complete, on one side of paper so that written comments could be recorded by the Area SENCo and shared with the respondent at the time of the survey (BERA, 2004) – summarising the responses of each practitioner.

Area SENCoS agreed to carry out the surveys as part of their routine visits to settings with practitioners that were familiar to them, aiming to ensure trust and confidence, whilst also treating information confidentiality (Lee, 1993, Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). Prior to commencing the survey, it was agreed to explain to all respondents that though the researched information would contribute to future LA and Area SENCo planning, all individual responses would be reported anonymously in any publicised material (Lee, 1993, Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004).

It could be argued that although confidentiality was assured, as respondents knew the Area SENCoS and were completing the questionnaires with them present, this could lead to biased responses being given (Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003; Silverman, 2005). However, it was felt to be a valuable process in that it enabled a broad sample of data to be collated, to add to contextual information for the case study as a whole. Key issues arising could then be researched further (anonymously) through postal questionnaires later on (Appendix 4).

There were opportunities during the face-to-face surveys for pre-school providers to ask questions and set targets for their next Area SENCo visit (as was usual practice); so this was felt to be mutually beneficial. For instance, one pre-school provider expressed concern that she had not received a training brochure and it was agreed that the Area SENCo would bring her a spare copy.

At the end of the six week period, Area SENCoS passed all completed surveys to the researcher. Data from the whole county and in each of the five districts was then collated and categorised electronically on a database (for example: the district, the type of setting, with or without a SENCo, any training attended) before being reported and analysed further. Having gathered all qualitative comments and perceptions alongside more statistical data, there was then an attempt to identify, categorise and “interpret” (Ball, 1990 & 1994) the key emerging themes surrounding SEN training and pre-school “inclusion” (see Chapters Five and Six).

Postal Questionnaires

Though recognising the scope for using postal questionnaires in small scale research as well as in large scale research, there are frequent discussions as to the possible merits and disadvantages of questionnaires, which were considered for this study (Brannen, 1992; Bell, 1993; May, 1993; Fink, 1995; Drever, 1995b). For instance, Bell (1993), May (1993) and Drever (1995b) refer to the low cost of questionnaires and the possibility of covering a wide area. They also note that anonymity of the respondents can be maintained when dealing with ethically or politically sensitive issues and that less bias exists, because questions are standardised (not influenced by the way in which interviewers might ask questions).

On the other hand, as Brannen (1992) and May (1993) point out, questions need to be kept relatively simple and straightforward, as the researcher has no control over how people are interpreting a question once it has been mailed. Nor, they suggest, is there the possibility of probing beyond the answers that respondents give.

It was decided to use two postal questionnaires in this research, one for parents (Appendix 3) and one for pre-school providers (Appendix 4), because as several writers discuss (Oppenheim, 1966; Bell, 1993; Burgess, 1993; Fink, 1995), they enable a broad sample of data to be collected and are more easily quantified. Oppenheim (1966) and May (1993) outline some of the potential problems of low rates of return and possible bias associated with postal questionnaires. For instance, Oppenheim (1966) emphasises that although questionnaires are cheaper and simpler to process and analyse, there could be poor response rates, which could lead to bias,

‘because almost invariably the returns are not representative of the original sample drawn’ (Oppenheim, 1966, p.34).

It was essential to guard against this bias; when looking at how questionnaires were firstly distributed across the whole county, then checking that returns were representative of all 5 districts of the county and across a range of pre-school settings (playgroups, LA nurseries, private day care providers).

Parent Questionnaires (Appendix 3) were distributed across the county to all 92 parents of children identified at “Early Years Action Plus” (DFES, 2001) at the time of the study. As recommended by Gilbert (1993), each questionnaire was colour-coded prior to distribution, so that anonymous returns would retain their “district” identity. The return of 35 parent questionnaires appeared to be similarly representative of incidences of children with SEN across each of the five districts (Appendices 8 & 8a). Data is reported and analysed in Chapter Four.

Practitioner Questionnaires (Appendix 4) were posted to all settings in a newsletter and returns were distinguishable by the early questions relating to district and type of setting. Although for both postal questionnaires (Appendix 3 & 4), responses were slightly lower from two out of the five districts, this apparently reflected similar response rates for other county-wide surveys that had been carried out by the LA (CIS 2003). There were 26 returned practitioner questionnaires, but again these were representative of cross-county and district contextual data that had already been gained from the pre-school settings across the whole county (“face-to-face” survey, Appendix 2). Analysis of the combined data of the wider survey (Appendix 2) and the more detailed questionnaire (Appendix 4), gave an insight into the differing socio-economic areas and the varying nature of early years provision in rural and urban districts (see Chapters Four, Five and Six).

Drever’s suggestions (1995b) for maximising questionnaire return rates were particularly useful for this research, for instance ensuring confidentiality and offering incentives (prizes) to respondents, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. May’s suggestions (1993) were also helpful for designing and clarifying questions in a clear and unambiguous way, so that they were more likely to be understood by the “target population” of respondents (p.76). May (1993) advised “undertaking preliminary reading around the topic” and piloting questions with a “subsample” group of respondents (p. 76). Constructive criticisms could then be requested from the pilot group in order to amend the order, layout and wording of questions. This proved particularly useful advice when preparing postal questionnaires (Appendices 3 and 4), for which the

researcher has “no control” over interpretation once posted (May, 1993, p.73). Using a mix of open and closed questions (Oppenheim, 1966; Bell, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993; Drever, 1995b) in order to gain the confidence of respondents, questions were more quantitative in design to begin with, using clear boxes to tick and yes/no answers. These questions were used (as in Appendix 4) to seek contextual data such as the role of the respondent, the type of pre-school setting, SEN courses so far attended and sources of information about such training.

There were also opportunities in both questionnaires (parents and pre-school providers) for sliding scale answers to measure **opinions** and **attitudes**, based on a Likert scale (Oppenheim, 1966; Robson, 1993; May, 1993; Drever, 1995b). Oppenheim refers to concerns about "reproducibility" of findings and a possible lack of a "neutral point" on a Likert scale, but points out the reliability of its usage;

'Likert's primary concern was with unidimensionality - making sure that all items would measure the same thing' (Oppenheim, 1966, p.133).

Once respondents were “in the flow” of completing the questionnaire and were likely to be more familiar with the content and context (SEN, inclusion and pre-school provision), it was then felt appropriate to include more qualitative questions that were pertinent to individuals’ opinions and perceptions. These questions would seek individual comments and further clarification of information, some of which referred back to answers already given. For example, pre-school providers were asked to indicate “any other important considerations” when looking at SEN training for their settings, in addition to the proposed considerations already listed on the questionnaire (Appendix 4). At the end of the questionnaire they were also asked;

“To help determine the impact of training that you have attended, please give examples of how your attendance at SEN training courses has influenced your practice, eg. In terms of your own staff training, liaison with parents, use of resources and/or changes in practice” (Appendix 4).

To delve deeper into comments and issues raised by respondents in questionnaires, a smaller sample of pre-school providers were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. The interviewees had consented to further involvement and were chosen from one area of the county that had a representative range of respondents from different types of pre-school settings and with differing roles and responsibilities (Oppenheim, 1966). As discussed earlier in this chapter, they were also selected as they were least likely to be familiar to the researcher in a professional capacity, so aiming to reduce bias when involved in face-to-face interviews (Powney & Watts, 1997).

Interviews

It is acknowledged that interviewing can take many forms and serve several different purposes and therefore definitions may vary. Bell (1993) writes about the adaptability of semi-structured interviews compared with questionnaires, in that they allow an interviewer to “follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate feelings, which the questionnaire can never do” (Bell 1993, p.91).

Many researchers (Powney and Watts 1987; Gilbert 1993; Cohen & Manion 1994) would agree with Robson when he describes a research interview as,

'a conversation with a purpose What matters are the intentions and actions of the enquirer, which ... can be various' (Robson 1993, p.228 & 229).

It was realised that the **purpose** of the research would have implications for the type of interviewing **techniques** that the researcher decides to use. For this study, "techniques" were considered to be the strategies employed when seeking validity, reliability, confidentiality and sensitivity. As Powney and Watts (1987) point out, it was anticipated that the actual face-to-face interviews would be just part of the whole interviewing process;

'We see research interviews as conversational encounters to a purpose that purpose extending in time well before - and certainly well after the actual encounter ...' (Powney & Watts, 1987, Preface).

With this in mind, before the interview a letter of invitation was devised aiming to ensure confidentiality, explain the purpose of the research and put respondents at ease with the process (Lee, 1993; Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). A great deal of thought went into pre-planning for how to put respondents at ease, so that the interviews would run as smoothly as possible. The letter requesting their involvement emphasised that interviews would be “relaxed and informal” and “at times and venues to suit the interviewees”. The LA agreed to provide funding, so that the researcher could offer payment for staff cover, allowing interviewees to participate without leaving staff pressures in their own settings.

A copy of each individually completed postal questionnaire was attached to the invitation to “refresh their memories”. It was important to acknowledge appreciation for their participation, before, during and after the interview. As mentioned earlier, one way afterwards was to send a certificate, as requested by one of the respondents. Interviews would be tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed, with further feedback given at a later stage to show the outcomes and impact of the research.

Interviews vary from very structured to unstructured interviews and definitions differ. May (1993) and Powney and Watts (1987) describe the structured interview as one in which the researcher/interviewer remains in control, following a clear, pre-organised schedule of questions for the interviewee to respond to accordingly.

Conversely, the unstructured interview is described as one in which the wording and order of questions is not as rigidly set by the researcher/interviewer and the interviewee is encouraged to respond more freely.

It was decided to devise a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 5) in order to seek more detailed information from a smaller sample of pre-school providers. As May (1993), Robson (1993) and Drever (1995a) point out, the semi-structured interview utilises techniques from both structured and unstructured interview techniques.

Drever describes the semi-structured interview as one which,

'lies between extremes The structure provided by the main questions allows semi-structured interviewing to be business-like. The variable control through the use of prompts and probes allows it to be flexible' (Drever, 1995a, p.1 & p.17).

By using "prompts" and "probes", in addition to key questions, it was hoped that this would enable further investigation of views, attitudes and expectations surrounding inclusion (see Appendix Five). Referring to the advice of Drever (1995a), Robson (1993), May (1993) and Powney and Watts (1987), when implementing semi-structured questioning techniques, there was an examination of the ways in which "prompts" and "probes" could be included between structured questions to enable the interviewee to extend or clarify his or her answers. Robson (1993) describes "prompts" as suggestions, which interviewers can give to respondents, demonstrating a range of possible answers. "Probes" are outlined by Robson (1993) as strategies, which interviewers can use to encourage respondents to "expand" upon their answers.

Drever (1995a) describes prompts and probes as subordinate questions, used to enhance validity and reliability of respondents' answers. However, there may be concerns about interviewer bias. For instance,

'The use of 'probes', 'prompts', and 'cues' may change the direction of the interview' (Powney & Watts 1987, p.173).

To counteract this problem, as Powney and Watts (1987) and May (1993) recommend, after piloting the interview schedule with colleagues and volunteer pre-school providers that were not part of the final sample group, useful prompts and probes were then carefully noted in the context of each interview schedule (see Appendix Five) and used consistently with every respondent.

Several writers (Powney & Watts, 1987; Gilbert, 1993; Cohen & Manion, 1994 & 2000) suggest that taping and transcribing interviews enables this type of recording to be achieved more accurately, so that the exact wording of questions, prompts and answers are less likely to be misconstrued during analysis; ideas which were implemented in this case study.

Powney and Watts (1987) advise that probes can be non-verbal as well as verbal, with examples such as, “an enquiring glance” or “an expectant silence” (Powney & Watts 1987, p.138). The researcher anticipated that great self-control would be needed when trying not to influence responses with a smile, frown or any other change of facial expression!

In summary

For the methodology of this study, it was felt that by combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods in a form of “triangulation” (Finch, 1986; Bryman, 1988; Bell, 1993; Burgess, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; Robson, 1993; Silverman, 2001), this would confirm and enhance the validity and reliability of findings; “cross-checking” and examining more than one set of data to look for inconsistencies as well as similarities in results. Ball’s “interpretive” approach (Ball, 1990 & 1994) has been adopted throughout this research in an attempt to add “realities”, “colour” and context to the case study as a whole.

Reporting and Analysis of data

The reporting and analysis of research data is now arranged in three chapters. Chapter Four presents some contextual information about the LA of this study, and highlights a range of parental views and experiences in relation to pre-school provision for children with SEN. Chapter Five then examines some of the influential factors which appear to aid or obstruct SEN training opportunities for early years practitioners, as perceived by respondents in this research. Looking at how national and local inclusion policy translates into practice within one LA, Chapter Six explores some of the identified training needs of pre-school providers and considers the contributing elements which influence “effective pre-school inclusion”. Arranging the data in this way partially reflects the sequential pattern in which research findings emerged, but also outlines the main contributing factors which lead towards the formation of the research model for this thesis (Fig. 7.1, Chapter Seven).

With the next three chapters reporting and analysing the research findings thematically, chapter four begins by exploring a profile of pre-school provision across the LA of this case study. There is then an examination of parental perceptions and considerations when choosing childcare for their children with SEN.

CHAPTER FOUR: Pre-School Provision and Choices for Parents

Introduction

This chapter begins to describe and analyse the access and availability of pre-school provision across a county, using contextual analysis of local primary sources (see Appendix 9). Initially, an examination of local statistical data is used to provide county-wide information, as well as revealing differing socio-economic profiles for each of the 5 districts within. Using data from the parent questionnaire (Appendix 3), there is then a discussion surrounding some of the parental considerations when choosing childcare provision for their children with SEN, where the majority of parents surveyed highlighted the importance of trained, qualified staff.

Socio-economical data

A county picture

Chapter Two examined inclusion from a range of viewpoints, including a human rights perspective (DRC, 2001; CSIE, 2002), where all children and families have the “right” to education provision which is “available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable” (CSIE, 2002, p.11), wherever they live in the UK. Research has shown that parents of children with special needs can face a “postcode lottery” in their search for good pre-school provision (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; OFSTED, 2005). In 2005, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) warned that the availability of good quality care for children with learning difficulties and disabilities varied widely across England. It was noted that, as a result of “inconsistent” provision and multi-agency support, “services for children with special needs depend on where they live, not on what they need” (OFSTED, 2005, p.6).

It was therefore considered important for this study, to gain a picture of pre-school provision for children with SEN from different regions within the county. As discussed in Chapter Two, social and economical factors were considered to be essential when reporting these case study findings, as potentially there could be variability in pre-school provision; according to where children lived, their

family makeup, and their financial circumstances (Mittler, 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; Emerson, 2003; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005).

At the time of this study, one of the questions commonly being used nationally to measure poverty and deprivation for a pre-school child, related not only to the provision of pre-schools, but to children's actual attendance at least once a week at a playgroup, nursery or toddler group (DWP, 2003). This take-up of places was therefore an important consideration to be explored through both LA primary sources (Appendix 9) and the parent questionnaire (Appendix 3).

In addition to the variability and inconsistency of childcare provision across the UK (Audit Commission, 2003), research has shown that parents of a child with SEN can experience extra financial difficulties (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). This could be in relation to returning to work, finding accessible, affordable childcare and seeking sources of extra family support (such as respite care). Describing this as a "poverty trap" for families (p.88), the Audit Commission (2003) advocates that all support services should develop a thorough understanding of the local population and their needs, consulting key strategic documents and data such as 'Early Years Childcare and Development Plans' and 'local census information' (p.12).

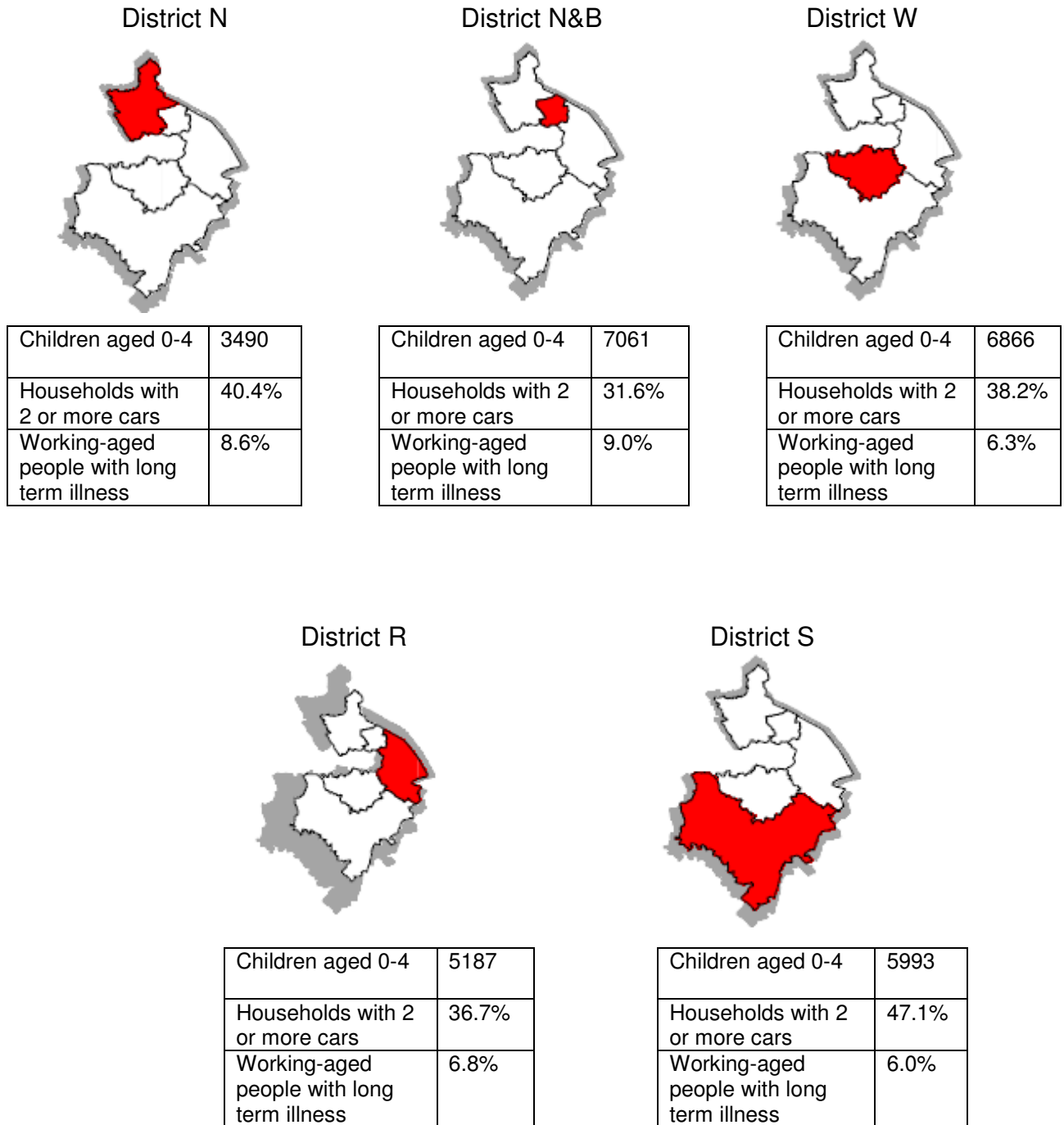
Therefore, in order to gain more local knowledge for this research, some local primary sources were consulted; the Childcare Information Service (CIS 2001-2004), County Census data, LA and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership Strategic Plans, Implementation Plans and "Gap" Surveys (see Appendix 9). As in the Audit Commission (2003), it was recognised that for children with SEN and their families, this knowledge should include,

'the full range and nature of people's support needs, including transport, housing, leisure, benefits and community safety' (Audit Commission, 2003, p.17 & 18).

Examining these fuller profiles helped to build both a county-wide and regional picture across the LA, seeking data from each of the five districts. However for the purposes of this chapter, following documentary and content analysis (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980 & 2004; DIIA, 2006), the extracted socio-economical findings that are reported here are those which relate most closely to pre-school provision and choices for parents.

As discussed earlier (Chapters Two and Three), it was felt important to refer to Census information and 'Environmental, Social and Economic Indicators' (County Census, 2001), examining "area profiles" for the whole county and for each of the 5 districts. To preserve anonymity, these are referred to here as Districts N, N&B, R, W and S (see Fig. 4.1, p. 98). Under each shaded map, there is a brief illustration of the type of data drawn from Census information (County Census, 2001). As well as indicating how many children are aged 0 to 4 years in each district, the statistics are given for households with two or more cars, and for numbers of working-aged people with long term illnesses (see Fig. 4.1, p.98). This is to provide a flavour of the socio-economic context in which the sample group of pre-school children and families live (Mittler, 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Emerson, 2003; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005), using examples of some of the statistics which are commonly used to measure and compare socio-economic groups (County Census, 2001; DETR, 2000).

Fig. 4.1 Maps of the 5 Districts within County W



Pre-School Provision and Nursery Education Grant

At the time of this research, although parents did not have to send their children to nursery, it was government policy to enable every child to have access to “free” early years education before they started school. The “Nursery Education Grant” (NEG) provided up to five 2½ hour nursery education sessions per week. LAs were encouraged to set “ambitious targets” when it came to developing funded childcare places, particularly in local “areas of deprivation” (DFES, 2003 b & c). These statistics were submitted quarterly by LAs as performance targets and were measured, published and compared with other LAs across the country. However, Surestart acknowledged that,

‘some authorities may have interpreted data requests in different ways to others – and data may not have been subject to rigorous checking before submission to the Unit.... Data in the document should be seen as indicators to prompt discussion and review; differences between authorities may be for sound underlying reasons’ (Performance Measurement Team, Sure Start Unit, November 2003).

Following the demands of national policy, the LA of this study (EYDCP, 2003b), stated that if children were not already receiving a place at a ‘free’ local authority nursery class or school, all three year olds were entitled to claim one term of funded nursery education in a non-maintained pre-school (independent or voluntary) via the NEG. The remaining NEG was then allocated using the Child Poverty Index (Index of Multiple Deprivation, DETR, 2000), so that those children living in areas of socio-economic need had priority access to the funding (not directly prioritising children with SEN). For example, using these measures (DETR, 2000), a child living in District N&B would probably be entitled to more funded provision than a child living in District S, with far more LA maintained nursery places available to 3 year olds in District N&B (County Census, 2001; “Gap Survey”, EYDCP, 2002b). Documentary and web research (Appendix 9) provided a wide and varied picture of the county.

With the increasing availability of NEG, the percentage of 3 year olds that were able to take up funded pre-school provision in the County rose from less than 40% in 2000/2001, to over 86% during 2002/2003 (EYDCP, 2002b; EYDCP, 2003c), with 346 settings in receipt of Nursery Education Grant. The LA then set a revised target for 3 year olds accessing funded provision, of 90% for 2003/2004 (LA, 2002, p.100). It is worth noting that attendance figures were approximate and tended to fluctuate as pre-schools opened and closed, expanded and reduced in size; reflecting the population and age of the children in the county. Although the majority of families chose mainstream pre-school provision for children with SEN, there were also 6 Specialist Nurseries attached to Special Schools (see Appendix 6), which offered pre-school placements for some children with significant special educational needs and/or disabilities, following parental consent and choice.

At the time of this initial data collation (2003), there were variations of pre-school attendance between District Areas. It appeared that not all parts of the county had reached the LA's own target of 78% (EYDCP, 2003c & 2004b). In 2002/2003, pre-school attendance ranged from 72% in District S, to 96% in District N&B (EYDCP, 2003c & 2004b). This was possibly due to the fact that there were a larger number of local, funded LA places in District N&B, with relatively higher levels of social deprivation and increased population size (DETR, 2000; DFES, 2003c).

Although geographically, District S covers the largest area, there were just 3 maintained LA nurseries offering "free" provision in 2002/2003 (EYDCP, 2003c). The remaining 70 non-maintained settings in District S were mainly smaller private provisions (such as village playgroups), with more travelling distance involved for some parents and not all provisions offered fully funded places. In addition, in order to remain sustainable, some smaller non-maintained pre-schools only opened for two or three half-day sessions per week (EYDCP, 2003c & 2004b).

The LA recognised that although there were high numbers of childcare places available, they were not necessarily in the right location, with some nurseries having limited accommodation (EYDCP, 2001a);

‘It is proposed to produce brief area plans as funding expands to ensure the viability across all sectors. Provision is still difficult to access in some rural and urban areas’ (EYDCP, 2001a, p.2).

During this research, the LA set a “strategic goal” to create 4,310 new childcare places by March 2004 and to provide “universal nursery education for three year olds” by September 2004 (EYDCP, 2001a). This “universal” status has since been achieved (EYDCP, 2004c), with all three year olds in County W offered up to 12 ½ hours of “free” childcare in the term following their third birthday. In 2006, out of all the children entering reception classes across the LA, 96.6% had attended pre-school provision (Childcare Audit and Sufficiency Assessment 2006/07: LA, 2007). The figures showing pre-school attendance for each of the five districts were all over 96% (LA, 2007).

So far, the socio-economical picture of the county has been described to “set the scene” for this research. There now follows a discussion surrounding some of the parental considerations when choosing childcare provision for their children with SEN, which were surveyed as part of this study (Parent Questionnaire, Appendix 3). Much of the data is reported quantitatively, in the form of charts (see Figures 4.2 to 4.5), with further analysis of the statistical findings. More qualitative data, gained from all of the written parental comments (Questions 1 & 5, Appendix 3), is anonymously reported and analysed thematically during the course of this chapter.

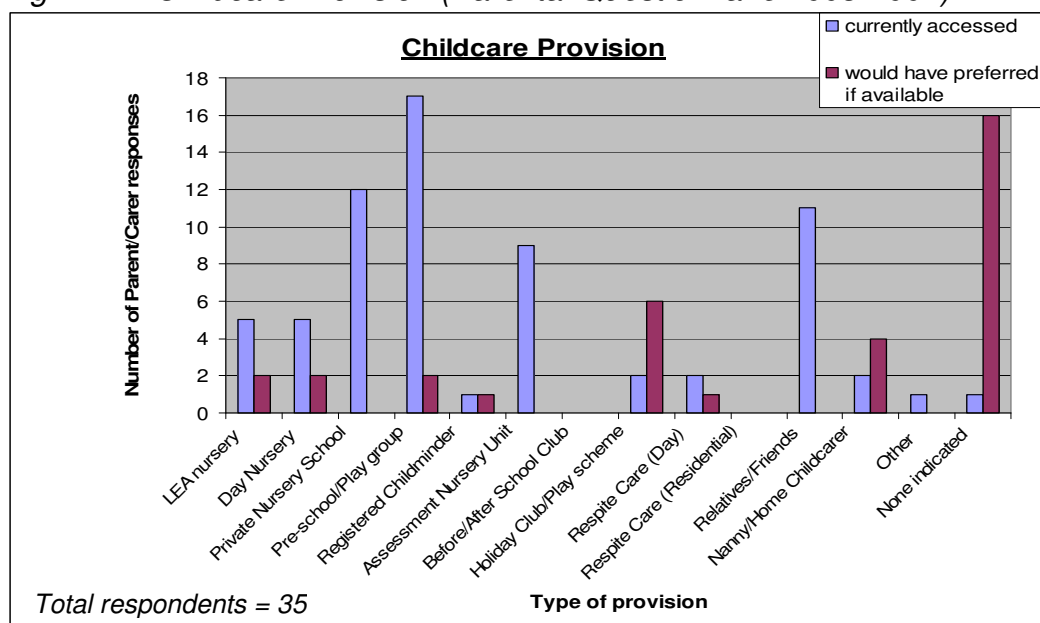
Parental Considerations when Choosing Childcare

Choice of provision

Prior to this study, in 2001 the LA had sampled the views of 40 parents/carers with children under the age of 3 with SEN (CIS, 2001), most of whom were not yet attending pre-school provision. The findings had indicated that there were five main areas of concern when considering childcare options; the cost, distance to travel, organising siblings and other family members, the times of the sessions, and transport availability. These reflected similar findings to those of the Audit Commission (2003) and SureStart (DFES, 2003a).

In the parental questionnaire for this research (Appendix 3) it is possible that some of the 35 respondents had also participated in the earlier survey (CIS, 2001). However, rather than anticipating provision not yet received, this time parents were asked to indicate which childcare provision their children actually attended or types of provision they would have preferred if available (see Fig. 4.2 below). LA database information showed that some of the children attended pre-school settings in districts other than those in which they lived. Therefore, for this part of the study, it was felt important to report statistical findings from across the whole county rather than in districts. For example, a child might live in District S, but go to nursery in District R near to a parent's place of work.

Fig.4.2 Childcare Provision (Parental Questionnaire 2003-2004)



Specialist Nurseries (see Appendix 6) are listed here as "Assessment Nursery Units", as that is what they were previously known as.

As the chart indicates (Fig. 4.2), the total responses in relation to “currently accessed” childcare provision (68) exceeded the number of respondents (35). This was because many children were attending more than one type of provision. For example, some children travelled to an “Assessment Nursery” for part of the week (more recently known as “Specialist Nurseries”, Appendix 6) and attended their local pre-school setting for the other part of the week. One child was taken to a child-minder every morning for breakfast, then transported to an “assessment nursery” until lunchtime, followed by a day-care setting for the afternoon, going next door to an after school club at the end of the day (indicated as “other”), before finally being collected by his parents.

Many parents appeared to be satisfied with their chosen childcare options, with 16 out of the 35 respondents not indicating an alternative preference. The majority of the sample (30) had children attending non-maintained pre-school provision (such as private nurseries and playgroups) and several parents (11) had friends or relatives that helped out with childcare. This reflects the findings of previous research literature (Chapter Two), where similar patterns occurred (Odom, 2000; Day Care Trust, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002).

In this study, those parents that expressed a preference for alternative childcare provision gave varied responses, the most significant (6) being a desire for a holiday club or play scheme. One parent wrote that,

“A holiday club or play scheme would be the best provision after the assessment nursery, as trying to occupy an autistic child when his whole nursery routine has stopped is difficult especially when we have another non autistic child and he needs attention as well.” (Parent in District W)

As in the earlier findings of the Daycare Trust (2001), this study found that childcare during school holidays seemed to be a common difficulty for any parent to access with a child under five, as clubs tended to be for school aged children (EYDCP, 2003c); more so for those with SEN who may need additional support and/or resources. Perhaps, as written by Odom (2000), “inclusion goes far beyond the classroom” (p.3) and should extend into the wider activities offered in the community.

Though children with SEN often engaged in a range of activities outside their pre-school provision, Odom (2000) noted that these were more likely to be attended with their parents. It has long been recognised that families can benefit from respite care or additional support; including support for the siblings that have *not* necessarily got SEN (Wolfendale, 2000; Porter, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003b & 2004; Carpenter, 2005).

Sometimes all family members take on some level of “caring” responsibility, and in the case of siblings, may experience “loss of parental attention” (as noted in the Audit Commission 2003, p.149). The extra demands put upon families are particularly heightened if a child has complex health needs or significant behavioural difficulties. Families need to have a break from caring for their disabled child in order to rest, spend time with other family members and re-establish their social links with friends and communities (Audit Commission, 2003). Therefore, the aim for LAs, as Wolfendale (2000) states, is to “embrace” the needs of the whole family (p.6); as often parents of a child with SEN are juggling complex and tiring daily routines, whilst also trying to ensure that all family members are cared for.

Four parents in the research sample expressed an interest in a new “home childcarer” initiative (NCMA, 2003), where a registered childminder could provide childcare in the child’s own home, as opposed to the home of the childminder. When family homes have already been adapted to meet a child’s physical needs, or where a child feels much more secure in their own surroundings and routines (*for example, a child with autism*), this would seem to many parents to be a sensible option. As one parent commented,

‘I may be interested in this type of service during school holidays. I do not work during school holidays as I have another child, but need some extra help at home to assist with *T*’s exercises, etc. His older brother can be jealous of the attention I give *T* at times’ (Parent in District S)

Following this parental questionnaire, the “home childcarer” initiative did not really come into fruition however, as the registration process was seen to be unwieldy (EYDCP, 2004b). Each potential home childcarer would need to be formally assessed as a childminder in their own home (with all the regulatory building inspections and health and safety checks), but would then be carrying out the childminding role in the home of the family.

With all childcare choices, as in Porter (2002), it felt as though parents of this study wanted to be actively involved in decision-making and remaining “in command of their family life” (Porter 2002, p.19), rather than services making decisions on their behalf.

Collaboration, Parental Involvement and Information-sharing

Several writers have continually advocated the case for effective communication with parents (Halliday, 1989; Sumner, 1990; Bowers, 1994; Brown & Carpenter, 1995; Hornby, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Carpenter at EECI, 2005). Carpenter outlined, “support, education, liaison, communication, provision of information, collaboration, resources and advice” as “Key reciprocal functions of Early Intervention” (EECI, 2005). These ideas (and more) are explored here through the analysis of data from research questions with parents (Appendix 3) and later (chapters 5 and 6) with practitioners (Appendices 2, 4 & 5); in an attempt to identify what “effective communication” and “collaboration” could look like in early years settings.

Research findings suggest that families want “better coordination” between all support services, in order to enhance the “quality of their lives” (Audit Commission, 2003, p4). Although the LA aimed to raise awareness of all available pre-school SEN services for families (mainly through CIS, pre-schools, health services and parent centres), it seemed that some parents had accessed this information more readily than others.

One parent wrote that;

“Through the SEN team I have accessed 2 ½ hour sessions for one-to-one for my daughter when she is at her local nursery, which links closely with the assessment nursery so that she receives best quality care in both. I have nothing but praise for the system. I must add however, that being in the nursing profession, I know how to access all the services and am shocked at the amount of people who don’t.” (Parent, District W)

Prior to SureStart (DFES, 2003 a,b&c), parents had sometimes described professional attitudes which had led to feelings of being excluded or ignored (Sumner 1990). As discussed in Chapter Two, at times, professional attitudes have been described as "barriers" which hindered successful parental involvement (Robson, 1989; Hornby, 1996; Mansfield, 1995; McDonnell in Wolfendale, 1997). Hornby referred to some situations where parents were regarded as “problems or adversaries ... vulnerable, less able or in need of treatment themselves” (Hornby, 1996, p.4).

In recent decades, literature has frequently advocated parental involvement and recognised that parents are “experts”, who know their child best and should be actively encouraged to be involved in collaborative decision making with multi-agencies (Bastiani, 1989; Halliday, 1989; Robson, 1989; Sumner, 1990; Galloway et al, 1994; UNESCO, 1994; Brown & Carpenter, 1995; Hornby, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2001; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Bruce & Schultz, 2002; Fielding, 2003; Russell, 2003; EECI, 2005). However, this study found similarities to the research of Clough and Nutbrown (2004) in that although pre-school settings welcomed the concept of parental involvement; parents were still “variously involved” and perceptions of the parental “role” differed, depending upon the “experience and expectations” of the practitioners (p.199). For example, one parent (Parent, District R) described seeing staff briefly at the start and end of each day, with little involvement in-between; whereas another (Parent, District S) had regularly been invited into the classroom to advise and assist with training the practitioners as to how to meet her child’s needs most effectively.

Whilst it is acknowledged that a collaborative approach should be adopted (Frederickson & Cline, 2002; DFES, 2003c), as Russell pointed out (in Wolfendale, 1997), this is not necessarily an easy process when families and multi-agencies are involved; with multiple aims and objectives to try to meet family needs. One parent in District S listed 34 support services that were involved with her son; as he had autism, severe learning difficulties and complex health needs requiring oxygen and tube-feeding. In this case (as in Frederickson & Cline, 2002 and the Audit Commission, 2003), there were inevitably several competing interests encountered; such as budget restraints, communication difficulties when coordinating all agencies, and differing service priorities from those in health, education and social care. As Lenehan (2004) quotes, “Fragmented services” can “create vulnerable families” (EECI, 2005).

That is not to say that a coordinated approach should not be aimed for and indeed the parent here felt that her child’s nursery were “coping incredibly well” (parent, District S). In today’s climate, a child with such complex needs and multiple agency involvement would probably be allocated a “Key Worker” (see Glossary, p.249); to help coordinate information and meetings with the range of service providers, and to act as an advocate for the child and family.

In addition to social services providing respite care to some families, County W has ‘SEN Childcare Coordinators’, who can help families to navigate their way through various sources of information (Children’s Information Service, CIS) and find appropriate holiday placements, “wrap-around” care or childcare provision (such as childminding during school holidays). However, at the time of the parent survey, as a relatively new and developing service, many parents were not yet aware of this support. There has since been an awareness-raising campaign through the re-named ‘Family Information Service’ (FIS) and the SEN childcare coordinators now experience difficulties in prioritising needs within a finite budget, due to the high demand from families for childcare services (LA, 2007).

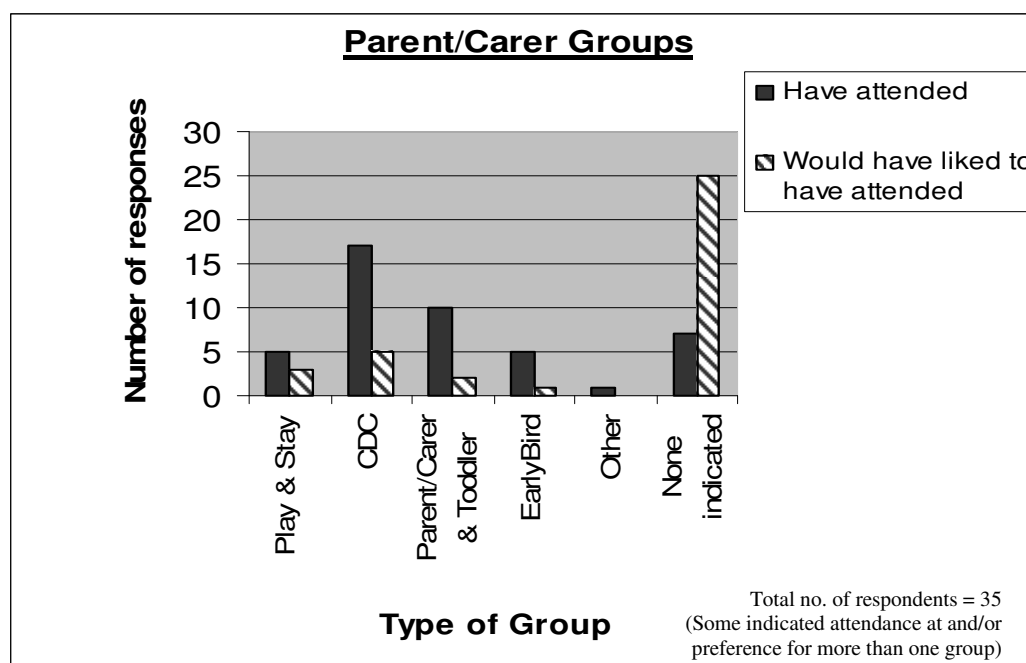
In recognition of the national demand for respite and childcare, government initiatives have been put into place (DFES, 2007). One of the priorities of 'Aiming High for Disabled Children' (DFES, 2007) is to increase the capacity and quality of key services for disabled children and their families, including short respite breaks and wrap-around childcare provision (DFES, 2007).

In addition to a variety of pre-school and childcare provision, group support and activities were sometimes offered to parents across the county; some of which were aimed specifically towards parents of children with SEN. As part of the questionnaire (Appendix 3), it was therefore felt appropriate to ask parents about their attendance at these groups.

Parent Groups

Group support is recognised as beneficial for many parents, particularly where there is a shared identity or need (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; NAS, 2008), in this case having a child with SEN. Parents/Carers were asked which support groups they attended or would have liked to attend, given the opportunity (see Fig. 4.3 below).

Fig. 4.3



The majority of respondents (25) did not indicate a preference for another type of group, other than the ones attended. It may have been that parents did not know about other available groups, but in this instance a postal questionnaire was not able to probe this information further. With hindsight, perhaps a question could have been included to ask how parents gained information about both group support and pre-school provision.

Groups at the CDCs (Child Development Centres) seemed to be the best attended. It is worth noting that transport was often available for parents in order to attend these groups. Also, groups were usually held at the CDC, where children had received health assessment of needs and/or a medical diagnosis and staff may have become familiar to the families. “CDC” provision (now referred to in County W as the Child Development Service) has since moved away from hospital sites and is now located in shared premises with staff from education and social care, including the Area SENCo team. Groups are now organised and delivered in a more multi-agency way; coordinated from one location, but not necessarily delivered in that same venue – many groups are now running in community venues, for example Childrens Centres (LA, 2007).

Fewer parents that were surveyed seemed to attend “Play and Stay” groups (5). However, in this research sample many of the children would no longer attend these groups, as they would have begun to attend other pre-school provision instead (independently of their parents). One parent “would have liked a rhythm/rhyme session” (Parent in District S), but another acknowledged that, as her child attended two different types of pre-school provision – assessment nursery every morning and one afternoon at a local playgroup, “we don’t really have very much time to fit anything else in” (Parent in District W).

Several parents indicated that they would have liked to have attended support groups. It is acknowledged that for many parents, group peer support is very valuable; with the focused guidance that can be provided by services, plus the mutual parent support, sharing of expertise, ideas and concerns (Halliday, 1989; Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; NAS, 2008).

Some parents in this study may have been offered group support following on from a particular diagnosis, for example, “EarlyBird” (NAS, 2008); supporting families with children on the autistic spectrum (see Glossary, p.249). This support continues today in the LA, with “EarlyBird” offered to every family whose pre-school child receives a diagnosis of autism. For a variety of circumstances and reasons (not the focus of this thesis), not every family chooses to accept a group place and some decide to defer the opportunity of support until a later time. That is also true of other support groups that the LA offer, such as ‘behaviour management’ (Finch, 1999).

Research has shown that children with “challenging behaviour” can be the most difficult to include in childcare settings (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Also, as in McNamara (2004) and Avramidis (2005), there are increasing exclusions of school-aged children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is advised that early intervention with behaviour management support can often lead to reduced incidences of “exclusion” for children later on (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001). When assessing and supporting a child’s overall development, as Sheridan (1988 & 1997) and Sayeed and Guerin (2000) describe; small group activities can look at social and play behaviours as well as the acquisition of cognitive skills.

At the time of the parental survey, behaviour management groups were available for parents to attend (Webster-Stratton, 1999; Finch, 1999), with a focus upon early preventative measures in relation to factors which influence children’s behaviour, social interaction and emotional competence. However, the groups were not widely publicised and attendance was usually prompted by specific referrals from support services, rather than parents coming forward independently. More recently, County W has reviewed all behaviour policies across the county and devised a “Behaviour Strategy”, which focuses upon “enhanced support” and “early intervention” (LA, 2007). Parent support groups are now more widely publicised, for example through an extensive poster campaign in all childcare settings, clinics and health centres.

At the 'International Early Intervention Conference' (EECI, 2005), Carpenter described the long-term preventative benefits of early intervention (mental health issues, well-being, confidence and social behaviour) for children with disabilities, their families and society. At the Conference there were several discussions surrounding some of the challenges of providing "state-of-the-art intervention" programmes for vulnerable children and their families across the world (but particularly in Europe). The general view was taken that a "collaborative", "transdisciplinary" and "family-oriented" approach was needed (EECI, 2005); where all forms of support, training and "guidance activities" are provided by services in a coordinated manner, and as an "immediate consequence" of the identified needs. As an illustration of these research findings, the Conference highlighted a survey that was carried out in the UK by 'Contact a Family' in 2004 (at EECI, 2005). When the survey asked families to rank the support that could have helped them; opportunities to take a break, emotional support/counselling, and support and information around diagnosis were given as their top three priorities.

In light of more recent government initiatives to "Narrow the Gap" for "vulnerable" families that may be at risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties (NFER, 2008); many of the support and training groups offered to parents have begun to have a behaviour focus, or are designed to provide holistic support and advice for families in a "play and stay" environment which is safe, enjoyable and locally accessible (LA, 2007).

Access, availability and affordability (DFES, 2003b) were central themes within this study and are now explored more closely in relation to childcare for children with SEN.

Access, availability and affordability of childcare

In the parental questionnaire (Appendix 3), parents of children with SEN were asked to indicate their considerations when looking for childcare (see Fig. 4.4 below). The questions were designed to investigate similar areas to those highlighted as “difficulties” in previous research (Day Care Trust, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; CIS Audit, 2001), but also to explore issues surrounding access, availability and affordability (DFES, 2003b).

Fig. 4.4 Parental considerations when choosing childcare

	Very Important	Quite Important	Not that important	Did not really consider this
a) Being near to home	13	17	4	1
b) The availability of transport	8	6	10	11
c) The cost	7	15	10	3
d) Work or study commitments (this could include wanting to return to work)	12	10	5	6 (2 did not respond)
e) The times of sessions and/or available opening hours	19	10	6	0
f) Recommendations of friends and family	13	13	8	1
g) Fitting in with other family commitments (eg. organisation of brothers and sisters)	18	9	4	2 (2 did not respond)
h) Confidence in the relevant training and qualifications of childcare staff	34	1	0	0
i) Accessibility, equipment and furniture appropriate to the needs of your child	26	8	1	0
j) Health and medical needs	22	6	6	0 (1 asked SEN?)

Total no. of respondents = 35

It was felt that there were some surprises amongst the findings, as well as more anticipated results. The majority statistics are highlighted in the above diagram. Similar to the findings of the Audit Commission (2003), access and availability of provision were considered to be amongst families’ main concerns. The majority of parents felt that times of sessions were “very important” (fig. 4.4e), and location and cost were “quite important” (fig. 4.4a&c). It was interesting however, that transport was indicated as the least important consideration, with 11 respondents not really considering this (fig. 4.4b). Perhaps this was due to “accessibility” and “access” being priorities for Local Authorities (DFES, 2003a; EYDCP, 2001a).

Previously, transport had been one of the main concerns that parents raised in County W (CIS Audit, 2001). This was particularly the case in the more rural areas of the county, where non-maintained pre-school settings were quite spread out across the district and were perhaps more difficult to reach for families without transport (Census information for District S, County Census, 2001). It would seem that as more local pre-school provision became available and affordable in 2003, with SureStart initiatives (DFES, 2003a) and funded Nursery Education Grant childcare places (LA, 2003) childcare became easier for parents to access in their local communities. One of the SureStart aims (DFES, 2003b), as set out in local guidance for the county within this study, was for provision to be “affordable and accessible” – and for all families to be within “pram-pushing distance”, especially in “areas of deprivation” (EYDCP, 2003a).

This notion of “pram-pushing distance” seemed more of a reality at the time of this survey (Sure Start Unit, 2003). LA map statistics and Gap Surveys (EYDCP, 2002b; EYDCP, 2003c; EYDCP, 2004b) had shown a steady increase in local pre-school provision for parents between 2001 and 2004. This was particularly the case in more rural areas such as District S, which had previously shown the lowest pre-school attendance (County Census, 2001).

However, more recent media publicity (Toynbee, 2005) suggested that SureStart was still not accommodating vulnerable families in “areas of deprivation” (DETR, 2000). For instance, Toynbee (2005) suggested that Sure Start, “still fails to reach many parents in the zone while turning away those outside it”. Reflecting tensions discussed in recent literature (Fredeickson & Cline, 2002), Toynbee asks whether Labour's childcare policy is “just a tool to get more parents into work or is it primarily to rescue children before they have a chance to fail?” (Toynbee, 2005). This observation also replicates some longer term concerns about the sustainability and quality of early years provision for some of the most “vulnerable children” across the county – those children with SEN who do not necessarily live in “areas of deprivation” (LA, 2007). Questions are raised about equality and “barriers to achievement” (DFES, 2004), when some children with SEN and their families do not receive additional SureStart services, because they live outside the “catchment area” (DETR, 2000; DFES, 2003c; LA, 2007).

The creation of good quality, affordable childcare and early education lies at the heart of government policy to promote social inclusion and economic well-being by enabling parents to return to work (DFES, 2003b; OFSTED, 2005). However, as pointed out by OFSTED, for children with special needs and their parents, access to childcare and early education can be more difficult (OFSTED, 2005, p1). Pre-school settings can need staff training beforehand to accommodate a child's particular needs (as experienced by Parent, District S). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, specialist advice and guidance would be essential in order to cope effectively and safely with the complexity of this child's needs (Parent, District S) and the potential involvement of 34 different support services! The SEN training needs of practitioners are discussed further in Chapters Five and Six. Also, it must be acknowledged that some parents of children with complex SEN and disabilities may provide care for their children at home (Day Care Trust, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

In line with the national government agenda (DFES, 2003b & 2004), local SureStart and Early Years documentation (Appendix 9) frequently encouraged parents to return to work or further education. In 2003 and 2004 especially, there was a lot of local publicity surrounding "free childcare places" and "claiming working tax credit" (a brief explanation of tax credits can be found in the Glossary, p.249).

In this research, when asked about receipt of working tax credit (fig. 4.5a & 4.5b below), the majority of parents surveyed indicated that they were not receiving this. Of the 16 parents receiving working tax credit, only 9 were receiving the childcare element (see Fig. 4.5b).

Fig. 4.5a

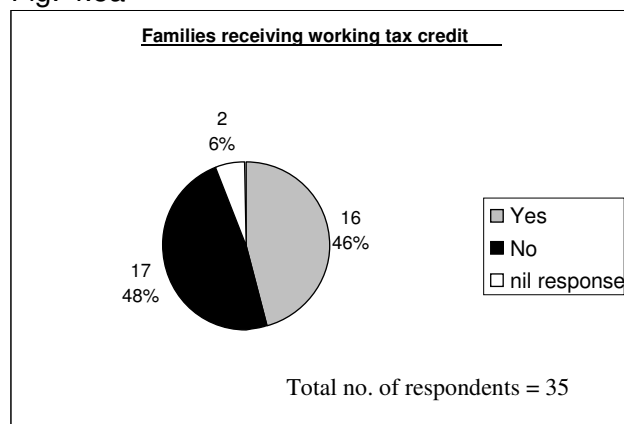
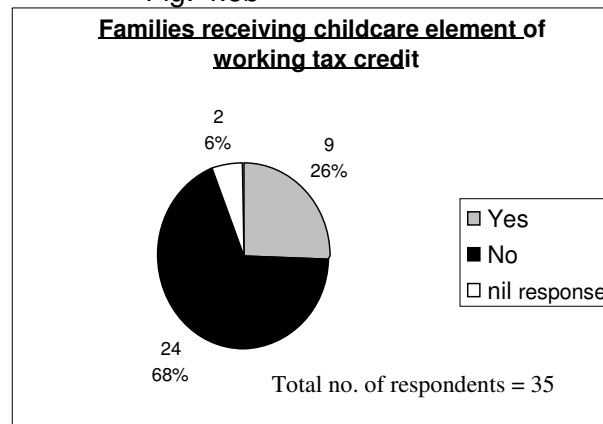


Fig. 4.5b



In consultation with the county's Childcare Information Service (CIS, 2004), it was found that there were several possible reasons for this. A lot of parents across the county were telephoning the CIS, finding the tax claim forms too long and complicated to complete. Despite the publicity, CIS suggested that there was also still a lack of awareness that such funding was available.

The CIS reported an increase in requests for tax credit information, during times of adverse publicity on the television and in newspapers (CIS, 2004). More recently, the LA published a 'Childcare Audit and Sufficiency Assessment' (LA, 2007), which reported that parents still found applying for tax credits very difficult, with the form described by a sample group of parents as "a nightmare".

As in the Audit Commission (2003) and OFSTED (2005), several parents of children with SEN in County W, stated that they were not returning to work in order to care for their children at home (CIS, 2004). As research literature shows (chapter two), for parents of children with SEN and disabilities, the practicalities of balancing childcare and family life with returning to work or college, are often very difficult to achieve (Wolfendale, 2000; Day Care Trust, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003).

In the parental survey of this research, work or study commitments were "very important" considerations for 12 of the parents (Fig. 4.4d). However, as in the Audit Commission (2003), fitting in with other family commitments was also a high priority for the majority of parents (18) in this research (Fig. 4.4g).

Extracts from Fig. 4.4

	Very Important	Quite Important	Not that important	Did not really consider this
d) Work or study commitments (this could include wanting to return to work)	12	10	5	6 (2 did not respond)
g) Fitting in with other family commitments (eg. organisation of brothers and sisters)	18	9	4	2 (2 did not respond)

Two parents commented that they would have liked full day care provision in order to return to work full-time (Parents in District N & R). One parent wrote that,

“Day Nursery provision should be made available at most places of work, I work flexi-shifts but have had to compromise the quality of my son’s childcare for a flexible place. The provision is OK, but I know that he doesn’t access everything that he could if he went somewhere else”
(Parent in District N)

Although whole-day funded provision in LA settings was growing at the time of the research, this was more commonly available to families in areas of social deprivation (DETR, 2000), and was mainly in District N&B (CIS, 2004). Again, the strategy took little account of SEN.

Parental Confidence

Several parents in this study commented that “happiness”, “safety” and “fun” were major priorities for their children in their pre-school settings, with one outlining the need for “a warm, loving environment” (Parent in District S). However, when considering her child’s well-being, one parent appeared to feel the need to compromise;

“I needed a stimulating caring environment for my son, the standard of care he receives is adequate enough to keep him safe and that’s all. I don’t feel happy leaving him there, but he is happy going there which I feel is a good marker. He is settled now....”
(Parent in District R)

This idea of compromising and balancing one area of “quality” for another of “lesser quality” has been debated and recognised as a national difficulty, where there are noted inconsistencies of childcare provision across the UK (OFSTED, 2005). Nonetheless, for a long time researchers have recognised the way in which a positive self-esteem can significantly influence and motivate a child’s progress (Finch, 1999; Cartwright & Dehaney, 2000; Rider, 2003; Dowling, 2003; Hanco, 2003; Quicke, 2003).

Rider (2003) suggests measuring a child's level of "well being" and "involvement"; looking at social interaction and contentment in addition to more cognitive abilities;

'Well-being: The feeling of being at one with oneself and feeling happy and secure/confident.

Involvement: Looks into the intensity of the activity, the degree of absorption, energy and the ability to find pleasure in exploration' (Rider, 2003, p.22&23).

For example when observing "involvement", Rider recommends using a five level scale (1 being low and 5 being high), so that where a child appears to be "frequently non-active" this would be recorded as level 1 and if they could "easily makes choices" this would be level 5 (p.22-24). These ideas seem supported in some ways through the Early Years Foundation Curriculum (DFES, 2008), where observation strategies across a range of activities and learning environments are key to practitioners recording a child's overall progress in early years settings. Parental involvement is also identified as vital to gain the full developmental profile of a child, at home and pre-school.

Training and Qualifications of Staff

In the parental survey for this research, confidence in the relevant training and qualifications of childcare staff was presented as the most important consideration of parents/carers, with 34 out of the 35 indicating that this was "very important" (see fig. 4.4 h).

Extract from Fig. 4.4

	Very Important	Quite Important	Not that important	Did not really consider this
h) Confidence in the relevant training and qualifications of childcare staff	34	1	0	0
i) Accessibility, equipment and furniture appropriate to the needs of your child	26	8	1	0
j) Health and medical needs	22	6	6	0 (1 asked SEN?)

One parent emphasised the importance of “professionalism, protocols, policies and procedures” to ensure the safety of her child (Parent in District S). The findings of the parent survey also indicated the desire for each child’s specific needs to be met; particularly regarding specialist equipment, health and medical needs. These were identified as “very important” considerations for the majority of parents (see fig. 4 i & j). When asked for additional comments within the questionnaire, parents from all 5 districts outlined the need for pre-school and childcare providers to demonstrate appropriate training, expertise, confidence, understanding, and communication skills in relation to including children with SEN, particularly if their child had complex needs and/or autism.

One parent (already mentioned in this chapter as having involvement with 34 agencies) stressed the importance of collaborative working with multi-agencies, stating that;

“the nursery needed to be confident at dealing with the multitude of therapists who visit him there, and they became so.... with staff able to follow input we had received from physio and medical practitioners.”
(Parent District S)

Three parents who indicated that their children had autism, described wanting pre-school staff,

“to be able to cope and to understand my sons needs – that would be different to some of the other children” (Parent, District W)

“to take account and deal with him being autistic” (Parent, District N).

“to be capable, and understand enough about the specific child” (Parent, District R).

Surprisingly, although most of the parents surveyed had prioritised staff training and qualifications, very few indicated that their children were attending LA maintained pre-school provisions (5). In fact the majority of children were attending non-maintained settings such as private pre-schools and playgroups (see earlier in this chapter, Fig. 4.2, p.102). At the time of the survey, LA maintained nurseries and nursery classes would all have had qualified teachers, whereas staff in non-maintained settings would rarely have had teaching qualifications and would probably have been working towards NVQ level 2 or 3 (EYDCP, 2003b). It was acknowledged both nationally (DFES, 2003a; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Frances, 2005; Pugh, 2006; Taggart *et al.*, 2006) and by the LA (EYDCP, 2003b) that early years professional development was a priority, particularly within the non-maintained sector; to raise the level of childcare qualifications, expertise and quality of pre-school provision.

That is not to say that those practitioners working in the non-maintained sector were necessarily less capable or in-experienced. As Chapters 5 and 6 describe, there were examples of “effective inclusion” in several of the non-maintained settings; especially in relation to their “can-do” attitude and ethos.

Recent Developments

As referred to in Chapter Two, the government have recently outlined their commitment to integrating multi-agencies, aiming for services to work more seamlessly and collaboratively with children and families (DFES, 2007; NFER, 2008). There has also been a further move towards increased professional development opportunities for early years practitioners, through the provision of the ‘Transformation Fund’ (DFES, 2006, see Appendix 7) and ‘Inclusion Development Programme’ (DCSF, 2008). With a continuing government drive to raise standards in all early education and childcare settings over recent years, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2006) has said that,

‘The Government wants to ensure that childcare providers, including those in both the public and private sectors, can improve quality and give parents increased confidence. When parents are paying for their childcare the Government would expect the provider to have sound employment practices’ (DTI, 2006).

The “Transformation Fund” (DFES, 2006) was introduced by the Government to support the training costs of pre-school providers, particularly in developing their skills and expertise when working with children with SEN and disabilities. The advice leaflet for childcare settings begins by looking at what parents want;

‘As an expert in running a childcare business you know that parents want the best possible start for their children. Parents look to you to provide high quality childcare and they know that their children prosper when cared for by skilled, confident and valued staff. No matter whether you’re managing a chain of nurseries or working on your own as a childminder - you need to invest in continuous improvements and training if you’re to deliver a high quality service and remain competitive....’ (Transformation Fund, DFES, 2006, p.2).

To Conclude

The parental opinions surveyed in this research prior to these more recent government initiatives, would support the identified need for more SEN training for all pre-school providers (as in SureStart, DFES, 2003a). Chapter Five explores pre-school training issues more closely in the years leading up to the implementation of the Transformation Fund (DFES, 2006), looking particularly at access and availability of professional development opportunities for practitioners across the LA of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: Resources, Infrastructure and Training for Pre-School Providers

Introduction

This chapter discusses issues surrounding accessibility and availability of SEN training opportunities; as identified nationally, as interpreted by one Local Authority, and as perceived by pre-school providers within this study. Bearing in mind the “uniqueness” of each pre-school setting, practitioners were asked to self-evaluate their training needs, knowledge and experience in relation to SEN and inclusion. Findings reveal differing infrastructures for staffing and resources across a range of pre-school settings and socio-economic areas of a county. Key themes which emerge from the reported data include; issues surrounding the implementation of LA training grants and opportunities, access and attendance at SEN training courses, and “barriers” to attending the training opportunities that are provided. Each key theme will be discussed in turn, with conclusions being drawn.

As in Chapter Four, some of the following reported information has been gained from contextual analysis of local primary sources (Appendix 9). Additionally, though the research methodology is shown chronologically in Chapter Three (p. 82), this chapter draws thematically upon pre-school practitioner data from a range of sources; the county-wide survey that was undertaken by Area SENCos (Appendix 2), the county-wide postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), and the semi-structured interviews with SENCos/Managers from District S (Appendix 5). As part of the reporting and analysis process, much of the quantitative data is displayed diagrammatically (Figures 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3). The more qualitative data that was sought with the intention of adding descriptive depth to the quantitative statistical findings (Chapter 3, p.80) is summarised thematically within the text; with representative quotes from both written and verbal comments that were collated and transcribed during the course of the research methodology.

National Context and Background

“Gaps and Inconsistencies”: training needs identified for practitioners

The review of literature (Chapter Two) found that one of the key international recommendations for effective inclusion was to develop training for practitioners in early years education and childcare settings (UNESCO, 1994). Additionally, governments were advised to ensure that training for teachers would bear in mind the “varied and often difficult conditions under which they serve” (UNESCO, 1994, p.28). In the pre-school arena of this study, it was evident that SEN training for practitioners would need to consider the diverse characteristics and needs of every setting; each with their own “difficult conditions” to contend with. For example, the face-to-face surveys (Appendix 2) found that some of the smaller playgroups in rural areas faced sustainability issues; with very low numbers of children attending (a maximum of 8 at any one time) and just two members of staff (as described by Playgroup SENCOs, Districts N and S). Sharing facilities with other local community activities such as youth clubs, also presented safety problems on a daily basis for several pre-schools to contend with (as expressed by Interviewee N). These issues are discussed further in Chapter Six.

The British government sought to extend opportunities that were available for children with SEN; manifesting its dedication to supporting earlier intervention, identification and inclusion of children with SEN (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2003b; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2004). So how might these policy initiatives translate into practice in one LA?

Though it was not usually qualified “teachers” working in non-maintained pre-schools at the time of this study (EYDCP, 2003a), it was felt essential to explore examples of such “varied” and/or “difficult conditions” (UNESCO, 1994, p.28), as experienced and perceived by pre-school practitioners in this research. This case study seeks to examine “evidence about what works best” with pre-school children, as well as the “political and ideological motives” surrounding inclusion (Gains in Connor, 2001, p.4). Also, it is worth remembering that “what works best” in one setting may be completely different to the next; with varying environments, staffing, children and communities.

Several studies have looked at inclusion for statutory school-aged children of five years and over (Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a&b; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanco, 2003; McNamara, 2004). Although inclusion was noted as an increasing priority within school policies, there was an identified need for more staff training (Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a&b; Connor, 2001). Tomko (1996) felt that there should be a shift in emphasis, moving away from “getting the child ready” for the classroom, towards getting the learning environment “ready for the child” (p.1). However, Garner (2000a) described a “lack of readiness” to take on inclusion initiatives, particularly amongst newly qualified teachers (p.111). Similarities were recognised where pre-school practitioners were ill-prepared for inclusion, quoting from the ‘Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion’ (1998); “programs, not children, have to be ‘ready for inclusion’” (in Odom, 2000, p.8). This chapter and the next, explore the extent to which providers in one LA perceive their “readiness” for inclusion (Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000a; Odom, 2000).

Research into pre-school inclusion for three and four year olds has broadly examined both the rationale and characteristics of inclusion within early years settings. As promoted in SureStart guidance (DFES, 2003b), findings have commonly revealed that pre-school providers acknowledge the importance of recognising family and community needs and providing an appropriate learning environment to meet individual local requirements (Tomko, 1996; Janko & Porter, 1996; Odom, 2000; Odom et al, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). However, there seems to be a variance of opinion amongst providers as to what such an “appropriate learning environment” should look like and how this might be achieved.

In addition to ensuring cognitive development and physical accessibility to learning activities - appropriate space, resources and staffing; several writers also stress the importance of social inclusion and the emotional well-being of children (Tomko 1996; Odom et al 2000; Porter, 2002; Emerson, 2003; Rider 2003; Maynard & Thomas, 2004; Carpenter & Egerton, 2005; Elias & Arnold, 2006). As highlighted in the review of literature (Chapter Two), these aspects

were also raised as important parental concerns in this study (Chapter Four) and are now explored further with pre-school practitioners.

Clough and Nutbrown (2004) found that although early years practitioners were generally supportive of inclusive practice, there was a tendency for “yes ... but” phrases to be used (p.205 & 208); reflecting their concerns about capacity to meet needs. Similarly, some practitioners in the LA of this study felt that, “**yes**”, they would like to attend SEN training... “**but**” it was very difficult to get staff cover, it was too far to travel, or it was at an inconvenient time (see Fig. 5.3, p. 141). As in the findings of Clough and Nutbrown (2004) and Foster (2007), there sometimes seemed to be particular difficulties for pre-school providers in terms of resources and staffing; areas that are discussed further in this chapter.

In Clough and Nutbrown’s findings (2004), although professional development opportunities were regarded as important, practitioners felt that the majority of their learning was through “on the job” experiences of working with children with SEN when and if they joined their settings (p.202). The research findings of this study (Appendix 2) revealed that 15% of pre-school SENCos across the LA were new to their role, with no previous experience or training in SEN.

The benefits of ongoing training for practitioners within the workplace have frequently been identified (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Porter *et al.*, 2000; Garet *et al.*, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 2003), but always with an emphasis on planned programmes of learning, rather than ad hoc training arrangements. This chapter describes some of the ways in which training plans vary for pre-school providers in one LA; from planned opportunities and timetabled “training days” for all staff (Interviewee L), to more random “last-minute bookings” if courses have any places left (Interviewee A), or limited opportunities if managers do not share training information with staff (as reported by SENCos in District S & W, face-to-face survey, Appendix 2).

As noted in Chapter Two, it is not always an easy process when trying to plan training for pre-school providers, often experiencing high rates of staff turn-over (Eborall, 2003; TUC, 2006; Foster, 2007). There were interesting similarities in the challenges faced by the LA of this research (see later in this chapter, p.147).

So far, research findings appear to reinforce the need for further exploration of pre-school inclusion from “policy into practice” (as in Ball, 1990 & 1994); from the macro-level ambitions of government policy initiatives (DFES, 2003a, b & c), to the micro-level implementation realities of a local authority. As Ball (1994) points out,

‘Policies pose problems to their subjects, problems that must be solved in context’ (p.18).

In examining issues such as the “capacity” to meet the needs of children with SEN and “creating an inclusive learning environment”, this case study seeks to draw out the key components of effective pre-school inclusion and looks at how practitioners might realistically achieve these through training and professional development.

The Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) defines children as having SEN “if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them” (DFES, 2001, p6). Research around both school and pre-school inclusion has identified gaps in SEN knowledge, expertise and provision, outlining the need for more training for practitioners. For instance, Connor (2001) suggested that training should concentrate more upon helping schools and local authorities to recognise a child’s differences, rather than focusing upon where this actually takes place. As the SEN Code of Practice suggests (DFES, 2001), there are many developmental aspects to be considered before determining whether a child has special educational needs and how best to support those needs in a childcare environment. This requires “a flexible response to the particular needs of the children” (DFES, 2001, p32).

In this study, such “flexibility” often seemed determined by the practitioners’ attitudes; their willingness (or not) to learn and adapt strategies to meet the needs of each child appropriately. In a typical example of “flexibility” from this study, the staff from one pre-school setting (Interviewee J, District S) had attended SEN training relating to identifying children with speech and language difficulties. Following on from the course, the SENCo had decided to try out some of the acquired ideas and found them useful in her weekly planning for children;

“I learnt that if you say something to a child, give them time to process and repeat it, then that would help them understand. I have now learnt to give them more time and use key words to help. I really picked up on what children with and without a speech and language disorder, comprehend and don’t comprehend. Based on this I have done a lot more work on my planning. This has had a big effect on recording children’s progress too” (Interviewee J).

There are further discussions about attitudinal influences upon inclusive practice in Chapter Six.

Although the Code outlines what constitutes a ‘learning difficulty’ and ‘special educational provision’ (DFES, 2001, p6), there is also an acknowledgement that most children ‘experience rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth’ during their early years (aged three to five). Knowledge of child development would therefore seem to be vital for pre-school practitioners, before they can begin to identify any unusual patterns of delay and/or disorder that an individual child may present in their setting. As commonly identified (Sheridan, 1988 & 1997; Cartwright & Dehaney, 2000; Sayeed & Guerin, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Porter, 2002; Rider, 2003; Maynard & Thomas, 2004), this could involve observation of cognitive, social, play, behaviour, physical, emotional and linguistic development, through a range of early years curriculum and learning opportunities, before a child can be identified as having SEN.

Primarily through the postal questionnaires (Appendix 4) and interviews (Appendix 5), this case study examines the levels of confidence and competence in identifying and supporting children with SEN, as perceived by pre-school providers in one LA (more also in Chapter Six).

Originally modelled on the USA's Head Start programme (in CRS, 2003), SureStart (DFES, 2003b) aimed to meet the needs of disadvantaged pre-school children and their families in England and Wales (see Chapter 2). Sure Start (DFES, 2003c, p.24) advocates "a strategic, holistic and child-focused approach", with families and multi-agencies working collaboratively to identify children's needs early and plan appropriate intervention. At the time of this research, multi-agency work was central to the government's agenda to reform services for children and families (Audit Commission, 2003, DFES, 2003 a & b, DFES, 2004). It was noted that,

'No less than 15 different policy initiatives in as many years have challenged early years educators in England and Wales.... The pace and extent of policy development has left no element of state-funded early childhood education provision untouched' (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004, p.193).

Ball (2008) reflected over the UK government's continual push to reform services in recent decades, describing this process as a "policy epidemic" (p.39) and "policy overload" (p.2). In the LA of this study, pre-school practitioners sometimes felt bombarded by too much information and high levels of responsibility, especially those carrying a dual role of Manager and SENCo (Interviewees C, J & L), as typically illustrated by Interviewee L;

"I am the Supervisor and SENCo. I work full time and I'm the only one on the staff that does...I have to update all our policies and take responsibility for most areas of the curriculum too. Although staff share the responsibilities for daily activities, I still have to coordinate them. I am personally responsible for recording all children's progress with maths, personal, social, and emotional development. I have always been the SENCo – I tried to delegate, but there have been problems with lots of changes of staff" (Interviewee L).

In order to achieve effective inclusive practice, SureStart acknowledges that training is needed for a wide range of early years and childcare settings, with differing levels of staff expertise and experience (DFES, 2003a). To support the SureStart model of inclusion, networks of pre-school settings and Area SENCos have been developed in each LA across England and Wales (DFES, 2003a), including the LA of this study (Appendix 9). However, in 2005 OFSTED reported that despite the government commitments to improving inclusive childcare provision there were still “inconsistencies” and “challenges” to “overcome”,

‘Children who have complex health needs and children with challenging behaviour present the most difficulties for providers to create an inclusive environment. To overcome these challenges, good providers need access to specialist/well-informed training and coordinated multi-agency support from local authorities, health professionals, and voluntary organisations. This is too inconsistent across the country’ (OFSTED, 2005, p.6)

With some providers struggling to provide adequate care and support for children with special needs, and national training “inconsistencies” identified (OFSTED, 2005); this study looked at how LAs might deal with such difficulties, when charged with promoting inclusive policy and practice?

LA Training Grants: Some “Insider” Information

The following section of this chapter, reports upon how the LA of this study considered professional development priorities and allocated government training grants for early years settings. As debated in Chapter Three, it is important to note here, that experiences as an “insider” attending LA management groups that were charged with making policy and funding decisions, enabled greater insight and access to LA documents for this study.

Chapter Three raised some of the ethical issues surrounding having an “insider” as a researcher (Powney & Watts, 1987; Burgess, 1993, Hammersley, 1993; Lee, 1993; May, 1993; Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004) and these were given careful consideration when reporting findings. In this instance, it was felt that undertaking investigative research whilst simultaneously having first-hand experience of LA management, has helped to give a greater insight into where SEN training for practitioners sits in relation to a much bigger picture.

An Introduction to Early Years Training Grants

In 2002, legislation led to a government grant being provided that was set up exclusively for training Foundation Stage practitioners working with children aged 3 to 5 (Education Act, DES, 2002). The main objective of this training grant was to improve the knowledge, skills and qualifications of early years staff delivering Foundation Stage education. It was acknowledged that although some Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) had asked about training priorities, these would vary from area to area (EYDCP, 2002b). EYDCPs were encouraged to prioritise in the light of local training and development needs, focusing on meeting the relevant targets (DFES, 2003c).

The grant could be used legitimately in many ways to facilitate the delivery of training objectives. As well as meeting the direct costs of training provision (such as trainers, venues and administrative costs) EYDCPs could use some of the grant in other ways, for example: to run seminars on the Foundation Stage; develop exchange programmes for staff; improve the ratio of qualified teachers/staff available to provide training or advice; involve qualified teachers in supporting practitioners in early years settings; and to support attainment of relevant qualifications. EYDCPs were encouraged to develop other innovative ways to support and provide training and development that would lead to the achievement of the relevant planning targets (see later in this chapter). It was considered good practice to consult practitioners on the delivery mechanism for planned training and development to improve take-up. The grant could be used to meet supply cover costs or to contribute to practitioner’s own childcare costs, where this would facilitate the achievement of training objectives.

Upon commencement of this study, there appeared to be very little consultation with the LA as to how practitioners perceived their own training needs, nor as to how they felt they might use training opportunities to their best advantage. Through analysis of research data (Appendices 2, 4 & 5), this chapter begins to uncover some of the thoughts and perceptions of pre-school providers (p.137 onwards)

In 2002-2003, in addition to the Foundation Stage Training Grant (Education Act, DES, 2002) and the Standards Fund for Early Years Training and Development, a further grant was specifically allocated to support training for early years SENCos (DES, 2002; DFES, 2003a). The priority was to ensure adequate training for all setting-based SENCos in the non-maintained sector; creating more inclusive education and narrowing inequalities in achievement, particularly targetting more vulnerable groups including those with SEN.

Grant funding could also be used by LAs to support the establishment of Area SENCos, providing that the fundamental training needs of all setting-based SENCos were met (DFES, 2003a). Each pre-school setting was required to identify a SENCo from within their own staffing, who would then be responsible for the setting's SEN policy and would need to have regard to the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001). However, as reported later in this chapter, the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) revealed that several settings (17%) in the LA of this study had either not yet identified a SENCo, or did not know who held the SENCo responsibility (Districts N & W). As in Foster's findings (2007), 15% of SENCos in this study were also new to the role. Training for 2002-2003 was required to focus upon building links between settings, parents and multi-agencies (such as education, health and social care) in supporting early identification and appropriate intervention of SEN (DFES, 2003a).

'LEAs/EYDCPs have a target to help ensure that setting based SENCos have undertaken at least 3 days specific SEN training by 2004' (DFES, 2003a, p.19).

The face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) revealed that very few SENCos had attended three days training (12%), and only 214 out of the 363 pre-school settings had accessed any type of SEN training during 2002-2003 (see Fig.5.1, p.137). Possible reasons for lack of attendance are explored later in this chapter.

In County W, a training brochure was sent out to every early years setting, outlining all the training courses that were available across the five districts of the LA. The Early Years Curriculum Advisory Teachers (LA, 2003a) and Area SENCos gave some advice to pre-school providers as to how to plan an annual cycle of training for every member of staff within their setting. Surestart guidance (DFES, 2003c, p.22) set out guidelines for EYDCPs as to how “ongoing evaluation” should “demonstrate the measurable impact” of the Area SENCo service.

Attempts were made by the LA to measure the use and effectiveness of SEN training that had been accessed through grant funding (EYDCP, 2003a & 2004a); but this mainly reported statistical data as to rates of attendance across the county, rather than the “value” or “effectiveness” of training received. Quantitative statistical data included recording the practitioners’ attendance at training, through course registers. Also, using course evaluation sheets, practitioners were asked to rate the content and learning benefits of courses, using a sliding scale of “1” (poor) to “5” (very good”).

Some qualitative data was gained from course evaluation sheets, when attendees were asked for “Any comments and suggestions”. The written comments from providers were often very positive and the majority of training opportunities seemed to be rated as “4” (good) or “5” (very good). However, most comments (LA SEN Course evaluations 2002-2004) related to the quality of the training venue, the refreshments, the parking availability and the “friendly” trainers – all important features (creating a conducive learning environment, perhaps with ideas to be replicated when working with the children), though not always indicative of the content of the SEN courses offered!

As discussed in Chapter One, all recorded data seemed only to gather “immediate responses” at the end of each course. Indications as to the longer-term impact of training opportunities appeared to be patchy, with very little researched evidence of how each practitioner’s attendance had then influenced and enhanced their daily practice. This seemed worthy of further investigation. As in research with teachers (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Porter *et al.*, 2000) how can pre-school settings introduce more intensive, longer-term professional development opportunities, so that practitioners are more able to retain and incorporate concepts into their work than single-session training activities? The postal questionnaires and interviews of this study were therefore used to probe these issues further (Appendices 4 & 5), see later in this chapter and in Chapter Six.

LA Strategic and Implementation Plans

The LA of this study built SEN training and development objectives into much of their strategic and implementation planning (Appendix 9). The EYDCP policy was that;

‘All Foundation Stage settings have a nominated SEN Co-ordinator who is responsible for the SEN policy. The current core training of 2 days will be increased to 3 days by 2004’ (EYDCP, 2001a).

In order “to improve access and equality in terms of pre-school SEN services with other statutory agencies”, the LA of this study planned to put a network of Area SENCos in place by 2004, following the national SureStart guidance of 1 Area SENCo to 20 non-maintained settings (Strategic Plan 2001-2002: target 19, EYDCP, 2001a). In 2001-2002, the EYDCP devised “business objectives and priorities” surrounding training and support for SEN and childcare (Implementation Plan, EYDCP, 2001b). A small SEN Pre-school Service, including a Manager and 4 Area SENCos was developed, which was described in the Plan as “embryonic”; a starting point, from which a growing team would be developed.

One of the training proposals for the LA was to establish a 3 day SEN programme for all SENCoS, including extra dates and half days on further training, as identified by participants (LA Implementation Plan 2001-2002: targets 18 & 19, EYDCP, 2001a). Following national guidelines and outlined as training priorities (DFES, 2003a), the three days SEN training focused upon raising awareness of the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) and working with parents, SEN Policy writing (including DRC, 2001), behaviour management, and speech and language difficulties. In the LA's Strategic Plan 2004-2006 (EYDCP, 2004c) the EYDCP still aimed to provide 1 Area SENCo to every 20 non-maintained settings, acknowledging that the current operation was 1 to 24.

During 2004, in addition to the three day SEN programme of 2001-2002, training and development work in the LA had expanded to include a range of specific SEN courses (autism awareness; hearing impairment; supporting children with Down Syndrome 0-5). This reflected and related to the increasing national policies and priorities to develop inclusive practice for all children (DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2004). Early years settings were encouraged to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence so that they were more able to meet a range of diverse and at times "complex" needs, within their mainstream settings (for example, as described by a parent in Chapter Four, p.118). In line with SureStart guidance (DFES, 2003a), this programme was designed to support provider's requests for particular SEN interests and to raise awareness of incidences of children with specific SEN (DFES, 2001) that arose across the county (see Appendix 8);

'The focus of initial training should be on encouraging a wide and deep understanding of the SEN Code of Practice (2001).... Area SENCoS may wish to help ensure that any locally offered training is tailored to support identified needs' (DFES, 2003a, p.15).

Qualifications and Training for Pre-school Providers in County W

In 2001, the LA of this study planned a process of enabling staff in non-maintained childcare and early years education settings to achieve nationally recognised qualifications (NVQs), with training grants available to encourage participants;

‘By 2004, all leaders of settings, and 50% of all workers will be required to have attained a level 3 qualification.... All remaining staff will have, or be working towards, a level 2 qualification’ (Implementation Plan 2001-2002: target 12, EYDCP, 2001b).

It was noted at the time that approximately 22.1% of staff had a Level 2 Qualification and 35.1% Level 3 (CIS, 2001). The EYDCP anticipated that in 2001-2002, there would be a further 10% increase across both levels of qualification (EYDCP, 2001b).

Raising professional qualifications and quality standards across all early years and childcare settings were set out as national priorities (DES, 2002; DFES, 2003c). However, again using Ball’s “policy to practice” approach” (1990 & 1994) there are interesting comparisons to be made between the government’s policy objectives and the achievable outcomes for LAs and pre-school practitioners. This research explores some of the issues which providers perceive as “barriers” to achieving the required training standards.

As a “requirement” of Nursery Education Grant funding, which would be monitored annually, the EYDCP proposed that each early years practitioner should have access to five days training and development per year (Strategic & Implementation Plans 2001-2002: target 13, EYDCP, 2001a & b). Assistance and advice would be provided for settings to prepare their own training and development plans. To enable access to training opportunities, a pilot scheme of “voluntary closure days” was suggested. However, it was acknowledged that “private settings providing childcare would find this extremely difficult without loss of income and service to parents” (EYDCP, 2001b).

In 2004, the LA sought to “continue the expansion in the number of practitioners employed in early years, playwork and childcare”, ensuring that all Foundation Stage practitioners had access to 4 days training and development each year. Training and development plans were to be regarded as “a high priority in all settings” and were “a requirement of nursery grant” (EYDCP, 2004c).

Some of the pre-school settings sought advice from Early Years Curriculum Advisory Teachers and Area SENCos. They then planned their annual staff training programme in detail, relating to LA guidelines and the needs of their individual settings and staff. However, there were also examples where training grant money had been spent inappropriately, for example on equipment and resources that were not related to professional development (reported to LA audit, anon., CIS, 2004). One could speculate that some “opportunist” managers had “misinterpreted” the word “training”, to encompass a range of items that they had not previously had the funds to purchase! However, it became clear that further guidance was needed for practitioners and ‘Training Development Packs’ were devised (LA, 2003e), with written guidance and templates to plan and evidence all staff training and professional development opportunities.

In an attempt to emphasise and raise the importance and status of SEN and training, letters were distributed to all non-maintained settings, headed “Requirements of Nursery Education Grant 2003-2004” (EYDCP, 2003d). Providers were asked to complete and return a “requirements of grant proforma”; evidencing their £700 Foundation Stage Training Grant spending for 2002-2003, and attaching a copy of their SEN policy. The letter stressed that all returns would be monitored and “failure to return the form could lead to non-payment of Nursery Education Grant” (EYDCP, 2003d).

In the Implementation Plan 2002-2003, it was acknowledged that,

‘Since staff turnover can be quite high in some non-maintained settings, the Partnership sends out the Requirement of Grant return annually with the Summer Term Nursery Grant Form to ensure these targets are sustained’ (EYDCP, 2002b).

Noting that not all providers were taking up training opportunities, even though they had booked places on courses, the LA introduced a £10 fine for non-attendance. The process of checking for non-attendance and chasing up fines appeared to be extremely complex administratively across the county (CIS, 2004). This research found it difficult to evidence how the EYDCP had followed up all examples of non-compliance to such “requirements of grant”, as will be illustrated through some further reporting and analysis surrounding access and attendance at SEN training for pre-school providers.

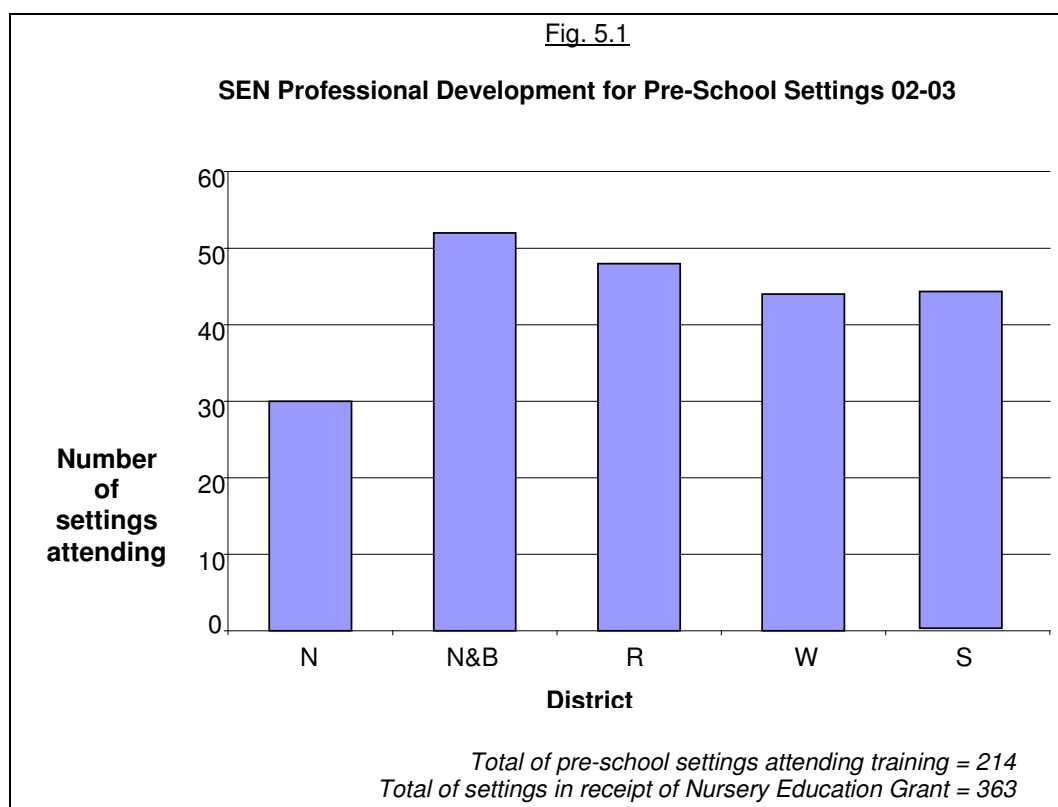
From a policy development perspective it would appear that such LA “requirements” were not acknowledged or taken too seriously by some of the pre-school providers. In relation to such policies, as Ball (1994) suggests;

‘we cannot predict or assume how they will be acted on in every case in every setting, or what their immediate effect will be, or what room for manoeuvre actors will find for themselves’ (Ball, 1994, p.18).

Therefore, if pre-school practitioners are not all accessing their entitlement to SEN training, nor responding necessarily to policy guidance despite “fines” and “grant requirements” (EYDCP, 2003d); perhaps more questions should be asked as to “why?” This research has sought to investigate such underlying reasons, by surveying the views and perceptions of pre-school practitioners from across one LA.

Access and Attendance at SEN Training

In 2002, there were 363 settings in receipt of Nursery Education Grant in the LA of this study (EYDCP, 2003a). Using data from face-to-face training surveys (Appendix 2), where all 363 pre-school settings were surveyed, 214 settings reported that they had already accessed some SEN professional development; by attending SEN training courses and/or receiving some in-service development work that had been offered during 2002-03 (see fig. 5.1 below).



As advised by the Standards Fund for Early Years Training and Development (DES, 2002), the LA had targeted SEN training for early years settings (LA, 2002 & 2003b, EYDCP, 2004c). Attendance was also “a requirement of nursery education grant” (EYDCP, 2003d). However, it was clear that not all providers had accessed the training. All LAs across the UK had been advised to ensure that the initial training pre-school SENCOs would focus upon “encouraging a wide and deep understanding of the SEN Code of Practice 2001” (DFES, 2003a, p.19). However, the face-to-face training survey (Appendix 2) revealed that approximately 29% of pre-school SENCOs had not yet attended the “SEN Code of Practice Training”, which had been recommended as a basic requirement (EYDCP, 2002b).

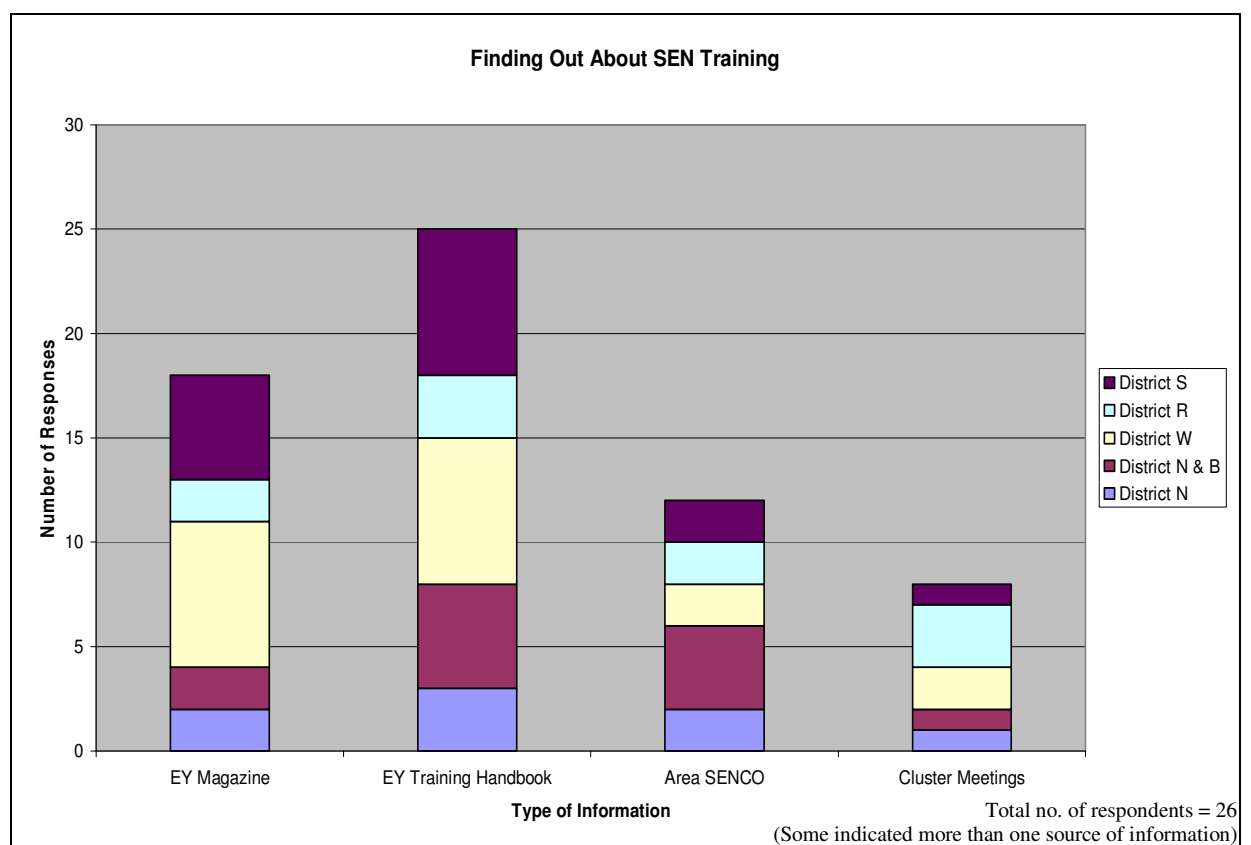
17% said that they had never attended any SEN training. When prompted, pre-school providers gave several reasons for their non-attendance at training and these are now explored further in this chapter.

Difficulties and “barriers” to training opportunities

Access to information

Part of the role of an Area SENCO is to encourage each setting-based SENCo to “disseminate” training information to all staff in their provision (DFES, 2003a, p.19). In the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), pre-school providers were asked how they found out about SEN training courses. There were a range of responses; the most common source of information being the Early Years Training Handbook, which the LA aimed to distribute by post to all settings (see Fig. 5.2 below).

Figure 5.2



However, in the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) some staff (17%) appeared not to have seen or heard of the training handbook, commenting that they were not aware of any form of advertised training.

As identified in the LA implementation plans 2002-03 of this study (EYDCP, 2002b) and similarly in other research (Eborall, 2003; Foster, 2007), there could have been difficulties for the LA in keeping “contact names” and postal addresses up to date; with over 300 pre-school settings, provisions opening and closing during the year, settings changing names, and high incidences of managers and SENCos leaving or changing jobs. Croll and Moses (2000) identified access to support and resources as being crucial to inclusive practice. However, the potential accessibility difficulties which were identified by Surestart (DFES, 2003 a&b), particularly for rural settings and those with high rates of staff turnover, continue to be areas for concern within this case study and in other research literature (Eborall, 2003; Foster, 2007). These “barriers” to training opportunities are discussed further in this chapter.

During the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) and interviews (Appendix 5), some staff commented that courses had already been fully booked when they had tried to access them. For example, one SENCo said that “by the time we get training information it is too late to book places on the most popular courses” (Interviewee A).

One playgroup manager, who had additional SENCo responsibilities (Interviewee L), encouraged all pre-school staff to attend SEN training, discussing all available courses “with the team”. She felt that sharing ideas and knowledge would benefit the whole playgroup. However, some pre-school staff (in the face-to face surveys, Appendix 2) felt that when information was sent to managers, it was not necessarily shared with the rest of the staff. One said;

“if it gets posted to the manager’s home address, we probably wouldn’t get to see it” (SEnCo, District S).

Another commented that,

“the training booklet goes on the shelf in the manager’s office – she just goes to the courses that she wants to go to and we don’t get a look in” (SEnCo, District W).

When considering inclusion, professional willingness and responsiveness are often regarded as equally important to the effective use of support and resources (Wolfendale, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). It would seem that a shared positive attitude and approach to SEN training helps to promote staff attendance at courses. In these research findings, some of the managerial attitudes to sharing SEN training opportunities appeared to be less positive. However, it could be that pre-school managers and owners were inexperienced or unaware of how to effectively instigate change in their settings (as in Foster, 2007). Foster noted a “lack of strategic business thinking and planning” amongst early years settings, with many managers feeling “under a great deal of pressure” to implement policy changes (p.2);

‘This is particularly difficult in some settings such as playgroups where the managers were volunteers or in settings where the manager has grown into the job over a number of years. Few come from a trained, academic or indeed business background, and so they may require support’ (Foster, 2007, p.2-3).

Interviewee C described herself as co-owner and manager of three large private day nurseries. She had attended quite a varied range of courses; including initial SENCo training (Code of Practice and the role of the SENCo), behaviour management, speech and language difficulties and autism awareness. She described these courses as “excellent”, “interesting” and “memorable”. However, she said that she was the only person that had accessed any SEN training, referring to one other member of staff that had once accompanied her to a child protection course. When asked how SEN advice and information was then shared with colleagues, Interviewee C responded;

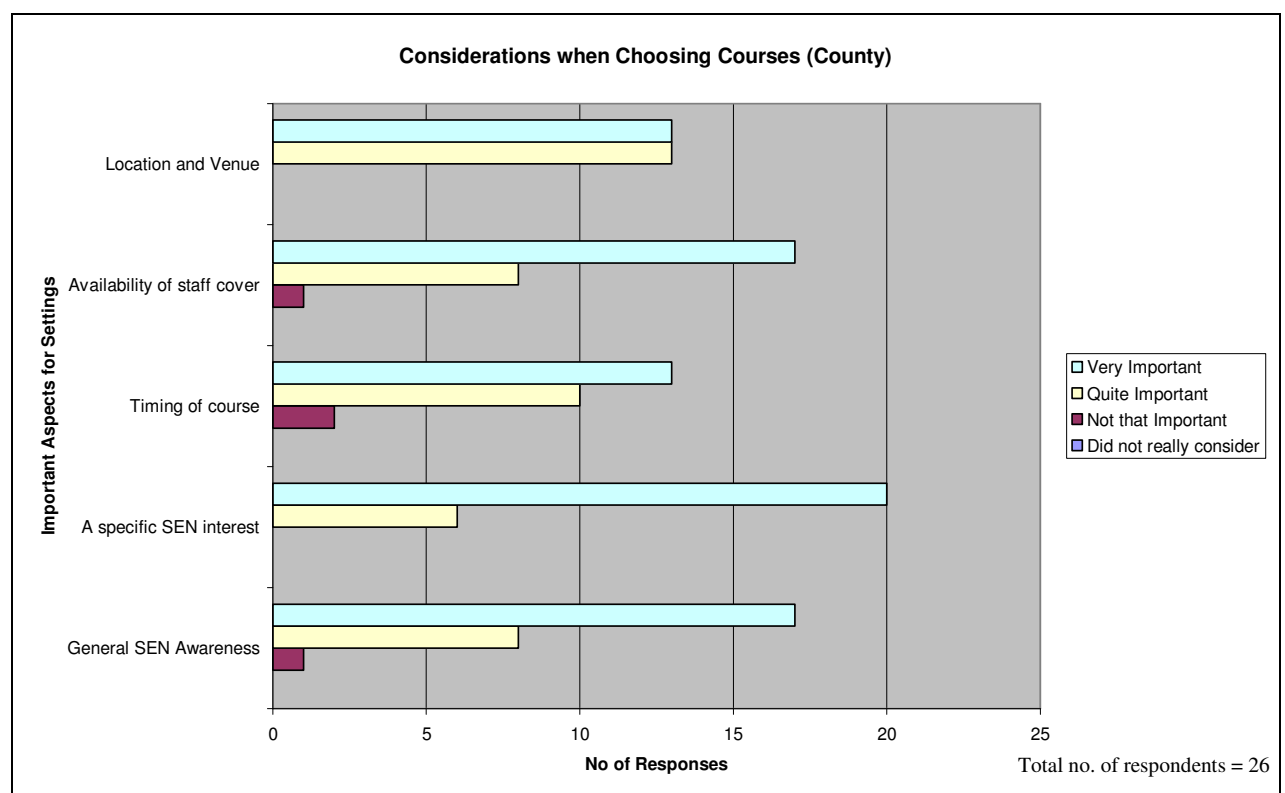
“Yes, I make them aware of everything. I let people know at staff meetings, if I think it was relevant. I also discuss main points that have come from it and photocopy the literature and put it in the staff room. I laminated some important pages from the Code of Practice the other day and put that on display” (Interviewee C).

As Wolfendale (2000) advocates, those with management responsibilities should lead the way in demonstrating inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices, using a “top down” approach to prioritise SEN issues. Valuing SEN training opportunities and sharing such opportunities with all staff might be one way in which a manager can encourage inclusive practice, rather than “photocopying” or “laminating” extracts for others to view afterwards (Interviewee C). As in Garet *et al.*, (2001), participating in professional development alongside others who have a shared agenda, is more likely to increase the effectiveness of such professional development. Considering pre-school inclusion, the effect of a manager’s attitude and ethos to staff development and training is explored further in Chapter Six.

Training considerations

In the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), pre-school providers were asked what considerations they made when choosing courses (see fig. 5.3 below).

Fig. 5.3



Location, venue and timing

Findings show (Fig. 5.3, p.141) that as in Surestart (DFES, 2003a) and Foster (2007), the location, venue and timing of courses in this study seemed to be important considerations, particularly for those in more rural parts of the county (such as Districts S and N). Transport difficulties were raised by 30% of respondents during face-to-face surveys (Appendix 2), when training venues were located several miles away. Not all staff had their own cars and public transport was not always available to their required location. Also, if people needed to take their own children to school (12 practitioners raised this during the face-to-face survey), they felt that this made them late for morning courses; similarly they then needed to leave courses early in order to collect children at the end of an afternoon. Foster's findings were very similar (2007), with many of the pre-school staff being students or school leavers who had not yet learnt to drive and several others being mothers of school-aged children;

‘the nature of the job and the hours mean that they can work easily around their own children’s schedules. This is especially the case in playgroups’ (Foster, 2007, p.9).

Interviewees B and C said that non-attendance at training was due to a lack of time and funding, as found by Pinnell (2003). Shared planning time was commonly identified by all interviewees as being an important part of training, but again (as in Pinnell, 2003 and Frances, 2005) this was difficult; when staff were paid by the hour, paid to be with children, and wanted to go home to their own families when their working day had finished. There were frequently difficulties in finding times and venues to suit all staff. Some pre-school staff had their own childcare needs, or other jobs to go to in order to supplement their salaries. For example, in addition to working in a playgroup every morning, one SENCo (District W, face-to-face survey, Appendix 2) ran a before and after school club, was a lunch-time supervisor in the school, was a teaching assistant for the school some afternoons, and worked evening and weekend shifts at the local supermarket. Sometimes, the pre-school (and venue for meetings) was also “the same room used by the before and after-school club”, so “timetabling meetings” was “virtually impossible” (Interviewee D).

The LA had reported that several practitioners, particularly childminders, would find Saturday training more accessible as they would not have work commitments, and childcare for their own children would be easier to arrange with family and friends (EYDCP, 2003a). When looking at the timing of learning and development courses, Foster (2007) also found that Saturdays were often identified by practitioners as being “more appropriate” than weekdays (p.13). However, at the time of this study, Saturday training was rarely offered and was mainly organised for childminders or occasional early years conferences (CIS, 2004).

Staffing and funding issues

As in Surestart (DFES, 2003a), Pinnell (2003), Frances (2005) and Foster (2007) the ‘availability of staff cover’ was shown to be important for pre-school providers across the county in this case study. In interviews and face-to-face surveys, maintaining staffing levels and staff-child ratios were given as some of the main reasons for non-attendance at training. As one SENCo of a private pre-school commented,

“We can’t send staff on training during the day, because OFSTED say we always have to have 2 members of staff with the children”
(Interviewee B)

Interviewee C (manager and co-owner) said that;

“I have many staff that would like to do SEN training but it is about prioritising - it’s time and expense that it comes down to. I would love to let as many go who want to go, but I have to look at the needs of the nursery. It would be nice to have more time to share training - be valuable to do it in other ways, but the demands of full day care don’t leave much time for that. (Interviewee C)”.

There were examples of SENCos and Managers of pre-school settings in all districts of the LA who outlined the need for staff to be with the children rather than attending courses, as “that is what they are paid for” (SENCo, District W, face-to-face survey, Appendix 2).

One Manager (District N&B) commented that, in order to release staff for daytime training, “we would have to close the nursery – parents wouldn’t like that – and staff would lose a day’s pay” (Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4). Losing pay would probably not act as an incentive for staff to attend training!

In the face-to-face training survey (Appendix 2), 15% of pre-school settings had newly appointed SENCoS, describing themselves as having very limited previous SEN experience. Perhaps coincidentally, 15% of the pre-school settings responding to the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4) indicated that they had newly appointed SENCoS, with less than twelve months experience in the role.

In District S (chosen as the interview sample group), one SENCo was new to post, five had a combined Manager/SENCo role and one was a SENCo with over twelve months experience. These findings reflect the national and regional staff recruitment and retention difficulties encountered in the early years and childcare sector. In 2001 the national turnover rate for staff in nurseries was 16%, and 13% for playgroups and pre-schools (in Eborall, 2003).

This case study noted some of the anxieties that SENCoS felt in relation to SEN. One SENCo in the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) recognised that being new to the post, she was “not sure what SEN issues need addressing yet” (District R). Another said, “I need to get up to speed to feel confident and competent in my role” (District N). Three pre-school managers had not yet identified a member of staff with responsibility for SEN, with one manager “not sure what SEN issues to address” (District W). Another seemed unclear as to who held responsibility for SEN and inclusion;

“Our SENCo has left. She was the one that did it” (Manager, District N)

New SENCoS described feelings of fear and uncertainty (all districts), especially when SEN training had not already been shared or cascaded to the rest of the staff by a previous SENCo. As in Foster (2007), when one trained member of staff left, it appeared that they took their expertise and knowledge with them, “often tempted away by better salaries elsewhere, in jobs other than childcare” (Interviewee D).

Concerns have often been raised about quality of service provision, recruitment difficulties and high rates of staff turn-over, often accredited to low levels of pay and status for practitioners working in early years (Pinnell, 2003; Frances, 2005; Toynbee, 2005; Foster, 2007). Foster also described cost-related anxieties about having to increase pay levels for more qualified staff (p.5). The LA had noted similar concerns (Implementation Plan 2002-2003, EYDCP, 2002b) particularly in non-maintained pre-school settings, where staff were often paid minimum wage (DTI, 2006).

In 2006, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) wanted childcare workers to “benefit from decent wages that reflect the real value of their work” and stated that,

‘Quality childcare requires a well paid and valued workforce. The government has invested a substantial amount in childcare but at the moment childcare employees earn less than most other workers in the education or care sectors and too many don't even receive the minimum wage’ (TUC, 2006).

During face-to-face surveys and interviews, some managers supported and encouraged training; still paying staff if they attended daytime courses, and sometimes using their “training grant” to do so (DES, 2002). Interviewee L had a joint role of manager and SENCo for a private playgroup that was based on a school site. She had identified training as a major priority for the playgroup and said that;

“Yes, training and development is quite high on the agenda for the Early Years Partnership. So we have our training and development file and we sort out at the beginning of the year who is going to do what and what is available. We base it on who expresses an interest in things, but also what the needs are of the playgroup” (Interviewee L).

Many pre-school providers felt that staff meetings were good opportunities to have in-service training and share ideas together (face-to-face surveys, postal questionnaires and interviews). For instance, Interviewee D described the benefits of having whole-staff training; when an Area SENCo had provided training in the nursery, and then time had been given at a staff meeting to follow-up ideas. She felt that there were opportunities to discuss and share strategies for dealing with behavioural difficulties that were particularly pertinent to those nursery staff in the setting;

“It helped that we were all there. We did observations and identified the behaviours. That really helped us think - this is a problem, but this is how we could manage it” (Interviewee D).

Joyce and Showers (2002) would recommend this form of shared professional development, as described by Interviewee D; including components of demonstration, practice and feedback. As in Smith *et al.*, (2003), because there are many factors which influence how much practitioners can initiate change in their settings, it is important for them to have opportunities to strategise about barriers to implementation in order to deal with aspects which may hinder change.

SEN “interests” and general awareness

When choosing courses, the importance given to ‘Specific SEN interests’ and ‘general SEN awareness’ seemed to vary; often depending upon the priorities and interests of managers (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Several SENCos identified particular professional development needs that were pertinent to their own settings. From the comments of the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), SENCos sought guidance in relation to amending their SEN policies, looking at improvements to their learning environment, health and safety and behaviour management concerns. Issues surrounding training preferences and “future training needs”, as perceived by pre-school providers, are explored further in the next chapter.

In Summary

This chapter has explored some of the practicalities of implementing inclusion policy at a local level, in this instance within one LA. There has also been an examination of the accessibility and availability of training opportunities –as devised by the LA and Area SENCos to develop the confidence and expertise of pre-school practitioners (DFES, 2003a). Several of the “barriers” to training have been discussed and these will now be investigated further.

Considering Ball’s framework (Ball, 1990 & 1994), Chapter Six examines how national and local inclusion policy translates into everyday practice for pre-school providers. The chapter explores how the ethos, attitudes, values and anxieties of nursery managers, SENCos, pre-school staff and parents can all significantly impact upon pre-school inclusion. As noted by Ball, “Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (Ball, 1994, p.10).

CHAPTER SIX: Ethos, Attitudes, Values and Anxieties surrounding Pre-school Inclusion

Introduction

This chapter examines how national and local inclusion policy is communicated into pre-school practice within one LA. Continuing to investigate which key elements are needed for “effective pre-school inclusion”, the chapter explores how the ethos, attitudes, values and anxieties of nursery managers, SENCos, pre-school staff and parents can all significantly impact upon pre-school inclusion. In this research, providers were asked to comment upon their knowledge and experience of SEN and inclusion. They were also asked to consider the importance of future SEN training needs for all staff within their settings. Data for this chapter is primarily taken from the practitioner questionnaires (Appendices 2 & 4) and the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5). As in the previous two chapters, Chapter Six follows a thematic progression of reporting and analysis; with diagrammatically displayed quantitative information (Figures 6.1 & 6.2) and illustrative qualitative data throughout.

Comparing and linking these case study findings to those of research literature (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Garner, 2004; Avramidis, 2005) an analysis of findings reveals elements of pre-school practice which could be regarded as either motivational or prohibitive towards inclusion. There is an exploration of how training and professional development opportunities might be designed to re-address such issues.

What is inclusion?

There has long been debate as to what constitutes “inclusion” and several definitions have emerged over recent decades. As introduced in the literature review (Chapter Two), a flavour of this debate and the ongoing issues surrounding “pre-school inclusion” emerge throughout this chapter.

The SureStart model of inclusion (DFES, 2003a) helped to establish networks of Area SENCos in LAs across the country, tasked with promoting inclusive practice and delivering SEN training to all early years settings. In seeking to “remove barriers” (DFES, 2004) and open up opportunities for all children and families, the SureStart initiative was felt to be an encouraging move forward (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004), particularly for more “vulnerable” children and families, including those with SEN and disabilities.

Such “barriers” included access, availability and affordability; of quality mainstream childcare provision for children with SEN and their families (DFES, 2004), and of SEN training opportunities for pre-school practitioners in a range of settings (DFES, 2003a). For instance, Surestart (DFES, 2003a) acknowledged the difficulties that some settings faced in relation to maintaining SEN expertise, particularly when faced with high levels of staff turnover (p.10). Also, as discussed in Chapter Five, when releasing practitioners to attend training courses, there were often associated transport difficulties (especially in rural areas), budget restraints for staff cover costs, and problems with maintaining staff/child ratios (DFES, 2003a; Foster, 2007).

This study examines some perceived “barriers” to both SEN training and pre-school inclusion, and how providers aim to “remove”, overcome or avoid such barriers through staff training and development work. Through an analysis of research findings, it is hoped to give an insight into how pre-school managers and SENCos prioritise SEN training needs and “inclusion” within their settings and how they then communicate these priorities to others.

Findings reveal a continuum of contrasting viewpoints and practice across one county; from some SENCoS and pre-school managers identifying creative whole-staff approaches to enhance their inclusive provision, to others feeling that the challenges posed are somewhat insurmountable. For example, there are settings which appear to embrace new developments and innovative practice surrounding the inclusion of children with SEN; seeking to “look behind the problems” (Interviewee A) and “come up with interesting and enticing things for children to do” (Interviewee J). As a common illustration, one SENCo described the “challenges” of including a child with cerebral palsy;

“the preschool staff were constantly looking for activities they could do with him as well as other children, activities that used his left side” (Interviewee J).

Others seem less confident, hesitant or even reluctant; at times just paying lip-service to the policies that are in place. As typically reported in this study, one SENCo described a setting’s experience of “struggling to manage” a child with behavioural difficulties;

“The staff got demoralised because they felt they were failing, which they weren’t. They struggled to realise that things don’t happen overnight ... the problem isn’t solved in a couple of weeks just because you think you’re doing the right thing” (Interviewee D).

Though some would describe inclusion as having all learners together in one educational setting (as in Hall, 1992) or ensuring that “ramps” and “disabled toilets” are in place (SENCo, District W, Face-to-Face Survey, Appendix 2), many would perceive inclusion to be much more than being situated in a shared environment (Connor, 2001). As the title of this thesis suggests, it is not enough to have, “a coat peg with his name on it” (Head Teacher, anon); then just expecting a child with SEN to be fully engaged and “included” in all activities - cognitively, emotionally and socially (Hanko, 2003; Rider, 2003). It is felt that much more consideration has to be given to collaboration with parents (as in Chapter Four) and planning an appropriate “inclusive” learning environment, with professional development opportunities designed to further

staff expertise in recognising and meeting the child's needs holistically (Odom, 2000; Connor, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Maynard & Thomas, 2004). As advocated by several researchers (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Hanko, 2003; MacConville, 2003) inclusion can be partially measured by the attitudes, responses and collaborative involvement of everyone within a setting; including children, parents, managers, pre-school staff and the local community. It is important also to focus upon children's rights and "best interests" - access, involvement and well-being (Hegarty *et al.*, 1994; Cartwright & Dehaney, 2000; Wearmouth, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Rustemier in CSIE, 2002; DRC, 2001; Tutt, 2002; Rider, 2003; Carpenter at EECI, 2005), when settings seek to translate inclusion policy into pre-school practice.

During face-to-face surveys in this research (Appendix 2) some SENCoS seemed keen to access SEN training, for example welcoming the opportunity to "learn new ideas and strategies that will help us all move forwards" (SENCo, District N). For other respondents, the notion of "inclusion" concentrated mainly upon the physical accessibility of an environment, leading to questions such as, "How long have we got to fit a ramp and a disabled toilet?" (SENCo, District W) Several respondents considered what they regarded to be "detrimental" effects of inclusion, for instance when it was felt that one child's "disruptive behaviour" could significantly impact upon everyone in and around the setting – children, staff and parents;

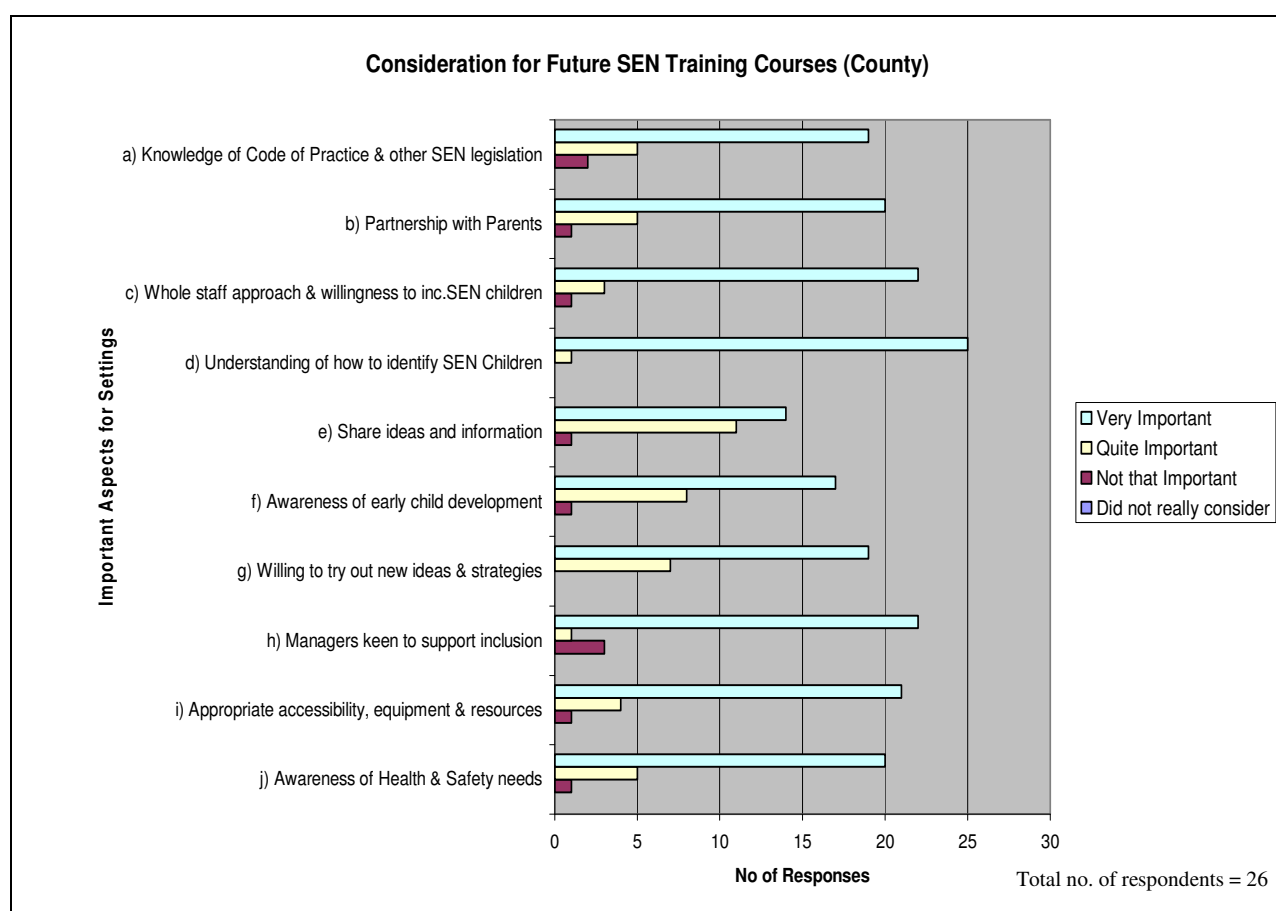
"Are we allowed to say that we can't meet a child's needs in our setting?" (Manager, District R, face-to-face survey, Appendix 2)

These provide introductory examples of the range of ideas and viewpoints which arose during this study. Debating these further, this chapter begins to examine what "inclusion" means to pre-school providers, revealing very varied responses to inclusion and SEN training within the pre-school arena. Are the needs of children and families really central to considerations when pre-school settings plan their SEN training (Wearmouth, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Rustemier in CSIE, 2002; DRC, 2001; Tutt, 2002; Rider, 2003), or do other priorities and influences take over?

Priorities for SEN training: the perspectives of pre-school providers

This research sought to gain an insight into the knowledge, expertise, approach and confidence of pre-school providers surrounding SEN and inclusion, as perceived by the pre-school providers themselves. Postal questionnaires (Appendix 4) asked respondents across one LA to consider several elements when planning for future SEN training courses and to rate these in terms of importance for their particular settings. Figure 6.1 (below) shows how questionnaire respondents across the whole County rated the importance of future SEN training courses for their settings.

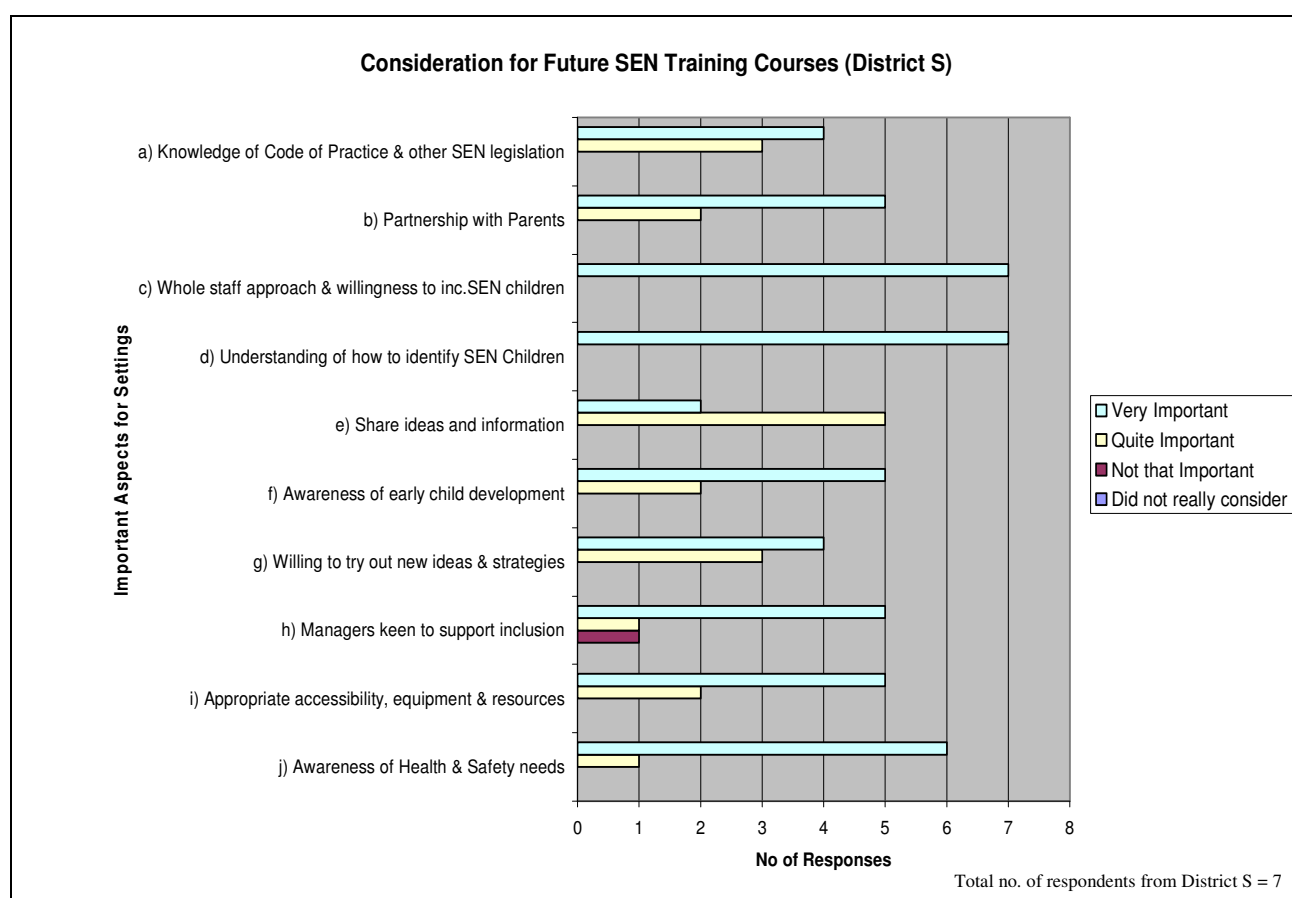
Fig. 6.1



Some areas for consideration related to knowledge of national legislation and guidance, such as the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) and health and safety issues (Fig. 6.1 a & j). Others prompted thoughts about general awareness; of child development, of identifying children with SEN, and of accessibility issues relating to providing appropriate equipment and resources (Fig. 6.1 d, f & i). There were several aspects to consider surrounding the approach and attitude of pre-school staff and managers in relation to both inclusion and staff training (Fig. 6.1 c, g & h). Opinions were also sought as to the importance of communication and liaison, with both pre-school staff and parents (Fig. 6. b & e).

In addition to the questionnaire data (Appendix 4) that was drawn from the whole county (Fig. 6.1), data has also been extracted from District S (see Fig. 6.2 below). As discussed in the research methodology (Chapter Three), the sample of respondents from District S was felt to be a representative group of practitioners, reflecting the wider opinions of the varied pre-school settings across the county. Findings from the postal questionnaire for District S (Fig. 6.2) are similarly proportionate to those of the county (Fig. 6.1, previous page).

Fig. 6.2



Questionnaire responses from both the face-to-face and postal questionnaires (Appendices 2 & 4) were investigated further during semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5) as a form of “triangulation” (see Chapter Three). The quantitative findings (6.1 a - j & 6.2 a - j) will now be examined alongside more qualitative data from both questionnaires and interviews (Appendix 5). In this way, the data will be reported and analysed thematically as four key areas emerge; knowledge of SEN guidance and legislation; skills and confidence to identify children with SEN and intervene appropriately; approach and attitudes towards inclusion and training; communication and liaison.

Knowledge of SEN Guidance and Legislation

Following national guidelines (DFES, 2003a), the SEN training in the LA of this study initially focused upon the following areas; raising awareness of the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) and working with parents, SEN Policy (including health and safety guidance relating to DRC, 2001), behaviour management, and supporting speech and language difficulties. The LA particularly aimed to target the setting-based pre-school SENCoS from across the county (LA, 2003b), but other practitioners were also welcome to attend. Most respondents from the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4) identified the SEN Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) and health and safety guidance to be either “very important” or “important” considerations for future training (see Fig. 6.1 a & j). Just two respondents indicated that they did not feel that knowledge of the SEN Code of Practice was an important consideration. They both noted that as they had recently attended SEN training, this was felt to be no longer a priority for their setting.

It seemed that if settings were required to prioritise training, they then only attended the “must do” SEN courses, as guided by the LA grant funding requirements (EYDCP, 2003d);

‘I have only attended SEN Code of Practice at present’ (SENCo, District N&B, Postal Questionnaire, Appenix 4).

Perhaps this was due to financial and staffing restraints (Foster, 2007; Pinnell, 2003; Frances, 2005), with providers facing difficulties when releasing someone to attend a whole day’s course; paying for staff cover and finding an appropriately qualified person to maintain correct ratios (OFSTED, 2003).

One relatively new SENCo, with less than 12 months experience in the role, had so far accessed little SEN training and felt quite anxious about legislation;

“my understanding is that there isn’t a choice. The legislation comes in and that’s the way we have to go forward. That’s been quite difficult for some people to understand – that we do have to support it” (Interviewee N)

As in previous research (Porter *et al.*, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002), managers and SENCos in this study seemed much more confident about their “inclusive practice” where several staff from one setting had been able to attend SEN training together, especially the LA Code of Practice and SEN Policy training, commenting for example that;

‘More staff are now SEN aware, able to identify children, know where to access help, able to plan and provide for their individual needs, able to liaise with parents’ (SENCo, District N, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4)

Interviewee L felt that even though not all staff could be away from the setting at the same time, they planned to attend “in twos” over the year if possible, until everyone had received the required training. As in Wolfendale (2000), 85% of SENCos in this research recognised “a whole staff approach” to training as being “very important” (see fig. 6.1), with one respondent describing the benefits when implementing SEN guidance;

“a whole-staff team approach enabled the setting to provide a comprehensive SEN policy which is constantly under review – rewriting and updating annually” (District W, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4).

Interviewee A (SENCo and Manager) felt that it was very important to be “aware of legal obligations”. In the light of recent SEN training, she pointed out that the pre-school had recently needed to alter their prospectus, realising that requesting toilet training prior to admission could be regarded as discriminatory;

“You can’t say a child has to be toilet trained any more. All of us had to be prepared to deal with accidents and have nappy changing responsibilities” (Interviewee A).

Recognising the range of experience and qualifications of practitioners (DFES, 2003a; EYDCP, 2003a; Foster, 2007) and the high frequency at which national and local policies were being introduced (Ball, 2008); providers in this study seemed to face significant challenges when trying to keep their plans and policies up to date. It felt important to remember that many practitioners were not teachers and some were paid little over the minimum wage (TUC, 2006), yet a lot was expected of them in terms of legislative responsibility. One SENCo in the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) described taking “an **unpaid** afternoon off each week in order to do paperwork at home” (SEnCo, District W).

Another SENCo, when interviewed believed that it was essential to have legislative guidance to take away from training courses that was written in “user-friendly language” and could be easily accessible for all staff;

“Sometimes it’s a lot to wade through. You need the bullet points that are actually pertinent to your setting. There’s so much to take in”
(Interviewee L)

In her SENCo role, Interviewee J sometimes used the legislative guidance that she had received from courses to support her proposals for change, taking these to the parent committee which held responsibility for the setting. This was particularly the case, when there were additional costs involved, for instance in order to make physical adaptations to the building. She said that,

“If I need to check legislation or I have a query I get out my *County W* information and look at that. I can’t quote it, but I know the guts of it and if something crops up I will use the reference booklet for advice.
Anything new in legislation is shared with the team” (Interviewee J).

As expressed by Interviewee J, it seemed that legislative guidance often provided a powerful influence with staff and “pre-school funding committees”, particularly when trying to review access arrangements and resources for children with disabilities in both the short and long term planning for pre-school settings.

Also, as Interviewee C points out, knowledge of the Code of Practice (DFES, 2001) and legislation is important, because “You can’t say with children – oh, they’re too difficult, we don’t want them!” This view accords with Government guidance (DRC, 2001; DFES, 2003a) which emphasises the importance of raising awareness of inclusive legislative knowledge amongst practitioners in early years settings. Ball (2008) also describes the ways in which many government policies over recent decades have aimed to “reform” educational services.

As discussed in Chapter Five, such political influences (Ball, 2008) have led to specific targets for early years in LAs across the UK, with dramatic increases in LA funding and resources for pre-school provision (LA documentary analysis, Appendix 9); increasing the availability of childcare for all three year olds, but also providing Area SENCos (DFES, 2003a; LA, 2002; EYDCP, 2003b; LA 2003b; EYDCP, 2004c) to develop the SEN knowledge and inclusive practice of practitioners in all early years settings across the county. Political and ideological influences are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

The findings of this study were similar to those of Clough and Nutbrown (2004, p.205 & 208) in that some providers said “yes” to wanting to be inclusive, then added “but” statements to some aspects which they felt they had little control over. However, this research found that several managers and SENCos had worked out their own solutions to identified problems, or sought additional advice. One common example which was described as a “barrier” to inclusion was the difficulty in maintaining health and safety for all children in the setting.

Reflections on Risk

Health and safety issues were raised by all the interviewees as being important considerations. Although some providers felt they had limited control over their learning environment as they were in shared community premises (Interviewees D & N), they often found that whole-staff awareness was essential to reducing risks. As in ‘The Disability Discrimination Act’ (DRC, 2001), making simple, “reasonable” adjustments could greatly reduce safety concerns.

For example, Interviewee N explained that the community facilities which hosted the pre-school were shared with a youth club and a huge pool table occupied a large section of one room. Staff had to cover the table and remember to ensure that pool cues were out of reach every morning, before children arrived!

“We set up every day and we put back every day and there are issues related to that with health and safety. We lock things in cupboards, but because of the setting there are things that we can’t physically move, so you do risk assessments. We have to make it safe for all the children, but no one says that’s easy’ (Interviewee N).

Other settings were purpose built for pre-school children, but health and safety concerns were still paramount;

“I can’t come in the door in the morning if I don’t know the nursery is safe and that the equipment being offered is safe and therefore the children can access it openly. Health and safety is imperative to any area of our work, it’s underlying of everything” (Interviewee L).

The LA provided written guidance on completing and writing “Risk Assessments” as part of their “Quality Standards for Safety: health promoting school scheme” (LA, 2003c). However, in the face-to-face surveys (Appendix 2) pre-school providers often sought additional advice from Area SENCos as to **how** to do this. Many had little previous experience of doing risk assessments and did not understand, for instance how to determine “high”, “medium” or “low” risks in relation to the safety of both children and staff, nor did they necessarily realise that risk assessments needed to be done for a range of activities and circumstances, both indoors and outdoors (LA, 2003c). As an illustration, one SENCo described being “fearful” of health and safety issues, saying that staff were often unclear as to how they might carry out and record risk assessments (SEnCo, District R, Face-to-Face Survey, Appendix 2).

At the time of this study, some “everyday safety” advice literature was available for schools and LA maintained nurseries (Griffin, 2001) and specific guidance had been written for identifying, preventing and “dealing with” potential risks when working with children with behavioural difficulties in schools (Olsen & Cooper, 2001). Many of the ideas from school-based advice would also seem applicable to pre-school practice. For example, practitioners could use a checklist or “systems at-risk sheet” (Olsen & Cooper, 2001, p.121); where contributing factors surrounding a “disruptive” child are examined such as environmental influences, rather than focusing just upon the child. Olsen and Cooper (2001) suggest that influences from both the home and classroom environment, particularly the types of interaction that the child observes and experiences with other significant people in his/her life (parents, teachers and peers) can greatly affect his/her behaviour. For example, if adults are heard shouting on a daily basis, the “risk” might be that a child adopts this behaviour as the “norm”.

It is also suggested that how a child experiences “organisation” and “structure”, impacts upon how they then behave. One question asks; ‘What are the rules and consequences?’ (Olsen & Cooper, 2001, p.121) There are then additional questions to determine whether the child actually knows these “rules” in advance and if they are “visual”- to remind, reinforce and prompt children about their behaviour (Olsen & Cooper 2001, p.121). If rules are unclear, inconsistent or too numerous, it is felt that this can cause confusion for a child, again leading to “risks” of misbehaviour (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Olsen & Cooper, 2001).

As noted by respondents in this study (SENCOs in District S & R, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4), it is important to observe how “routines” and “transitions” between activities might affect a child’s behaviour (Webster-Stratton, 1999, p53). For some children, if daily routines were unclear and changes happen without fore-warning, this was found to result in disruptive behaviour.

LA training (EYDCP, 2003b) focused upon adopting a “consistent” whole-staff approach (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Olsen & Cooper, 2001). As a result, one pre-school had introduced a “visual timetable”, using a sequence of pictures to represent activities that would be carried out during the session (Interviewee L). Children could then see what they would be doing “first” and “next”, when it was “snack time” and when it would be “home time” (Interviewee L). From the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) it was noted that another pre-school focused upon simplifying spoken language and encouraged every member of staff to use a child’s name at the start of an instruction to gain his/her attention; “*Jack*, story now” (SENCo, District R). One SENCo (District S – *not one of the interviewees*) had introduced a tambourine signal to pre-warn children and staff of an imminent change (as in Webster-Stratton, 1999); indicating, “Time to stop and listen!” It was reported that by learning to respond to this “rule”, practitioners felt this had benefited all children’s understanding, not just those with SEN; with ideas that reinforced understanding and safety, leading to “a calmer and smoother running nursery” (SENCo, District S).

During the period of this research there appeared to be very little specific written guidance for non-maintained pre-school practitioners in relation to assessing risk, nor as to who held responsibility in case of an accident (especially in some settings that were privately owned rather than on an LA site). Perhaps this was because there were too many variables to consider and one piece of advice would not necessarily be applicable to all settings. This was certainly the case for the pre-school providers within this study. For instance, one pre-school SENCo wanted to know who was responsible for providing funding for boundary fencing around the grounds of a church hall, to increase security and ensure that children could play safely in the outdoor area (SENCo, District N, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2). Another SENCo was working in a private nursery on an upper floor of a building, which was owned by a different business. Although she had wanted to include a child with physical disabilities, she had been advised that colleagues should not carry the child up and down the stairs as this was a health and safety risk (SENCo, District W, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2).

Reflecting this apparent uncertainty amongst pre-school providers, SEN training courses in County W introduced “Risk Assessment Guidance” as part of their “SEN Policy and Practice” training (EYDCP, 2004c). This was usually structured around individual questions that practitioners raised during courses. Area SENCos were often asked advice for example in relation to making fire exit doors safe “to prevent escapees”, reducing the risk when a child “puts everything in his mouth” or “bites other children”, or “having a care plan for a child in nappies” (feedback from training courses). Acknowledging that more “Risk Assessment” training was needed, the LA planned to devise further courses for practitioners (LA, 2004).

More recently, national guidance has been written which includes some health and safety advice for early years providers (DFES, 2005). In ‘Including Me’, the Council for Disabled Children offers specific written advice in relation to managing complex health needs, with a whole chapter entitled, “Risk Management and Assessment” (DFES, 2005, p.29).

In this research, several health and safety concerns were discussed in relation to children with behavioural difficulties and these are explored in more detail later on in this chapter. As one interviewee commented, a child’s behaviour can sometimes be;

“totally unpredictable. One minute they can be sitting, settled at an activity, the next they have thrown the large brick that they were playing with at someone, or over the room...So the risk with these children is huge” (Interviewee A).

It seemed important for practitioners to have a shared knowledge of SEN guidance and legislation, adopting a team approach to identifying and supporting children with SEN;

“As a staff, we then put the correct procedures in place” (SENCo, District N&B, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4).

There now follows an exploration of the range of skills and confidence that practitioners might need in order to implement effective inclusion.

Skills and Confidence: to identify children with SEN and intervene appropriately

In choosing pre-school provision for children with SEN, parents included in this study wanted to be confident in the training and expertise of pre-school staff, with the parent questionnaire highlighting this as one of their main considerations (see Chapter 4). However, as in other research findings (Garner, 2000 a&b; Connor, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Avramidis, 2005; Foster, 2007), this research found varied levels of confidence and expertise amongst practitioners.

As in Foster (2007) some respondents in the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) and interviews (Appendix 5) were older pre-school managers and SENCos, who felt that their years of experience compensated to some extent for their limited qualifications. Many said that they encouraged SEN training widely amongst the rest of the staff. One practitioner from a small village playgroup (District S, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2) said that she was nearing retirement yet had felt “pressurised” by the LA into gaining her NVQ3 (EYDCP, 2003b), and at times felt “over-faced” by the course requirements (as in Foster, 2007). Prior to the face-to-face survey, this practitioner had been observed by an Area SENCo in the playgroup garden with a little boy described as having “attention and listening” difficulties. They were both kneeling down under a large umbrella, thoroughly engrossed in collecting worms and making a “worm house” together out of mud and leaves. This activity took over twenty minutes and the child’s attention never wandered!

Others in this study were less experienced SENCos (see Chapter 5) who had attended little or no SEN training and had only recently left school or college. Similarly, Foster (2007) had noted a tendency for over a third of childcare workers to be under the age of 25. The face-to-face training survey (Appendix 2) showed many pre-school providers to be lacking in confidence, feeling unprepared and even quite fearful about SEN in some instances (as in Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a&b, Gains in Connor, 2001; Odom, 2000); describing “not wanting to do it wrong” as a common response (SENCo, District R).

They often needed reassurance, particularly in relation to unfamiliar legislative SEN and inclusion issues. For example, when considering the terminology within the Disability Discrimination Act (DRC, 2001), one SENCo asked;

“What constitutes a ‘reasonable adjustment’? I don’t know what that means” (District W, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2)

This corresponds to the findings of Foster (2007), where “stresses” were identified amongst childcare professionals in relation to “officialdom” and “red tape” (p.11). Ball (2008) also refers to the powerful and persuasive effect of the “language of policy” (p.5). Ball describes the ways in which “policy intellectuals” are employed to word policy documents in such a way as to “make them sound reasonable and sensible as solutions to social and economic problems” (Ball, 2008, p.5). This would appear to be the case within the ‘SEN and Inclusion Policy’ of this study (LA, 2003d), where the wording emphasises “achievement”; suggesting that the “best schools” already have an inclusive ethos and other schools and settings will be “helped” by the LA “to establish coherent policies and practices” relating to inclusion (p.1 & 10).

Another SENCo (District W, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2) felt that whole staff attendance at SEN training had “developed the setting’s confidence to accept a child with SEN”. Practitioners often felt more confident when information was broken down into more “user-friendly” terminology, with practical advice and illustrations as to what was expected of them. As in Foster (2007) and DFES (2003a), they enjoyed practical “hands-on” training courses geared to their individual interests and needs, where they described being motivated to develop support strategies and resources in their own settings. As well as specific SEN guidance in identifying needs at “Early Years Action” (Code of Practice, DFES, 2001) which had been highlighted as a training priority (DFES, 2003a), there appeared to be a need for more general child development awareness; looking at how to observe children, in order to assess and monitor their progress (Sheridan, 1988 & 1997; Sayeed & Guerin, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Porter, 2002; Maynard & Thomas, 2004; DFES, 2007). Some of these aspects were explored further using data from postal questionnaires and interviews (Appendices 4 & 5).

In the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), understanding how to identify children with SEN came out as being of greatest importance when considering future training for pre-school providers (see Fig. 6.1 d). The majority of respondents also felt that having an awareness of child development (Fig, 6.1 f) would help with the process of identification of SEN and appropriately planned intervention. As emphasised by one of the more experienced SENCos interviewed (Interviewee L), although knowledge of child development is essential (see chapter 2), it can be difficult to identify children with SEN if you only have them for a year before school. It was felt that because children need time to settle in and some summer born children are very young;

“You get such a range of differences, even within one year group”
(Interviewee L).

Interviewee C hoped that all staff working within a nursery setting would have an understanding of child development and the ability to recognise additional needs that individual children might present;

“To actually identify the need initially is imperative, it’s essential to see if a child is progressing normally, progressing slowly or not progressing at all. So that understanding needs to be the base line from which every member of staff works” (Interviewee C).

In relation to the importance of child development awareness and how to identify children with SEN, one nursery manager and SENCo suggested that;

“If you’re not aware of how they should be developing, then you don’t know if that’s not normal” (Interviewee A)

This view of “normality” as a baseline indicator for children with special educational needs, though contested in literature (discussed in Chapter Two), was also seemingly shared by others within this study. For instance, one SENCo felt that by having knowledge of child development, “it would be easier to detect what isn’t normal development” (Interviewee M).

By labelling or categorising pre-school children into two groups - “normal” or “SEN”, there is a sense that this could be premature, inaccurate or limiting (Gross, 1993; Lewis, 1995; Corbett, 1996; Maynard & Thomas, 2004); with very young children receiving inappropriate educational provision and support as a result.

Rather than focusing upon the notion of “normality” (Goffman, 1968; Gross, 1993; Galloway *et al.*, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996), perhaps pre-schools should encourage and motivate children to progress at their own rate and in a way that best meets their needs and interests (Rider, 2003; Maynard & Thomas, 2004). If this sometimes means an impromptu session of “making worm houses” to generate a child’s interest and attention (as with the practitioner in District S), why not?

As acknowledged by Interviewee M, due to the wide spread of ages in some pre-school settings (children aged 3 months to 4 years and 11 months), it was often difficult for staff to have thorough awareness and expertise of child development across the whole age range. Several government initiatives were introduced (DFES, 2005; DFES, 2007; DCSF, 2008) hoping to redress some of these difficulties; by providing curriculum advice, activities, observation and monitoring techniques for practitioners working with children aged 0 through to 5 years.

SureStart (DFES, 2003) outlined the importance of early identification and intervention. By introducing the guidance for ‘Birth to Three Matters’ (SureStart, DFES, 2002), alongside the statutory ‘Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage’ (QCA, 2000) for three to five year olds, it was hoped that early years settings would be able to deliver effective provision for children under three, as well as for three to five year olds.

These curriculum developments have not necessarily been uncontentious. As mentioned in Chapter Two, rather than recording children’s progress and providing activities in progressional stages, several writers prefer to look more holistically and ecologically at a child’s development (Maynard & Thomas, 2004).

Also several concerns were raised amongst early years practitioners (Nursery World Forum, January to March 2004) following the introduction of the new documentation (QCA, 2000; DFES, 2002). Some described not receiving the information and others expressed problems in understanding how to record progress; asking when they should “transfer children” from one system to another – at the “age of three or four?” or at the “*stage* of three in their development?” (Nursery Forum, March 2004). Similarly, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, practitioners identified the need for further training in understanding child development; in the postal questionnaire of this study (Appendix 4) and in interviews (Interviewees L, C, A & M). One SENCo in the LA of this study described moving a child into another group “**to do** Foundation Stage now, because he’s four” (SEnCo, District W, Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2), when developmentally the child’s skills were at a much earlier stage.

By focusing more upon the individual child, and less upon specific subjects and curriculum areas, the government aimed to redress the difficulty of tracking developmental progress across the whole birth to five age-groups.

This later led to the devisal of the statutory ‘Early Years Foundation Stage’ (EYFS) framework, with written standards for learning, development and care of children from birth to five (DFES, 2007). From September 2008, all registered early years providers and schools would be required to use the EYFS (DFES, 2007).

There has been much discussion surrounding the age and stage of development of such young children (Sheridan, 1997 & 1999; Sayeed & Guerin, 2000; Dowling, 2003; Rider, 2003) and whether “academic achievement”, particularly for those nearing school age, is sometimes too much of a driving force at the expense of children’s emotional well-being (Connor, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Essentially, there has been a gradual move away from looking at “stages” of development, towards an ecological view of the whole child (Maynard & Thomas, 2004; DFES, 2007; NFER, 2008).

Interviewee L was a SENCo and manager of a privately run playgroup, which was based on a school site. The majority of pre-school children transferred into the school at the age of five and the school reception class was situated directly next door to the playgroup.

Sometimes Interviewee L felt “pressured” by the school staff to identify pre-school children with SEN, even though in her opinion the children had not had chance to settle into their nursery routines;

“The school have expectations. So you tend to err on the side of caution, which perhaps you shouldn’t” (Interviewee L)

Could this be regarded as a way of schools screening children before they arrive on their doorsteps? As referred to by Avramidis (2005), there appear to be increasing “tensions” when schools are expected to be inclusive, whilst also raising academic achievement (p.3).

Sometimes it seems that pressures are then also put upon pre-school SENCos to initiate formal statutory SEN assessments (DFES, 2001) as early as possible, in order for schools to access additional LA funding when children enter full-time school. This could potentially lead to over-identification or exaggeration of needs in pre-school settings in order to try to secure such funding; a huge area of debate that could be discussed as a future piece of research!

Tutt (2002) questions whether “inclusionists” are being unrealistic in “pretending that children are more like each other than they actually are” (p.16) especially when children have complex needs, believing that there is;

‘a preoccupation with location that has mitigated against their individual needs being considered and met.... Is it because some policy makers are more concerned with adhering to a principle than meeting the needs of the child?’ (Tutt, 2002, p.16).

In this study, although sometimes practitioners felt “pressurised” to ensure that children reached similar levels of academic “achievement” and behaviour upon entry into school (Interviewee L), there seemed to be genuine recognition and acceptance amongst early years providers of the diverse needs amongst the pre-school children and their families, reflected in this commonly held view that;

“All children are different and special – some just have extra needs that we then have to learn how to respond to” (Interviewee J).

In devising SEN training courses, it would seem that there needs to be an acknowledgement of diversity; not only amongst the children and families, but also amongst the range of very varied pre-school settings. One size does not fit all! Moreover, it should be recognised that every child is unique and personalities, learning styles and experiences vary (Maynard & Thomas, 2004). As Porter (2002) suggests, it may be necessary to develop “individually appropriate practices” (p.13).

Is it not then more appropriate, as suggested in Clough & Nutbrown (2004) and Porter (2002), for practitioners to be encouraged to move away from identifying a child’s deficits; towards an analysis of the most appropriate learning environment, resources and strategies for each individual? This forms the platform for later discussion surrounding the “essential elements” of SEN training opportunities (see Chapter Seven).

Approach and Attitudes towards Inclusion and SEN Training

When Area SENCos are planning SEN awareness training, SureStart recognises the importance of evaluating the attitudes, values and feelings that are held by early years practitioners (DFES, 2003a). OFSTED reportedly found that inconsistent training and the lack of a "can-do" attitude were the biggest barriers to looking after children with SEN;

‘The attitude of the provider is fundamental to achieving successful outcomes for children The best nurseries and childminders publicly welcomed children with learning difficulties or disabilities’ (Smith, 2005).

This case study found varying approaches and attitudes amongst pre-school providers surrounding SEN and “inclusion”. These were revealed partly through specific research questions (Appendix 4), when questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the importance of; a whole staff approach and willingness to include children with SEN (fig. 6.1c); willingness to try out new ideas and strategies (fig. 6.1g); and managers keen to support inclusion (fig. 6.1h).

Additionally, there were many underlying values, opinions, concerns and anxieties that were revealed throughout other parts of the investigation using qualitative data, particularly during semi-structured interviews (Appendix 5). As mentioned earlier, some managers and SENCos appeared to welcome new SEN training opportunities for all practitioners working within their settings; putting newly acquired initiatives and strategies into practice and encouraging a positive whole-staff ethos towards inclusion. Others seemed more inclined to focus upon the difficulties in accessing SEN training and implementing different practice in their settings, with some SENCos and managers expressing concerns and anxieties which they felt to be “barriers” to inclusion (as discussed in Chapter 5). Managers occasionally appeared to acknowledge inclusion, but were then driven by what they were “required to do”; almost a token gesture, rather than welcoming opportunities for change and development, or pursuing the interests of their staff. This might also be about their levels of confidence to effectively influence policy and change in practice (Foster, 2007).

During interviews, it was found that one respondent (Interviewee C) was the only person from her setting that had received any SEN training. Interestingly, as the manager and co-owner of the nursery, she had not felt it important for other staff to attend SEN training, suggesting that it was sufficient to leave “laminated important pages” on display in the staff room (see Chapter Five).

Examining face-to-face and postal questionnaire data (Appendices 2 & 4) and also using course registers from Area SENCo data (anon., 2002-2005), it would seem that lone representation at training (or “preciousness” of holding onto information) was not uncommon, with several pre-school managers from across the county being the sole attendees at all SEN courses.

When a manager left the setting, they frequently took the SEN knowledge and information with them. As discussed in Chapter Five, it was found that managers and SENCos often moved to other pre-school settings or changed career completely, reflecting the similar findings of Foster (2007). Course training materials were sometimes taken home or taken with them into their new settings. Alternatively, information was left behind on shelves, without explanation to other staff as to their content. Chapter Two examined the idea that “power” can be associated with those who hold, interpret and distribute policy information (Bastiani, 1989; Ball, 1990, 1994 & 2008; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991; Stacey, 1991; Fabian, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Tutt, 2002). The extent, to which policy information is valued and transferred into practice, could depend upon how (and by whom) interpretations and emphases are made. As Ball (2008) points out,

‘... the ways in which policies are spoken and spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of their conditions of acceptance and enactment’ (Ball, 2008, p.5)

As this chapter has discussed, where ideas were taken on board with enthusiasm and considered to be “helping us all move forwards” (SENCo, District N, Face-to-face survey, Appendix 2), inclusion was more usually viewed more positively. This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Interviewee C, as the manager and lone SEN trainee from her setting (see Chapter Five), described difficulties when trying to cascade her “knowledge and expertise” of inclusion to other staff. Although Interviewee C said that “everyone should support inclusion, not just the manager”, she suggested that this was a struggle from her point of view; having to “instil in people”, “take them to one side”, and “debate with staff” in order to encourage inclusive practice.

One point which she outlined was;

‘If I watched them with a child and I could see they could be doing it the way that I was trained then I would just take them on one side and tell them quickly’ (Interviewee C).

It would seem that such a management style was quite dictatorial, with staff being told what to do rather than being encouraged to share thoughts and ideas. If staff had all experienced the same training in the first place, maybe the manager could then have guided her team of staff in more of a team-building capacity (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Foster, 2007).

Much of the LA’s SEN training (EYDCP, 2002b; EYDCP, 2003b; EYDCP, 2004c; LA, 2003b; LA, 2004) recommends that at least two members of staff attend from each setting, suggesting that a consistent staff approach will then be beneficial in introducing new strategies. For example, as advised by Finch (1999), Webster-Stratton (1999) and Olsen & Cooper (2001), the SEN courses in County W recommend that all staff work as a team to help children to learn “rules and boundaries” (LA, 2004). This then helps to reinforce and practice certain behaviours such as “good listening”, “good looking”, “no hitting” with children, rather than causing confusion if too many conflicting approaches and instructions are in place.

The face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) revealed that one private daycare setting (District S) had ensured that every member of staff (eight, including the manager) had attended the ‘behaviour management’ courses. Following this training, at each of the monthly staff meetings, the manager included a practical workshop where ideas and experiences were shared.

As in previous research findings (Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Hanco, 2003; MacConville, 2003) it seemed in this study that new ideas were then more commonly felt to be supported and guided by the manager, but also understood, welcomed and shared amongst the whole staff. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, by adopting a “consistent” approach (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Olsen & Cooper, 2001), ideas had led to “a calmer and smoother running nursery” (SENCo, District S, Face-to-face survey, Appendix 2).

Some pre-school providers tried to plan and share out training opportunities, but acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult to release more than one member of staff at a time due to staffing constraints (as discussed in Chapter Five). Although only sending one representative was felt to be possible at times, some settings were very creative in how information was then cascaded to others; through staff meetings, discussions, workshops, training days and practical sessions with staff and parents.

One SENCo for instance, suggested ideas for shared training;

‘Each week we have a staff meeting and if anyone has been on a course then they feed back. Training videos would be a good idea – each person could watch the video at home and then come back to chat about it’ (Interviewee A).

Some managers and SENCos in this study recognised and promoted the importance of shared, first-hand training experiences to enhance practice amongst their teams of staff (Porter *et al.*, 2000; Garet *et al.*, 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Smith *et al.*, 2003; Foster 2007). Also, as emphasised by Porter *et al.*, (2000), they acknowledged the importance of on-going and long-term professional development opportunities rather than one-off activities; enabling practitioners to retain and incorporate newly learnt concepts into their daily practice.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the LA promoted the development of annual training plans for all staff in settings and introduced financial assistance following national guidelines (DES, 2002) , particularly encouraging accredited learning, such as NVQs (LA, 2003e). In 2002-2003, in addition to the Foundation Stage Training Grant (DES, 2002) and the Standards Fund for Early Years Training and Development, a grant was specifically allocated to support training for early years SENCOs.

Initially, although funding for training was provided, there appeared to be neither clear guidance (documentary analysis, Appendix 9) nor monitoring as to how to spend the money effectively in order to meet the needs of each setting and all the staff within it. As identified by Foster (2007) and Ball (2008), gaps and inequalities can exist when it comes to the effective dissemination of policy information, especially when early years practitioners have to deal with implementing several initiatives at once and have a limited timescale to do so. As referred to in Chapter Five, some settings experience difficulties in accessing training and opportunities to keep abreast of policy information.

Ball (2008) refers to “policy overload” (p.2); describing the increasing pace and volume of educational policy which has been introduced over the last twenty years. The “speeding up” of new policy initiatives (Ball, 2008, p.197), has sometimes led to early years practitioners feeling “overwhelmed” (Interviewee A), typically commenting that;

“We are trying to do our NVQ work to gain our required qualifications, then we also have to fit in our four days curriculum and SEN training. All our written policies have to be updated ready for OFSTED soon. Most of us are part time and have young children. It’s a lot to juggle. We are not keeping up-to-date with everything that we should” (Interviewee A).

During face-to-face surveys (Appendix 2), some SENCoS expressed their belief that training money had been spent inappropriately, for instance on “re-decorating the nursery” (District N&B) or “buying a new computer for the manager’s office” (District N). In the postal questionnaire, one SENCo wrote that;

“The nursery owner expects us to pay for our own training and we also lose a day’s pay if we go – this doesn’t exactly encourage people to attend training!” (SENCo, District R).

On the other hand, there were also examples of creative approaches to spending, which appeared to use funding to good effect. For example, one SENCo in District S described using their neighbouring school’s “training days” to facilitate consistent dates and times for whole-staff training across a twelve month cycle;

“We decided to inform all our parents at the start of the year that we would also be closing on the school training days, in order to access staff training and professional development. Parents seemed OK with this, as it was something that they were already familiar with. This meant that we could all attend courses together and we did not have to pay for staff cover. We then used some of the grant money to buy useful books and resources that we learnt about on our courses” (Interviewee J).

Following on from the period in which these research questionnaires and interviews took place, the Transformation Fund (DFES, 2006) was introduced, enabling LAs to offer financial support for all practitioners in non-maintained settings to attend training for relevant Level 3 (A-level equivalent) or higher qualifications; including training towards the Early Years Foundation Degree or to support the new Early Years Foundation Stage from 2008, and training to improve skills in working with children with SEN and disabilities. Transformation Funding (DFES, 2006) could also be used to pay for staff supply cover, enabling appropriate staff-child ratios to be maintained in settings. A summary of how this was partly facilitated by Area SENCoS in the LA is included (Appendix 7).

Threading throughout this study is the unfolding journey of “policy through to practice” (Ball, 1990 & 1994) and how there are influential factors that need to be understood and considered along the way. This research has found the approach and attitudes of practitioners to be powerful influences surrounding pre-school inclusion. There will now be a further examination of the extent to which such influences might be communicated to others.

Communication and Liaison: a shared approach?

In this study, there appeared to be varied attitudes and approaches to collaborative working; amongst managers, SENCos, staff and parents. The degree to which inclusive practice was “shared” and “communicated” through SEN training and professional development was explored through all aspects of the research. Any identified “barriers” have practical implications for the implementation of policy into practice (Ball, 1990, 1994 & 2008; Foster, 2007).

One SENco worked in a large day nursery, providing childcare for children from 3 months to 4 years. She valued whole-staff training as a way of working towards the “same goal” and commented that;

“It’s best if everyone goes, because they can all hear it themselves and can all be working to the same goal...If they don’t all attend, then they’re not all on the same wavelength and don’t have that passion for it”
(Interviewee M).

Having a “can-do” attitude or “culture” amongst the whole team has long been identified as motivational to effecting change (Rider, 2001; Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; OFSTED, 2005). In the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2), some pre-school staff felt that, although they were enthusiastic to implement adaptations to their practice and learning environment (in light of attending recent SEN training), their managers were sometimes a little hesitant or reluctant.

Several SENCOs expressed a view that they wanted managers to give more priority and status to inclusion and SEN issues (SENCOs, Districts R and W, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4). One SENCO felt that LA training sometimes needed to target the pre-school managers, so that they would have a better understanding of the issues that practitioners faced on a daily basis;

“We’d like senior team members to attend training ...they (*the LA*) need to consider building up the knowledge and expertise of pre-school leaders” (SENCO, District W, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4).

As advocated by Wolfendale (2000), the ethos of those in a managerial role can be extremely influential when transferring inclusive policy into practice. The concept of “management” in the pre-school field (as in Foster, 2007) varies tremendously from setting to setting. For example in the LA of this study (Face-to-Face Survey: Appendix 2, in some settings there was one self-employed (self-appointed) “manager” that perhaps started the village pre-school years ago (SENCO, District S); whereas larger daycare settings tended to appoint a “manager”, yet realistically these people were then managed by an “owner” who made decisions for several daycare settings in his/her possession (SENCO, District R and Interviewee C).

Alternatively, there were several settings that had a “management committee” (Interviewees J & N) made up of local parents and representatives from the community. As Foster (2007) noted, though frequently charged with making influential decisions about the running of the setting, such “management committees” were often made up of volunteers, “recruited with little idea of what their role should be” (Foster, 2007, p.11).

They were not necessarily involved on a daily basis with the pre-school practice and sometimes, especially when parents had their own children in the setting, there were potentially conflicting interests when decisions were being made about provision (Interviewee J).

In this research, where pre-school managers (including owners or committees) led by example in their positive attitudes to inclusion and valued SEN training opportunities for all staff, settings seemed more pro-active and engaged in their inclusive practices. For example, one interviewee described inclusion as having to “come from the top, in our case from the management committee”, explaining that;

“Sometimes we’ve had to really think about the way we do things. This may be because it is causing problems for one particular child, although its fine for all the others. You need to find ways so that every child blends in, even if that means every member of staff having the willingness to try out new things, change their approach and sometimes change how we’ve always done things previously” (Interviewee N).

As mentioned in Chapter 5, if a pre-school SENCo left, they sometimes took the SEN information away with them! Due to frequent staff changes in some pre-schools as in previous findings (DFES, 2003a; Eborall, 2003; Foster, 2007), the face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) revealed that regular information up-dates were felt to be essential; to retain the expertise and knowledge within a setting;

“There need to be targeted opportunities to disseminate information from SEN courses, for instance at staff meetings and INSET training times” (SENCo, District N&B).

All of the pre-school providers from the interview sample had sent at least one member of staff to a minimum of 2 days SEN training each year, usually their identified SENCo. However, when two or more representatives had been able to attend training simultaneously, pre-schools felt that this was much more beneficial. As one SENCo pointed out;

“When several staff from our setting have attended training together its then much easier to implement a consistent approach, for instance with behaviour” (Interviewee L).

As described by another SENCo, in order to effect change and develop inclusive practice, it would seem that;

“The manager has to want to do it and the full staff need to be supportive” (Interviewee A).

Earlier in this chapter, when considering health and safety, some settings seemed more hesitant to support inclusion, particularly when struggling with behavioural issues. Staff attitudes and levels of tolerance varied, particularly when a child’s behaviour appeared to impact upon others in the setting.

Throughout this study, as in the findings of OFSTED (2005) and several researchers (Croll & Moses, 2000, Connor, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005), behavioural difficulties were frequently identified as the most demanding special educational needs to accommodate within pre-school settings and posed the most challenges for effective inclusive practice. There was recognition that staff within a setting did not always adopt consistent approaches with children, nor did they share the same values and beliefs. There were also questions raised as to how to manage the reactions and comments of other parents in relation to a child with special needs, particularly if the child had noticeable behavioural difficulties (Interviewee C).

Many SENCos and managers identified behaviour management as an essential shared training requirement for their staff, in that;

“behaviour courses can help all staff to work together in the same way which means that all children have continuity, so children with behaviour problems are dealt with by all staff in the same way, which means the children know where they stand” (District N).

As in Finch (1999) and Webster-Stratton (1999) several practitioners felt that they had benefited from training; to recognise the importance of early preventative measures in relation to factors which influence children’s behaviour, and to develop consistent strategies.

Behaviour management training was felt by one SENCo to give “a greater insight into how to communicate effectively with a child”, and how to look at “positives, rather than negativesrecording progress and not expecting instant change” (SENCo, District W, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4).

In interviews, all interviewees felt that children with obvious behavioural difficulties posed several health and safety risks to both staff and children and were much more difficult to include than those with “other types of SEN” (Interviewee A), where “other types of SEN” were described in this instance as “children needing speech therapy” (Interviewee A). Interviewees also felt that parental attitudes to “inclusion” were less favourable towards children whom they felt were “disruptive”, “dangerous”, or “a bad influence” on their peers;

“Behaviour difficulties are unpredictable, the child becomes unpredictable ... the staff are on edge waiting for what the child is going to do next. It is all about getting a sense for how the child is feeling that day.

Everyone emits something that tells you what sort of mood they’re in. So at the beginning of the day we’re worrying - have they had a good night, have they slept well, what’s gone on at home before they came in, what sort of a day therefore are we going to have?” (Interviewee A)

This research found that whole-staff training opportunities seemed to reduce anxieties surrounding behaviour and helped to develop consistent strategies and approaches. Many of the training ideas were initiated by the Area SENCos delivering the training, but then adapted in response to the experiences and suggestions of practitioners in each setting. For instance, practitioners were encouraged to observe children (and each other) in their settings to identify possible factors which might “trigger” certain behaviours amongst children. Some strategies were then suggested by the Area SENCos (for example, introducing picture symbols to display behaviour “rules” and activity “choices”), but further ideas were also generated amongst the pre-school staff;

“It helped that we were all there. We did observations and identified the behaviours together. That really helped us think - this is a problem, but this is how we could manage it” (Interviewee J).

The “rules” and “activities” may not be exactly the same in every setting, but should be consistent within (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Olsen & Cooper, 2001). For example, whereas some settings had large spatial areas to “control and manage” (SENCo, District R), Interviewee J described coping within one small room;

“In a perfect world we would have a bigger place. In our particular building it’s not been easy to create specific areas and that is why we have created pathways. Children have to go through the back door to the other side of the room to get their coats, as the garden is at the back. Initially they just walked straight through the room straight through the middle of other activities that were taking place, so sticky footprints were put on the ground and that marks the pathway to use” (Interviewee J).

As in the findings of several writers (Halliday, 1989; Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Frederickson & Cline, 2002), sharing behaviour management ideas and training with parents was felt to be extremely important by two of the interviewees (Interviewee N & J). It was believed that collaborative working with staff **and parents**, helped to develop “consistent approaches” and “shared ownership” of behaviour management policies (Interviewee N). Interviewee N felt that;

“the best combination is when staff have the focused guidance provided by LA services, plus the mutual parent support - all sharing expertise, ideas and concerns” (Interviewee N).

The face-to-face survey (Appendix 2) identified “working with parents” as a training priority for many settings, together with “how to approach parents” and “dealing with parents when raising concerns”. Advice was also sought as to how to talk to “other parents” who had perhaps made complaints about the children with SEN (Interviewee J).

At interviews it was noted that sharing sensitive, possibly upsetting information with parents was very difficult, especially when in a small village playgroup with a “committee” including local parents;

“Sometimes staff say what they think parents want to hear. We might want to tell a parent that we have concerns about their child, but it’s tricky when we see those parents every day. We all live together in a close community and often know people as friends outside of pre-school”
(Interviewee J)

Another SENCo felt that personal experience as a parent of a child with SEN, had helped her to “empathise” and had steered her views about inclusion (Interviewee M). She felt that it was important to keep communicating with parents, but also to recognise that;

“We don’t always have the answers. We need to know how to advise parents of routes to take concerning their child – sign-posting them to other agencies if appropriate” (Interviewee M)

As outlined in Chapters Two and Four, collaboration with parents is an essential component of inclusive pre-school practice, as it is the joined up approach and mutual recognition of “expertise” that takes ideas forward and improves outcomes for children (Wolfendale, 2000; EECI, 2005).

In Summary

What is clear from the findings of this research is that inclusion is not necessarily achieved by just putting children into mainstream provisions (Tutt, 2002). Moreover, to realise the SureStart (DFES, 2003a) vision, “inclusion” is about the response and “can-do” attitude of everyone involved (Rider, 2001; Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; OFSTED, 2005). Should it be therefore, that SEN training is designed to concentrate upon the development of a shared inclusive ethos and culture within any childcare environment; which then becomes clearly evident in their everyday practice?

The findings of this study would seem to reveal that whole-staff training and commitment are essential to developing inclusive practice and achieving consistent outcomes, especially with behavioural issues. As expressed by Interviewee N, though it is helpful to be prompted and guided by an external facilitator (an Area SENCo), it is the ideas which are then generated and shared by practitioners at the “heart” of everyday delivery, which are particularly likely to be relevant, understood, valued and taken on board.

Though whole-staff training is the “ideal”, pragmatically due to staffing, time and funding restraints (as described in Chapter Five), the best many can achieve is a cascaded model. However, as this research shows, many settings have developed creative ways in which individual staff members can cascade their training ideas to others.

As Wolfendale (2000) advocates, those with “management” responsibilities should lead the way in demonstrating inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices, using a “top down” approach to prioritise SEN issues. Generally, **how** information is communicated to others would seem a vital component for consideration and this is an ongoing thread throughout this research. However, as discussed in this chapter that does not mean that it is the sole responsibility of a manager to attend training and disseminate information as a “lone voice” with the “power” to interpret and translate policy in a singular fashion (Wolfendale, 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Ball, 2008).

Although there were examples of innovative training plans and ideas to develop SEN knowledge and inclusion within some settings, the research findings also revealed an apparent lack of clarity in some cases, as to what settings were “required to do” (EYDCP, 2003d), how they might achieve it and who would be responsible. As in Foster (2007) and Ball (2008) the legislative framework governing children’s educational experiences (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001) has led to a degree of “fear” amongst childcare providers. A carefully planned training programme, geared specifically to the needs of pre-school providers, could help to allay those fears, increase their confidence and build upon existing strengths and enthusiasm to support pre-school inclusion.

This study has identified some potential “barriers” to accessing training (chapters five and six), and there is an acknowledgement that implementing change is not always easy. However, several managers and SENCos were able to give examples where they had found solutions, or ways around problems;

“We are all busy, but when we all know its worthwhile, we try to make time – even if its an hour all together - to pass on what we’ve learnt”
(Interviewee L).

Chapter Seven now pulls together the threads and themes that have emerged from the research findings (chapters four, five and six) and attempts to build a potential model for effective pre-school inclusion.

CHAPTER SEVEN: A Model for Effective Pre-school Inclusion

Introduction

This chapter brings together the themes and issues that have emerged from research findings for this thesis and presents a potential model that encapsulates the key elements for the promotion of more effective pre-school inclusion. The model reflects important considerations of how policy is developed into practice, as in the work of Ball (1990 & 1994). The complete research model is presented here for consideration (Fig. 7.1, p.187) and each contributing element to the model is then examined in turn. The model is directly constructed out of the case study research findings outlined in earlier chapters.

This research has found three constant themes emerging from inclusion policy, each of which has influenced the model construction and been of particular relevance for the parents and pre-school practitioners of this case study; “collaboration” with families, “early identification”, and “early intervention”. These themes have also been consistently identified through policy analysis processes (CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; CRS, 2003; DFES, 2003 a & b; DFES, 2004; EECI, 2005; LA sources, Appendix 9). How such key elements of policy contribute and translate (or not) into inclusive practice, are outlined in the research model and explored thematically during this chapter.

In the search for effective pre-school inclusion, the research model also examines how values, attitudes and interpretations influence policy through to practice (Ball, 2008). Constructed around an “ideal” model of inclusive pre-school practice, as conceptualised through the research findings of this study, four essential ingredients are proposed and integrated; “Communication, Commitment, Clarity and Consistency”, referred to in the model as the “4 Cs” (see Fig. 7.1, p.187). As will be discussed later in this chapter, it appears vital to consider the response and involvement of everyone in and around the pre-school setting; *communicating* and sharing essential information and ideas, developing a positive ethos and *commitment* towards inclusion, working collaboratively to develop *clear* and *consistent* policy and practice.

Situated within an interpretive paradigm (Robson, 1993), this study has provided a unique opportunity for an “insider” to explore wider interpretations of inclusion (and inclusion policies), and to describe some of the challenges and practical realities experienced by parents and pre-school providers in one LA (Finch, 1986; Ball, 1990; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003). Using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Powney & Watts, 1987; Bell, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993), the research model for this thesis has drawn upon data from a range of sources, including documentary analysis, questionnaires and interviews.

As a form of “triangulation” (Bryman, 1988; Brannen, 1992; Burgess, 1993; May, 1993; Silverman, 2001), the mixed methods have mainly been employed to engage with the views of both parents of children with SEN and practitioners within the pre-school arena. As outlined in Chapter Two, these respondents were felt to be “key stakeholders” (Frederickson & Cline, 2002): with first-hand viewpoints, experiences and interpretations that were essential to this enquiry. The collated data gave an insight into some of the benefits and challenges faced on a daily basis (Yin, 1994).

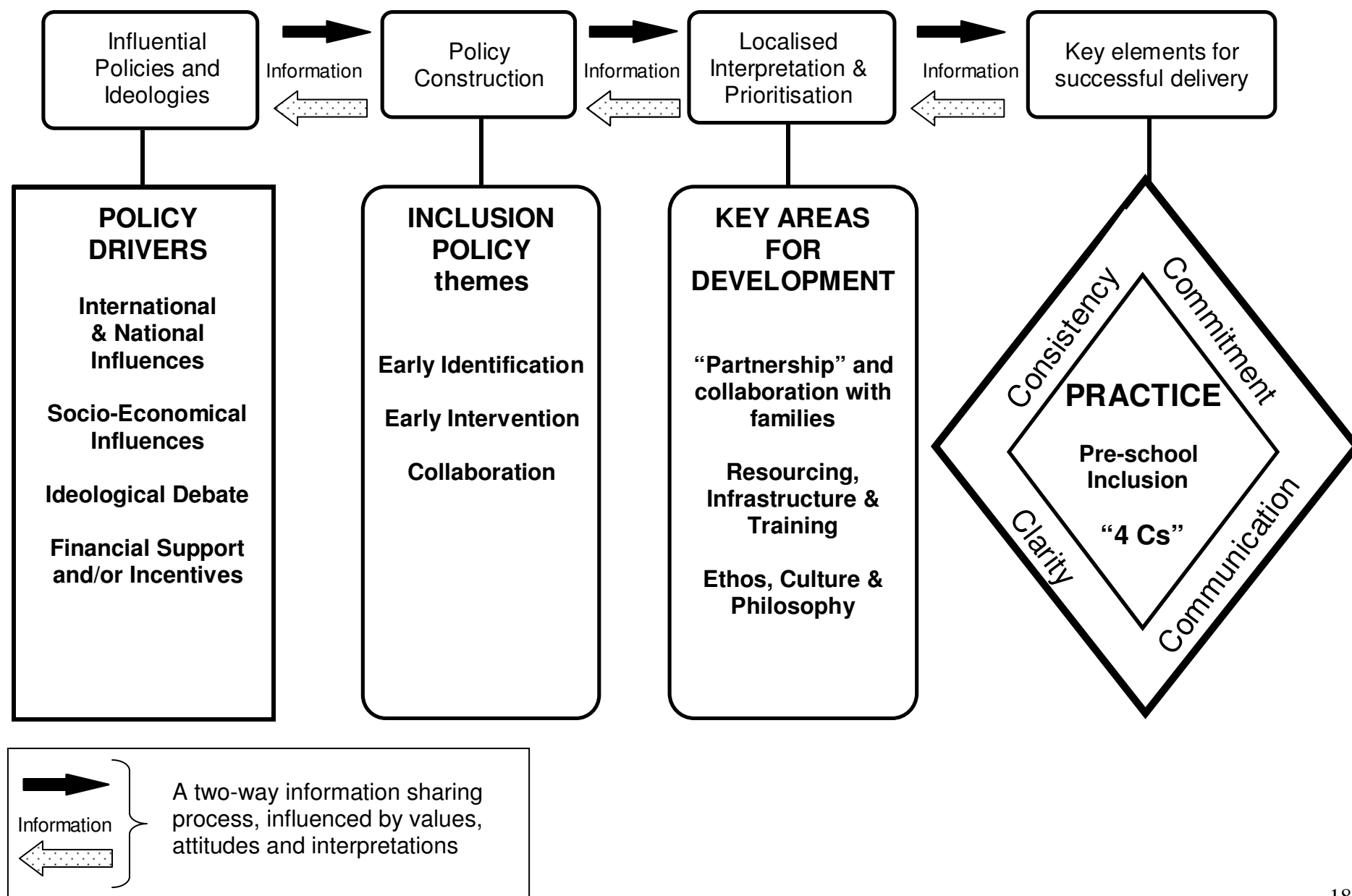
Chapter Three debated some of the issues surrounding carrying out research within one’s own locality or organisation (Powney & Watts, 1987; Burgess, 1993; Hammersley, 1993; Lee, 1993; May, 1993; Watt, 1995; BERA, 2004). As an “insider” carrying out this research (Finch, 1986; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003), it is hoped that the following model (Fig. 7.1. p.187) will help to illustrate some of the real concerns, experiences and ideas surrounding pre-school inclusion; which could be mutually beneficial to pre-school providers in the UK, as well as the LAs and Area SENCos who are tasked with planning and delivering their training. Ultimately, this model of pre-school inclusion attempts to pull together the essential elements that practitioners need in order to facilitate “early identification”, “early intervention” and “collaborative working” (DFES, 2003 a, b & c), with each other and with parents.

LAs across the UK have been urged to promote inclusion in all educational and childcare settings (DRC, 2001; CSIE, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2003b; DFES, 2004), with strategic planning and local initiatives to guide, support and improve inclusive practice in early years settings (Appendix 9). Networks of Area SENCos have been established and SureStart's aim was to improve and develop 'the confidence and capability of frontline services' (DFES, 2003c, p.24). The research model (Fig. 7.1, p.187) examines "localised interpretation and prioritisation" of such policy initiatives, as experienced by the LA of this study.

Previous research (Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004) found that successful inclusion depends upon the capacity of pre-school providers to meet needs; for instance in terms of recognising family and community requirements, providing an appropriate learning environment, staffing and training (see Chapter Two). One of the main aims of this thesis was to investigate such training needs for "frontline services" and their personnel (DFES, 2003c, p.24), in this case the pre-school practitioners working in a range of early years settings across one LA. Following an examination of these training needs, as perceived by practitioners, the model then proposes some "key elements for successful delivery" (Fig.7.1, p. 187).

The research model for this thesis, 'A Model for Effective Pre-School Inclusion', is displayed here (Fig.7.1, p. 187). Captured within the model is the potential journey from policy through to practice (as in Ball, 1990 & 1994), structured in a way that seeks to illustrate the influential factors along the route.

Fig.7.1. A Model for Effective Pre-School Inclusion



Constructing the Research Model: Policy into Practice

Within social research, it has long been felt that models can help to bring together and illustrate key findings. The creation of a model can involve combining and refining research findings, which may be both contrasting and inter-relating; from a range of data sources, as well as via theoretical analysis (Bowling, 2002; Cohen *et al.*, 2000). The model presented here seeks to create a visual diagram of “effective pre-school inclusion”, with contributing elements which may (or may not) lead practitioners from “policy” into successful delivery of “practice”.

There now follows an examination of the driving factors that have contributed to the research model as a whole. These outline the various influences upon pre-school inclusion, from policy to practice, that have been key in shaping the model.

Influential Policies and Ideologies

As discussed in Chapter Two, “inclusion” has been at the forefront of many policy initiatives for early years and childcare providers. Encompassing the ideological imperatives to promote early intervention, identification and collaborative working, many policies have been designed to promote good quality childcare, which is affordable and accessible to all families. (CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; CRS, 2003; DFES, 2003 a & b; DFES, 2004; EECI, 2005; LA sources, Appendix 9). There has also been an underlying political agenda encouraging parents to return to work, with a range of government grants and funded initiatives being offered to endorse early years provision across all socio-economical regions of the UK (DETR, 2000; CSIE, 2002; DFES, 2003; LA sources, Appendix 9).

In the earlier stages of this research when seeking parental views (questionnaire, Appendix 3), work and study commitments were indicated as amongst the “very important” or “important” considerations for many of the parents considering childcare options (Chapter Four). Similar to the findings of research literature (Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Day Care Trust, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004), this study found that childcare and sustainable work opportunities were often more challenging for families of children with SEN, and were sometimes dependent upon where families lived.

Although whole-day funded childcare provision in LA settings was growing during 2003 to 2005, this was more commonly available to families in urban areas of social deprivation (DETR, 2000), rather than in the larger rural areas of the county (CIS, 2004).

Acknowledging that balancing childcare and family life with returning to work or college can be difficult for any parent, it would seem to be more so for a parent of a child with SEN. As in the findings of the Day Care Trust (2001), Audit Commission (2003) and OFSTED (2005), several parents of children with SEN in County W, stated that they were not returning to work in order to be able to care for their children at home (Chapter Four). Also, as prioritised by several writers (Finch, 1999; Cartwright & Dehaney, 2000; Dowling, 2003; Rider, 2003; Quicke, 2003), parents emphasised the need for their children to be “safe and happy” in “a warm, loving environment” (Parent, District S).

At the time of this study, although maintained nurseries and nursery classes all had qualified teachers, staff in non-maintained settings were mainly working towards NVQ level 2 or 3 (EYDCP, 2003b). It was acknowledged both nationally (DFES, 2003a; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004) and by the LA (EYDCP, 2003b) that early years professional development was a priority, particularly within the non-maintained sector; to raise the level of childcare qualifications, expertise and quality of pre-school provision. In relation to SEN and inclusion, Area SENCos often became the LA’s driving force to effect change amongst pre-school practitioners, through a range of training and development programmes (DFES, 2003a, LA sources, Appendix 9). The extent to which practitioners have accessed, benefitted and been influenced by such training, has been central to this research.

The short-term impact of political and ideological influences upon pre-school provision has seen dramatic increases in LA funding and resources (LA sources, Appendix 9); noticeably increasing the availability of “free” childcare places for all three year olds, but also providing Area SENCos (DFES, 2003a) to help target the professional development needs of practitioners in all early years settings across the county.

As identified by Clough & Nutbrown (2004), the longer term impact upon the “quality” of pre-school provision is more difficult to determine at this stage, as each setting is developing from a different starting point – some with more knowledge and experience than others (see chapters five and six), and further research is needed. However, this study begins to uncover some of the benefits and challenges for practitioners faced with implementing policy into practice.

The Power of Values, Attitudes and Interpretations

As Ball describes (1990 & 1994), this inquiry has found that values and attitudes inevitably influence both the construction and implementation of inclusion policies, with some drivers being more prevalent than others at varying times over recent decades (DES, 1967; DES, 1978; CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a), depending upon the socio-economical climate and the agenda for service “reform” (Ball, 2008). For example, at the time of this study, the government aimed to increase childcare opportunities for all families, enabling more parents to return to work (Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003 a, b & c; DFES, 2004), particularly those in areas of social and economical “deprivation” (DETR, 2000; DWP, 2003).

For policies constructed at the time of this study the values and attitudes of the elected government seemed to promote earlier intervention, identification and inclusion of children with SEN, and collaboration with families (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; DFES, 2003a; DFES, 2003b; DFES, 2004). By setting specific governmental targets and providing additional funding grants as incentives, this also prompted targeted work for LAs to evidence in their own policies; such as aiming to provide one Area SENCo for every twenty non-maintained pre-school settings (DFES 2003a; LA 2003b).

At the implementation stage of inclusion policy, for pre-school providers in one LA, this research found that the values and attitudes of managers and SENCos were extremely influential. On the one hand, there were managers/SENCos that valued SEN training and advocated regular training opportunities for all staff (Interviewees A, J & L). On the other hand, there were also managers/SENCos that did not appear to value such shared opportunities; always attending training individually, then picking out what they believed to be relevant for other colleagues (Interviewee C).

By assigning all SEN training to herself and being selective about what, and how information was passed on to others, this was felt to be an example of how a manager could entrench her own interpretation of inclusive policy into the everyday practice of the setting;

“If it’s not how **I** would do it, I take them to one side and explain how it should be done” (Interviewee C).

The power of policy interpretation would appear to come into play here (Bastiani, 1989; Ball, 1990 & 1994; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991; Stacey, 1991; Fabian, 1996; Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter, 2002; Tutt, 2002), where those with most access to information have the power and ability to interpret policy in their own way. A somewhat unique style of interpretation influenced by personal opinions and preferences (as suggested by Ball, 1990), might involve selection and emphases, omissions and deletions. Ultimately, the resulting policy messages that are being portrayed may not be those intended by the original policy-makers! For example, when the ‘Disability Discrimination Act’ (DRC, 2001) refers to making “reasonable adjustments” so that every child is “included”, this can be translated in a variety of ways. As in Chapter Six, one SENCo might provide “sticky footprints” on the floor so that **every** child has visual cues for where to walk (Interviewee J). Another might “do things differently” for **one** child so that he/she “does not disrupt the others” (Interviewee A). Whereas some tended to “adjust” the environment for everyone in their setting, it appeared that others focused upon “adjustments” for the child with SEN.

Analysis of policy documentation (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980 & 2004; DIIA, 2006), reveals that this view of influential interpretation could conceivably be true at all levels. For instance, as LA policies, strategic and implementation plans are constructed (Appendix 9), the text of *priority messages* seems more likely to appear on an opening page; outlined, enlarged, in bold, in colour, highlighted or bulleted. Ideas perhaps considered of lesser importance or *lower priority* might then be positioned later on in a document, in smaller text, faint print, abbreviated, put as a small footnote, or referenced to elsewhere.

For example, the opening message from the LA's inclusion policy (LA, 2003d) appeared to emphasise "schools" and "achievement";

'Our SEN and Inclusion Policy will impact on the ethos of schools; helping all schools to achieve practices already characteristic of *the County's* best schools' (LA, 2003d, **p.1**).

In the same LA document, but nearer to the back of the publication, there was a more general statement, appearing to group together all settings and services other than schools;

'The LA will work with other agencies and services and with voluntary groups in order to establish coherent policies and practices that support inclusion' (LA, 2003d, **p.10**).

As a researcher reading through this policy text (LA, 2003d), it felt as though this particular inclusion document promoted school achievement as a priority consideration, with non-maintained early years settings (amongst the "other agencies, services and voluntary groups") regarded almost as an after thought.

The research model constructed for this thesis (Fig. 7.1., p.187) seeks to demonstrate the potential impact, variability and vulnerability of policy information-sharing, which can be influenced at different stages; by those who drive policies, by those who construct policies, by those who localise and prioritise policies, by those who communicate the "priorities" of policies to others, and by those who seek to put the key elements of policy into practice. As will now be discussed further, it would seem that values, attitudes and interpretations are vital components throughout the whole process of cascading information from policy into practice.

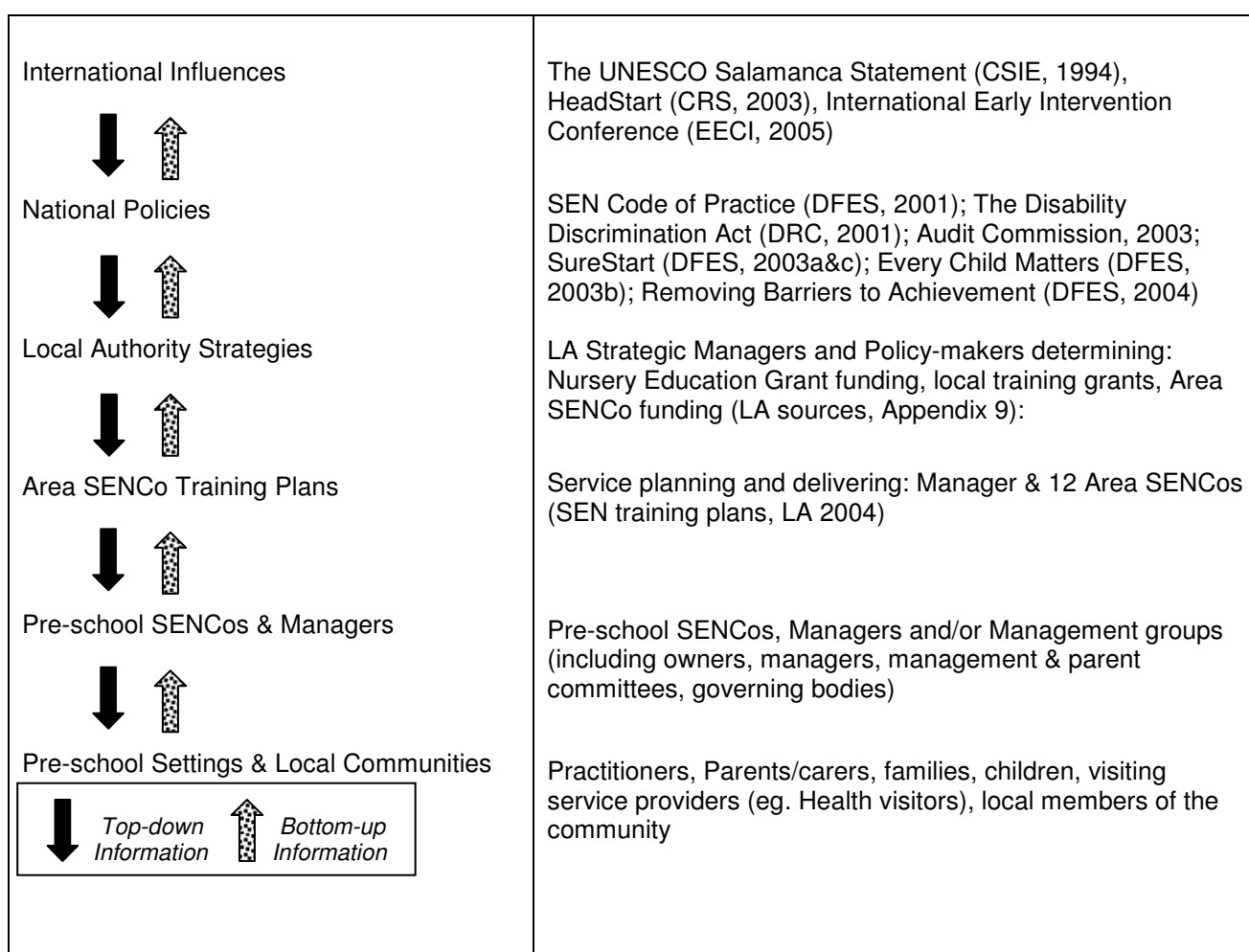
Cascading Information Processes

Ball's suggestion of influential "interests" and "conflicts" (1990, p.3) are worthy of specific consideration. There is an exploration of how attitudes and values can influence and penetrate the portrayal of policy transmission, which is then cascaded and influenced further at all levels; from international influences (CSIE, 1994), right through to everyday practice in pre-school settings and local communities (see Figure 7.2, p.194).

In this study, several managers and SENCos explained how inclusion policy initiatives were cascaded to others within their settings. For example, Interviewee J recognised the importance of sharing policy guidance and "good practice" with all stakeholders, through training opportunities and by sharing information and ideas; including the Area SENCo and other specialist support services, management committee members, pre-school practitioners and parents. To illustrate the setting's ethos and commitment to collaborative working and inclusion, Interviewee J described several SEN courses that staff had attended in order to support pre-school children with a range of SEN (including autism, cerebral palsy, speech and language difficulties, behavioural needs, vision and hearing impairment). She also emphasised that parental involvement was a priority, stating that "the first port of call is always the parents", and stressed the importance of "giving the children status, showing them they've got something to contribute" (Interviewee J). Conversely, other SENCos (Districts S & W, Face-to-face survey, Appendix 2) described situations where information was posted to managers, but then not cascaded to others; remaining un-opened "on a shelf" (Chapter Five).

Not only can attitudes, values and interpretations play a part at every stage of the cascading information progression; but there is also a debate to be had as to whether a two-way mediation process can exist throughout (hence the connecting arrows in Figure 7.2, p.187 and in the research model, see Figure 7.1, p.194).

Figure 7.2. Cascading Information & Two-Way Mediation



As both figures suggest (Figures 7.1, p.187 and 7.2 above), two-way mediation and information sharing, is neither equal nor straightforward. Limitations exist, in that some voices may be more powerful and others less easily heard (Ball, 2008). Policy delivery from more authoritative bodies would tend to have stronger force, especially when government grants are provided to drive specific LA targets and expectations (indicated by bold arrows); whereas opportunities for pre-school practitioners to voice ideas and comments which might then influence future decision-making, would seem limited and more difficult to facilitate (hence, the dotted arrows).

That is not to say that practitioners do not have valuable contributions to make. This research found that Area SENCos are often ideally situated to observe pre-school practice across a range of settings, from varied socio-economic districts. Are the Area SENCos then not best placed to collate valuable ideas, suggestions and concerns surrounding pre-school inclusion; from practitioners who have a wealth of real, everyday experiences? It would appear that much depends upon the communication channels in place and the degree to which decision-makers are receptive to these kinds of approaches (Wolfendale, 2000).

In the LA of this study, although summarised evaluative feedback from Area SENCos was given via audits (CIS, 2001 & 2004) and “Measuring and Monitoring” meetings (attended by “inside” researcher 2002-2008), the data was mainly quantitative. For example, this included recording numbers of pre-school children with SEN at “Early Years Action Plus” (DFES, 2001) and numbers of pre-school practitioners attending SEN courses in each of the five districts. One could speculate that the focus upon quantitative data, rather than qualitative, has been partly due to the governments preoccupation with what “counts” as evidence, quite literally in many instances; with LAs aiming towards “strategic” numerical childcare targets in order to “measure” their progress (see Chapters Four and Five). More qualitative data now needs to be collated and acted upon by the LA, as to the everyday experiences of practitioners seeking to access the training and suggestions for future improvements to aid inclusive practice. It is hoped that this research can be one of the starting points for such an opportunity.

For example, as in Foster (2007), several pre-school practitioners outlined the time, cost, travel and staffing difficulties when trying to attend SEN training as a whole staff, but could also see the many benefits of doing so in order to generate a consistent team approach (Chapters Five and Six). Interviewee J described using their neighbouring school’s “training days” to facilitate consistent dates and times for whole-staff training across a twelve month cycle; an idea that was acceptable to both parents and staff. This suggestion could be adopted by the LA and presented as a county model of good practice.

The extent to which information is diluted or altered during the process of cascading and feeding back (Ball, 1990, 1994 & 2008) has provided interesting debate during this research. There has also been an examination of the differing effects that varied interpretation has had upon practice in a range of pre-school settings within one LA, particularly in relation to “inclusion”.

Differing Interpretations: the effect upon inclusion

This research has found that policy priorities can be significantly influenced or dependent upon the political, social and financial agenda at the time of policy construction and delivery, at both a national and local level. As Ball writes;

‘Policies project images of an ideal society Policies cannot be divorced from interests, from conflict, from domination or from justice’ (Ball, 1990, p.3).

In relation to Ball’s idea of policies seeking to portray the “ideal society”, this links back to the review of literature for this research (Chapter Two), examining the controversies surrounding the notion of “normality” and the search for the “norm” (Goffman, 1968; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Porter, 2000). As Allan suggested, it could be that children with SEN, particularly with associated behavioural difficulties are ‘defined in relation to normality’ (Allan, 1996, p.223). In the case of pre-school inclusion, have policy-makers then targeted specific groups of the population (children with “SEN”), to become more included in the “norm” (mainstream pre-school provision), as suggested by Tutt (2002)? As suggested by Olsen & Cooper (2001), it could be argued that the “norm” is partially socially constructed and reinforced by all those in a child’s environment at home and at pre-school; with frequently observed behaviours that are modelled by adults and peers, ultimately imitated by the child.

Similar to the findings of Goffman (1968), Corbett (1996), Lewis (1995), McNamara (2004) and Avramadis (2005), this study reveals some of the possible detrimental effects of labelling, stereotyping and stigmatising children with SEN.

This was more frequently the case for children with “behavioural problems”, where a range of managers, SENCos, pre-school practitioners and parents had expressed concerns and anxieties surrounding their inclusion (see Chapters Four, Five and Six). As Corbett reflected (1996), at times it is possible that “fear of difference breeds hostility” (Corbett, 1996, p2 & 5).

For pre-school providers in one LA, variability in policy analysis (as in Ball, 1990) would seem to apply; not only to their interpretation of text and terminology within inclusion policies and guidance documents (DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; DFES, 2003a; LA sources, Appendix 9), but also in how they then apply and develop their knowledge and understanding when implementing “inclusive” practice in each setting.

Across the LA, there were several examples of innovative inclusive practice and ideas for sharing staff training and expertise, which could potentially be replicated by other pre-school settings (Chapters Five and Six). These have been drawn upon to shape the “working” research model. Contrasting instances have also been used, as these demonstrate potential difficulties or “barriers” to inclusive practice, for instance when practitioners do not share the same values or commitment towards SEN and inclusion.

During the cascading process, from the macro level of policy, to the micro level of day-to-day practice (as in Ball, 1990 & 1994), pre-school practitioners appear to carry an incredible amount of responsibility; in interpreting policy information, in planning appropriate staff training, and in implementing effective ideas and strategies (Foster, 2007).

This research has revealed varying individual interpretations of “inclusion” and associated terminology surrounding SEN; not only from the findings of this case study (Chapters Four, Five and Six), but from the review of research literature (Goffman, 1968; Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; Hall, 1992; Allan, 1996; Hegarty *et al.*, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Corbett, 1996; Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Porter, 2000; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Hanks, 2003; MacConville, 2003; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Garner, 2004).

However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it appears that current ideological drivers have produced a dominant discourse; that collaboration, early identification and intervention are required to inclusively support the needs of children and families (CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DRC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003; CRS, 2003; DFES, 2003a&b; DFES, 2004). In terms of both national and local policy, and the practice described in this case study (Chapters Four, Five and Six), the central aim would appear to be for the improvement and “reform” of pre-school provision (as in Ball, 2008); increasing the availability and accessibility of childcare, and providing more professional development opportunities for pre-school practitioners via specific training grants (LA sources, Appendix 9)

Amongst the pre-school providers of this research, there were some consistent themes, strengths and concerns that emerged, but often with varying responses to the challenges that “inclusion” poses. When reflecting upon the variability of interpretation and implementation of “inclusive practice”, it feels important to remember that some pre-school practitioners, though often extremely committed to “inclusion”, were sometimes inexperienced or lacking in self-confidence in relation to supporting children with SEN; with a high turnover of staff and many practitioners paid little over the minimum wage (Eborall, 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Frances, 2005; TUC, 2006; Foster, 2007).

As illustrated by the bold and dotted arrows of the research model (Fig. 7.1, p.187) interpretation of information can differ between all levels of involvement, from international and national bodies, through to pre-school practitioners and local communities. As an inside researcher, discrepancies and inconsistencies of understanding were uncovered even amongst those who have commonly identified roles and objectives.

“Collaboration” with parents and families has long been regarded as an essential component of inclusive pre-school practice (Halliday, 1989; Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; EECI, 2005) and the findings of this study revealed a general commitment amongst practitioners to partnership-working. However, as in Russell (in Wolfendale, 1997) and Frederickson and Cline (2002), pre-school providers in this research recognised that working with parents was not always an easy process and interpretations appeared to differ as to what was actually meant by “collaboration”.

During the face-to-face survey of this research (Appendix 2), “working with parents”, “how to approach parents” and “dealing with parents when raising concerns”, were identified as priority training areas for many settings. At interviews it was noted that sharing sensitive, potentially upsetting information with parents was very difficult for staff, especially when working in a small village playgroup and as part of a close-knit community (Interviewee J). Practitioners also wanted ready access to additional external information and expertise in order to “advise” and “sign-post” parents of appropriate routes and support agencies (Interviewee M). There was an acknowledgement that they did not always have “the answers” and did not want to misinform or ill-advise.

Guidance was sometimes sought as to how practitioners might talk to parents other than those of children with SEN; those who had perhaps made complaints or disparaging remarks regarding children with behavioural difficulties. Where children were considered to be “disruptive”, “dangerous”, or “a bad influence” (Interviewee A), pre-school practitioners sometimes felt anxious about how “other people” would react – staff, parents and children. Where SENCos lacked confidence in their collaborative role with parents (and indeed colleagues), they seemed to find it easier to avoid conversations, rather than engage in a challenge. As implied by Corbett (1996) and Foster (2007), practitioners can face difficulties when aiming to turn-around stereotypical ideas and opinions; of managers, staff and “parent committees” (Interviewee L). In these instances of sensitivity and controversy, it seemed as though the main aims for practitioners were to contain and control situations, rather than develop and improve practice. There appeared to be quite a large focus upon *reducing* and *preventing* situations, particularly in relation to health and safety risks associated with behaviour (Chapters Five and Six).

With inclusion policies promoting “school achievement” (LA 2003), perhaps this reinforced the need for schools to compete for academic success and league-table eliteness (Avramidis, 2005). Throughout this research, even at the pre-school phase, there seemed to be some underlying ambitions and tensions amongst the LA, pre-school practitioners and local communities, for children to conform to “normality” and to behave “like everyone else”. Some pre-school settings seemed pressurised to prepare children in readiness for the years ahead, sometimes at a cost to their well-being (Interviewee L).

As in similar findings (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Wearmouth, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005), the majority of concerns and training needs expressed by practitioners were in relation to behaviour. Some managers and SENCos took a proactive stance and prioritised behaviour management training in their settings (Interviewees A, J & N), feeling that whole-staff training opportunities helped to reduce anxieties and enabled them to develop consistent strategies and approaches;

“Sometimes we’ve had to really think about the way we do things....even if that means every member of staff having the willingness to try out new things, change their approach and sometimes change how we’ve always done things previously” (Interviewee N).

At times, where pre-school children presented with challenging behavioural difficulties, which were felt to be outside the realms of “normality”, these children were sometimes stigmatised (as in Tutt, 2002; McNamara, 2004) or regarded as detrimental to the setting’s achievement of “quality” (OFSTED, 2005).

Moreover (as in Foster, 2007), some pre-schools in this study seemed to be greatly influenced and pressurised by voices from schools, management committees and “other parents” (Manager in District R, Face-to-face survey: Appendix 2; Interviewees L&C). Whereas one SENCo acknowledged that children should not be excluded for being “too difficult” (Interviewee C), another asked, “Are we allowed to say that we can’t meet a child’s needs in our setting?” (Manager, District R, Face-to-face survey: Appendix 2)

Whilst Hall (1992) would suggest that inclusion is about sharing the same educational environment, bearing in mind one of the statements that prompted this investigation, it is not sufficient to put every child’s “name on a coat peg” (Head Teacher, anon.) and expect effective inclusion just to happen! In agreement with Tutt (2002), it is acknowledged that children are not all the same, nor should they be treated as such. As the ‘SEN Code of Practice’ advocates, there should be a more “flexible response” to children’s individual needs (DFES, 2001, p.32).

If inclusion policies were less driven by attaching labels to children to secure effective support, perhaps “special” would become “normality” and we could begin to “celebrate difference” (Corbett, 1996, p.65 and 101). In this study, where practitioners adopted a “can-do” attitude (Rider, 2001; Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; OFSTED, 2005) and joined together to share SEN training opportunities, they were then more collectively driven towards achieving successful outcomes for all children and families;

“We are all busy, but when we all know its worthwhile, we try to make time – even if its an hour all together - to pass on what we’ve learnt”
(Interviewee L).

As a collaborative team, by communicating and applying a consistent ethos and approach, inclusive practice is much more achievable. The key elements for successful delivery will now be summarised.

The “4Cs”: Communication, Commitment, Clarity and Consistency

Throughout all aspects of this research, from policy through to practice (Ball, 1990 & 1994), four key elements have emerged as essential to the successful training and delivery of inclusive practice in pre-school settings. These are referred to in the research model as the “4 Cs” (Fig. 7.1. p.187); communication, commitment, clarity and consistency.

As in previous research literature, (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Wolfendale, 2000; Hanks, 2003; MacConville, 2003), this study has found that successful inclusion can be measured partially by the responses of everyone involved, including children, parents, managers, pre-school practitioners and the local community; how people deal with diversity and difference, as well as by being in the same environment. Amongst pre-school staff in any setting, the ethos, culture and philosophy seemed either to promote or reject inclusion policy, depending upon their levels of shared **commitment** and how this was then **communicated**. Whereas some pre-school practitioners focused upon *reducing* and *preventing* “problems”, for others inclusion seemed to be about *increasing* “access”, “engagement” and “options” for every child and their families (as in Porter, 2000, p.11). Where settings valued the input of parents and welcomed collaborative working this was felt to enhance inclusive policy and practice; helping to develop **clear, consistent** approaches (as discussed in Chapter Six) and “shared ownership” (Interviewee J). As described by one practitioner;

“the best combination is when staff have the focused guidance provided by LA services, plus the mutual parent support - all sharing expertise, ideas and concerns” (Interviewee N).

Research has shown that parents of children with special needs can sometimes face a “postcode lottery” in their search for consistently good pre-school provision, dependent upon where they live (Frederickson & Cline 2002; Audit Commission, 2003; OFSTED, 2005). There appeared to be a consensus of opinion amongst many pre-school providers, that although they may not always have the SEN expertise or be able to provide all the answers for parents; **communication, clarity, commitment and consistency** were very important in order to gain parental confidence and trust.

In the case of one family (Parent, District S), where the child's needs were very complex and 34 support agencies were involved (see Chapter Four), it would seem very unlikely that the pre-school placement could have been successfully sustained without the "4Cs" being in place!

When examining the resources and infrastructure of pre-school settings across one county, additional LA support and SEN training courses were generally felt to develop consistent practice and enhance an inclusive ethos and approach. For example, Interviewee D described how an Area SENCo could facilitate whole-staff training; allowing time to observe and think, reflect and problem-solve. As suggested by one SENCo, inclusion is not always easy and perhaps practitioners should concentrate more upon positive outcomes, "recording progress and not expecting instant change" (SENCo, District W, Postal Questionnaire, Appendix 4).

The way in which information is communicated to others would seem to be a significant factor as to how inclusion policy translates into effective pre-school practice. If the tone of communication is one of shared optimism and enthusiasm, rather than anxiety and negativity, this research has shown that practitioners are more likely to engage in a positive ethos, culture and philosophy. As one SENCo commented, inclusion will only work if everyone is working towards the "same goal", "on the same wavelength" and with the same "passion" (Interviewee M).

As Wolfendale (2000) advocates, those with management responsibilities should lead the way in demonstrating inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices, using a "top down" approach to prioritise SEN issues and "normalise" inclusive practice (Corbett, 1996). As with children imitating their role-models (Finch, 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1999; Olsen & Cooper, 2001), it would also seem that by modelling "appropriate" behaviour and attitudes towards SEN and inclusion, a manager can set the "standards" for colleagues to imitate. SENCos then have the responsibility to communicate and promote inclusive ideas and strategies amongst all practitioners, which in turn are shared with children and their families. Generally, how information is communicated to others would seem a vital component for consideration and this has been an ongoing thread throughout this research.

In Summary

Bearing in mind the complexity of the concept of “inclusion”, the study has found that the key aims of inclusion policy at the time of this research (CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a, b & c; DFES, 2004) – “early identification”, “early intervention” and “collaboration”; seemed to be welcomed by both parents and pre-school practitioners. There were examples of innovative training plans and ideas to develop SEN knowledge and inclusion within some settings, yet research findings also revealed an apparent lack of clarity at times; as to what settings were “required to do” (DFES, 2001, DRC, 2001), how they might achieve successful inclusion (DFES, 2003a) and who would be responsible.

Contrasting viewpoints were also revealed in relation to how staff training needs were identified and the practicalities of day-to-day implementation of inclusive practice. Therefore, in the case of pre-school SENCos and Managers, translation of policy into practice would seem to be crucial yet variable (Foster, 2007; Ball, 2008), depending upon their individual and collective interpretations. This research found that opportunities for “whole-staff” training were key to developing effective inclusive practice. Having a shared ethos and a commitment to inclusion, together with good communication channels with all staff and parents (Wolfendale, 2000; MacConville, 2003) would also seem to be vital.

As well as top-down dissemination of inclusion policy information and guidance, from international bodies and the UK government, this research suggests that there is also *potential* for bottom-up feedback, which would give authoritative bodies valuable insight into what constitutes effective pre-school inclusion in practice. Pre-school practitioners should be more able to share ideas and experiences with their Area SENCos, which in turn could influence future policy-making with their LA; similarly an LA should have mutual deliberation with national bodies to agree more localised priorities. Successful two-way mediation from ‘practice to policy’ as well as from ‘policy to practice’ would seem to be quite an idealistic viewpoint at this time. However, it is hoped that by using research data from this study, together with the essential components of the research model (Fig. 7.1. p.187), this could help to formulate future process mechanisms for deliberation and feedback opportunities to become more of a reality.

The compilation of this research model has brought together some of the key issues surrounding “effective pre-school inclusion” and the training needs of pre-school providers in one LA. The scope of this model aims to illustrate the potential pathway from “policy through to practice” (Ball, 1990 & 1994); beginning by illustrating some of the political and ideological drivers, and ending by highlighting some of the key realities and influences of “successful delivery” for pre-school providers in one LA. Hopefully this case study and research model will provoke further discussions and thoughts amongst policy writers and decision-makers; particularly those engaged in future planning for the professional development opportunities of pre-school practitioners.

Chapter Eight draws some conclusions from the thesis and hopes to leave some lasting thoughts for consideration.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter looks back over the research process as a whole; reflecting upon the research aims and methodological strategies employed, reviewing the literature and reported findings of the study, and ultimately revisiting the initial research questions that prompted this investigation. There is also a re-examination of the emerging themes which helped to formulate the research model for this thesis (Fig. 7.1, p.187).

Though it is difficult to generalise from a small-scale study of this nature (Powney & Watts, 1987; Bryman, 1988; Yin, 1994; Silverman, 2005), it is believed that the research findings and the resulting model (p.187) could help to inform and shape future inclusive policy and practice, within the LA of this study and also further afield (Bassey, 1998). In identifying some key elements for effective inclusive practice, but also in unveiling potential gaps and areas for further investigation, it is hoped that lessons can be learnt and ideas can be replicated by others involved in implementing pre-school inclusion.

Positioning the Research

The study began with an overview, which outlined the rationale and aims of the research. The rationale was driven by several identified factors. Firstly, though inclusion for school-aged children seemed a more common area of investigation (Garner, 2000; Hornby, 2000; Connor, 2001, Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Hanco, 2003), there was an identified need for further research into “pre-school inclusion” (UNESCO, 1994; Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Secondly, motivated by experiences as an “insider” (Finch, 1986; Pring, 2000; Hegarty, 2003) with management responsibilities for Area SENCOs (DFES, 2003a), it seemed timely to measure the impact of service delivery and to investigate some of the significant SEN training implications for practitioners working with children and families in a range of pre-school settings, across varying socio-economic regions of a county. Thirdly, influenced by Ball’s “policy into practice” trajectory (1990 & 1994), it was decided to adopt an interpretive case study approach.

This methodological approach was felt to facilitate an in-depth, “exploratory” and “descriptive” enquiry (Robson, 1993) that would be needed throughout this research; seeking meanings and perceptions surrounding pre-school inclusion, from both the literature and the findings of this study. Therefore, a range of data would be collated; from a macro level of national government policy initiatives, through to a micro level of LA service delivery and implementation of inclusive practice (Layder, 1993; Ball, 1990 & 1994). Collecting data in this way was highly instrumental in the construction of the model (Fig. 7.1, p.187).

The research aims centred around an investigation of “pre-school inclusion” in one LA; analysing key documentation, surveying the experiences and views of parents when considering childcare provision for children with SEN, and exploring the perceived training needs of pre-school practitioners in relation to SEN and inclusion.

The review of literature explored the concepts of pre-school “SEN” and “inclusion”, and how varying descriptors and interpretations have emerged and been debated over time. It was felt important to examine different perceptions, especially if labelling (and possibly stereotyping) children with SEN might influence decisions and actions surrounding inclusion, from policy through to practice (Gross, 1993; Lewis, 1995; Allan, 1996; Corbett, 1996; Ball, 1990, 1994 & 2008). Particularly regarding children with behavioural needs, research literature and case study data uncovered degrees of “exclusionary” practice, which warranted further discussion in light of the inclusion debate (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005).

In the findings of this study, though not necessarily physically removing children from pre-school settings, there were examples of attitudes and responses that were potentially “exclusionary”, communicated through questionnaires and interviews (Chapter Six). Children with behavioural needs were sometimes described as “unpredictable”, “high risk” or “disruptive” (Manager, District R). There were others seemingly trying to counteract such concerns, by highlighting behaviour management training as a valuable whole-staff opportunity, to develop confidence and consistency of approach (Interviewee L).

Moving from a medical model of segregated provision for “handicapped” children in the years leading up to the 1960s and 70s (in Potts, 1983) there was a gradual shift towards “integration” of children with SEN (DES, 1967; DES, 1978). Following on from this was a further move towards fuller “inclusion” of children with SEN within mainstream educational settings (DFE, 1994; DFES, 2001). The last four decades have seen an increasing emphasis upon collaborative working with families and earlier intervention and support for children, in order to “remove barriers to achievement” (DFES, 2004) and to help all children to achieve their full potential (Audit Commission, 2003). These changes in political emphasis have driven forward the work of this study. It seemed essential to discover how much children were actually perceived to be “included” in today’s pre-school arena and what training needs were required in order to achieve inclusion; as identified in one LA’s policy documents, and as viewed by parents and practitioners in pre-school settings. A range of examples were revealed, which still demonstrated varying degrees of “inclusion”, despite the aforementioned change in policy over time.

Some parents and practitioners felt that children were being effectively included in appropriate learning environments (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004), with consistent strategies in place and trained staff. One parent (Chapter Four) described her son’s needs as “severe and complex”, yet still felt that the nursery had gained confidence in “dealing with the multitude of therapists who visit him” and that staff were able to effectively “follow input received from physio’ and medical practitioners” (Parent, District S). Also, as described by one pre-school SENCo in the postal questionnaire (Appendix 4), practitioners often felt more confident to include children with SEN when all members of staff had attended SEN training together, as they were then more “SEN aware, able to identify children, know where to access help, able to plan for their individual needs, able to liaise with parents” (SEnCo, District N).

There were other examples brought to the fore, where it seemed as though children were still just partially “integrated” (as in Warnock, DES, 1978), rather than included effectively in all activities. One parent (Chapter Four) felt that “the standard of care is adequate enough to keep him safe and that’s all” (Parent, District R). Another parent explained that, in order to return to work shifts with varying work patterns, she had felt the need to, “compromise the quality” of her son’s childcare in order to access a “flexible place” in a full day-care setting;

‘The provision is OK, but I know he doesn’t access everything that he could if he went somewhere else’ (Parent, District N)

Probably the most concerning practice described in this study was where children appeared still to be “segregated”, knowingly or unknowingly by the response and prejudices of others (as also described by Tutt, 2002 and McNamara, 2004). Though children with SEN were in the same building as their peers (as in Hall, 1992), their presence did not seem to be readily welcomed due to the nature of their behaviour. As discussed in chapters five and six, there were concerns amongst some managers and SENCOs that certain children were “too difficult”, having a detrimental effect upon the “quality” (Ofsted, 2005) and reputation of the setting amongst staff, management committees (*from the local community*), other parents and receiving schools.

Throughout this research, as concluded in Chapter Seven, degrees of “commitment” to inclusion and “consistency” of strategy and implementation were regarded as essential indicators as to how a pre-school staff team might successfully achieve inclusive practice (research model, Fig. 7.1., p. 187). This study found that pre-school inclusion is very much related to the attitudes and ethos; of managers in settings, SENCOs, other pre-school practitioners, parents, and the local community (Chapter Six). As in the findings of other writers (Stakes & Hornby, 2000; Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; MacConville, 2003; Hanko, 2003), for inclusive practice to work effectively, everyone needs to be involved in the process. This type of “shared journey” and collaborative approach is emphasised in the research model (Fig. 7.1., p.187) with “collaboration” identified as another of the essential components to inclusion.

Several writers have recognised the benefits of coordinated support for families (Hornby, 1996; Wolfendale, 2000; Porter, 2002; Carpenter at EECI, 2005) and the importance of valuing the involvement and rights of parents in decision-making about their children. Again, considering the changing political picture of “partnership” and “collaboration” with parents over recent decades (from Plowden DES, 1977, to SureStart DFES, 2003b), the views of parents was felt to be crucial to this research. It was hoped to reveal the types of considerations that families have to make in relation to where and why their children attend pre-school settings (Chapter Four) and to what extent they were involved in decision-making making and “partnership” working with pre-school settings, as perceived also by practitioners (Chapters Five and Six). Did parents sometimes feel “undervalued” as in previous research findings (Newell & Potts, 1984; Wolfendale, 1993a; Au & Pumfrey, 1993) or excluded from making decisions about their children (Sumner, 1990)? Were they regarded as “adversaries” (Hornby 1996, p.4)? Alternatively, were they involved, valued and treated as important members of the team; all sharing information, expertise and advice (Halliday, 1989; Hornby, 1996; Wolfendale, 2000; Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Carpenter at EECI, 2005)?

Findings for this study revealed that parents wanted to be valued and listened to as they often felt that they knew their children best (as in Wolfendale, 2000), but also parents hoped that practitioners would welcome their involvement in developing practice within settings (Chapter Four). The majority of pre-school SENCos and managers recognised that working in “partnership” with parents was important (Chapters Five and Six). However, they also commented that this was not always easy, particularly when discussing “sensitive” information or having to acknowledge when they “don’t always have the answers”. Many practitioners wanted additional training and advice in order to improve these skills further (Chapter Six).

Guided by visiting professionals from health and education support services, this study found that some parents had already carried out specific learning and physical activity programmes (for example, guided by a physiotherapist) to help their child at home prior to attending pre-school; with one parent hoping these would then be continued in the pre-school environment (Parent, District S). In this instance, the parent felt that this process had been successful in the setting.

As described in earlier research literature (Chapter Two), parents in this study wanted to be involved as a “valued part of the team” with pre-school practitioners, having already had a significant early role in supporting the needs of their children from birth (Halliday, 1989; Mansfield, 1995; Sonuga-Barke *et al.*, 1995; Wolfendale, 2000; Porter *et al.*, 2002, EECI, 2005).

Early years education and childcare has become a focus for the government at the time of this study (DFES, 2003b & 2004); striving to encourage parents to return to work, aiming to provide accessible and affordable childcare, and raising the overall quality of pre-school provision. At the start of this research, international and national initiatives were also prioritising “inclusion” (CSIE, 1994; DFES, 2001; DFES, 2003a). Whole rafts of funded training programmes were set in place in LAs across the UK (Appendix 9) to increase childcare opportunities and to develop inclusive policy and practice in pre-school settings (DFES 2003a).

Several researchers identified training needs and gaps in professional development (Janko & Porter, 1996; Tomko, 1996; Garner, 2000 a&b; Odom *et al.*, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). It was apparent that this study would need to investigate such identified training needs in one LA and many “gaps” were uncovered as perceived by the practitioners themselves (Chapter Five and Six); particularly in relation to behaviour management, assessing “risks” in the varied learning environments, talking to parents, and keeping up-to-date with policy initiatives (in a “user-friendly” way that practitioners can relate to).

In County W, as in other findings (Eborall, 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Frances, 2005; Toynbee, 2005; TUC, 2006; Foster, 2007), the study identified varying levels of expertise and experience of many practitioners working in early years. With a high staff turn-over, reflecting the national average at the time of between 13% and 16% (Eborall, 2003), managers of pre-school settings across the county were concerned about recruitment and low rates of pay (Chapter Six).

At the time of this study, the face-to-face survey with practitioners (Appendix 2) revealed that 15% of pre-school SENCOs were newly appointed, with little or no previous experience of working with children with SEN. This highlighted the need for a continuous roll-out of staff training on an annual basis, particularly involving new pre-school SENCOs, to ensure that SEN awareness was maintained in every setting (DFES, 2003a).

Chapter Three provided an explanation of the methodology. An interpretive case study approach was chosen (Cohen *et al.*, 2000), with the underpinning idea of an “insider” carrying out the research within one LA. Ethical considerations were felt to be vital within this research, particularly in relation to avoiding bias and maintaining confidentiality (Lee, 1993; Watt, 1995; Pring, 2000; BERA, 2004), when providing information about the context of the study and the participants involved. There was an analysis of policy documentation surrounding SEN and inclusion, and the opinions and experiences of key-stakeholders were sought (Wolfendale, 1997 & 2000, Frederickson & Cline, 2002; Porter *et al.*, 2002; Carpenter at EECI, 2005); parents of pre-school children with identified SEN and pre-school practitioners across a range of settings. Parent’s views were essential in this study, as the “first educators” of the children (Wolfendale, 2000). Pre-school practitioners perceptions were also needed, as the ones with first-hand experiences (or not) of “inclusion” in practice (DFES, 2003a).

Mixed methods were employed; documentary analysis, postal questionnaires with parents and practitioners, face-to-face surveys with practitioners, and semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of pre-school SENCOs and managers from one of the five LA districts surveyed. These methods were illustrated chronologically in Chapter Three (p. 82).

As a form of “triangulation” (Bell, 1993; Burgess, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; May, 1993; Robson, 1993; Silverman, 2001), this collation of both quantitative and qualitative data was felt to enhance the reliability and validity of case study findings (Yin, 1994; Silverman, 2005). Questionnaires were used to survey wider issues across the LA (mainly quantitative in design) and interviews were then undertaken to explore the research questions in greater depth, particularly to add “colour” and qualitative, descriptive detail to the responses given in earlier questionnaires (Finch, 1986).

To build an overall picture of findings, the research data was reported and analysed thematically. These themes then helped to formulate the construction of the research model (Fig. 7.1, p.187); “Influential Policies and Ideologies”, “Policy Construction”, “Localised Interpretation and Prioritisation” and “Key Elements for Successful Delivery”, and the value of using such a model to illustrate the potential transition from policy into practice was discussed (Chapter Seven).

Chapter Seven drew together the key themes that had emerged from research findings and constructed a proposed model for “effective pre-school inclusion”, from policy into practice (as in Ball, 1990 & 1994). There will now be a re-examination of the initial research questions in relation to the eventual findings of the study.

Research questions re-visited

Returning to the original research questions for this case study (Chapter One, p.14), it is now time to determine to what extent these questions have been answered and which areas may need further investigation. The first question sought to discover how, if at all, children, parents and pre-school providers were benefitting from “early intervention” and support from the LA and Area SENCos. In relation to this, many of the reported findings indicate the range of views and experiences of parents and pre-school providers, with several tentative conclusions about children then drawn from emerging themes. For example, parents commented on their children feeling “happy” in their pre-school setting, or that they “enjoy going there” (Chapter Four).

However, although the research recorded some statistical data (Appendices 8 and 8a) relating to numbers of children with high levels of SEN attending settings across the LA, with broad descriptions of their specific needs (DFES, 2001) there is not an analysis of **how children perceive** that they are benefitting (or not) from their experiences in pre-school provision. Various studies have looked at child participation and involvement in research (Lewis, 1995; Rider, 2003) and this could be a future area to consider.

The second question asked which aspects of pre-school SEN and inclusion training opportunities could be improved or developed further. This was a main focus of the research and as such, the reported findings of Chapters Five and Six revealed many ideas and areas for discussion. Some of the suggestions, opinions, challenges and “barriers” that were identified by practitioners now need to be taken forward so that the next steps towards “improvement” and “development” can be debated with the LA policy-makers.

The final question asked how practitioners could become empowered to be more inclusive; self-evaluating their individual training needs within their own unique set of circumstances. During this study, particularly during face-to-face surveys and interviews (Appendices 2 and 5) it felt as though many of the managers and SENCos were already beginning to reflect, evaluate and question inclusive practice within their own settings; perhaps prompted by the research questions to consider their own training needs and the wider training needs of their staff.

Although this proved to be quite a detailed piece of research in its own right, it has provoked thoughts about future monitoring and analysis processes, with strategies to gather information from practitioners. As the research model of this thesis identifies (Fig. 7.1., p.187), in order to improve LA service delivery, there should be a more direct response to the suggestions and needs identified by the pre-school providers. Mutual collaborative working is just as much about the LA receiving and responding to information **from** practitioners, as it is about the LA delivering key policy messages **to** practitioners.

Final Conclusions: The Significance of This Case Study

By examining the views of both parents and providers, this study has begun to offer an insight into different perceptions of pre-school inclusion and training needs for practitioners within one LA. The research findings will hopefully form a platform for further investigation. As a service manager supporting pre-school inclusion, there is an exciting opportunity now to consider what measures might be taken in terms of improved early intervention and collaborative working at a local level.

This thesis aimed to capture the experiences and views of real people involved in “pre-school inclusion” on a daily basis; in a range of settings across both urban and rural districts, and from differing socio-economic backgrounds. In doing so, parents revealed many of their childcare considerations (Chapter Four), some of which related to accessibility and affordability (DFES, 2003b), but many described their priority for children to be safe and happy, with experienced and trained staff.

The implications from these findings are that perhaps less consideration needs to be made in relation to “labelling” children (Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Tutt, 2002; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; McNamara, 2004; Avramidis, 2005) and more consideration given to supporting the safety and “well-being” of each child, looking more holistically at provision (Rider, 2003; Maynard & Thomas, 2004) in an appropriate learning environment (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004). Training is underway across the LA to address this issue, for example helping practitioners to create an inclusive “communication friendly environment” for all children, including those with SEN (DCSF, 2008; Area SENCo Development Plan, LA 2008).

The practitioners of this study revealed some interesting concepts of “inclusion”, demonstrating varying degrees of confidence, experience, expertise and engagement. Differing models of pre-school inclusion (as described in Chapter Two) were seemingly “enacted” in practice (Ball, at BERA, 2007).

There were pre-schools that were keen to develop effective inclusive practice and found creative ways to involve parents and to facilitate “whole-staff” training opportunities so that everyone felt actively involved.

As in previous research (Garner, 2000 a & b; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004), this study also found examples of providers who “lacked readiness” to include children with SEN (Garner, 2000a, p.111), but for a range of reasons – not necessarily “unwillingness”, such as building restraints, young inexperienced staff and high rates of staff turn-over (as also in Foster, 2007). Chapter Six revealed practitioners whose anxieties related to legislative directives (DRC, 2001) and others who were pre-occupied with health and safety or behavioural needs that affected the reputation, smooth running and “quality” of their provision (as in Croll & Moses, 2000; Connor, 2001; Smithers & Curtis, 2002; Curtis, 2004; Garner, 2004; Avramidis, 2005).

As identified by previous writers (Eborall 2003; Pinnell, 2003; Frances, 2005; TUC, 2006; Foster, 2007), staff turn-over in the LA was quite high in many pre-school settings. Some SENCOs were new to their role and lacked experience and confidence, highlighting the importance of continued SEN training and awareness-raising by the LA on an annual basis.

Other Managers and SENCOs, though more experienced, were perhaps a little set in their ways and determined to do things “their way”; attending training individually and not necessarily cascading information to others, resulting in misinterpretation or misrepresentation of how “inclusive practice” can be achieved (Chapters Five and Six). As discussed in Chapter 7, the power of policy interpretation cannot be underestimated; when one person takes on sole responsibility for selection, emphases, omissions and deletions of information (Ball, 1990). Also, as in Ball (2008), at times pre-school providers could feel as if there is a “policy overload” (p.2) or an “epidemic” (p.39), with an increasing number of early years policies and practitioners feeling bombarded with too many rapidly changing initiatives. The LA and Area SENCOs of this case study now need to support practitioners through these changes, assisting them to pick out, simplify and prioritise the essential pieces of information that they need to implement.

This research found that effective inclusive practice was dependent upon the active involvement and engagement of everyone in a pre-school setting, whatever size, nature or socio-economical composition; managers, SENCos, pre-school practitioners and families. Having a shared ethos and a commitment to inclusion, together with good communication channels with all staff and parents were vital to successful inclusion and collaborative working.

The research model constructed for this thesis aimed to illustrate how training opportunities can ensure that inclusive policies are made into “meaningful realities” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004, p.208), for pre-school practitioners. By incorporating the findings of all data sources for this research, Chapter Seven drew together some concluding thoughts and ingredients for “effective pre-school inclusion”.

The research model proposed some “essential” contributing factors to ensure smooth transition from policy into practice, and reinforced the need for “Communication, Commitment, Clarity and Consistency” (Fig.7.1., p.187). It is now time to consider the next steps that could be taken; reflecting upon the findings of this thesis and going back to the work of Ball (1990, 1994 & 2008).

Personal Reflections and Areas for Further Consideration

In examining Ball’s work (1990 & 1994), an attempt was made to track the transitional progression of pre-school inclusion, from policy into practice. More recently, Ball (2008) has reflected upon trends in educational policy over the last two decades and has offered further suggestions as to how key stakeholders can make sense of policy-making processes and implementation strategies. As in Ball (2008), there is a need to re-visit the vast array of government initiatives and policies that have been introduced and look at how they have actually impacted upon educational provision, children and families. This process has started, through the review of literature (Chapter Two) and the early responses as an “insider” to parts of the research data (Chapters Four, Five and Six), leading to some initial changes in strategic implementation of SEN training (for example, Appendix 7).

Bearing in mind the concept of “two-way mediation” (as discussed in Chapter 7), there now needs to be consideration given as to how LA support services see themselves within and feeding into the model. As an “inside” researcher, it is hoped that the research findings can now be fed back in two directions; to key stakeholders (practitioners and parents), and to the LA policy-makers.

This investigation could possibly have been enhanced by interviewing the LA policy-makers, those responsible for constructing the SEN and inclusion guidance documents, as well as the pre-school practitioners charged with implementing inclusive practice. This would have added another dimension to the research. However, the timing was felt to be insensitive due to the rapid changes in organisational structure, roles and responsibilities within the LA amidst the move towards further “integrated working” (DFES, 2004; DCSF, 2008; NFER, 2008). It was therefore decided to postpone this avenue of investigation. As a result of the findings from this thesis, it would now be useful to re-visit this possibility; by asking LA policy-makers (past and present) to reflect upon previous inclusion policy and to critically review current documentation.

The ambitions at the start of this study were to influence and shape ideas for future strategic planning in relation to pre-school inclusion; for those involved in decision-making, as well as for those participating in settings. The research model (Fig. 7.1., p.187) exemplifies the need for two-way mediation and information sharing processes. As an “insider”, this would now seem an ideal opportunity to test this concept.

By feeding back informative data from parents and pre-school practitioners in their local settings, then assisting policy-makers in how they might interpret and use this information effectively, it is hoped that the key findings of this case study will help to inform and improve “early intervention”, “early identification” and “collaboration” for children within the LA and wider afield.

There should be a shared inclusive ethos and culture within any childcare environment; clearly evident in their everyday practice. As Wolfendale (2000) advocates, those with management responsibilities should adopt a “top down” approach to implementing policy; not by dominating or single-mindedly directing practice, but by leading the way in demonstrating inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices, pro-actively prioritising training opportunities and discussing SEN issues with all colleagues and parents.

It is now hoped, not only to revisit more general workforce development initiatives for early years as discussed in Chapter Two (Abbott & Pugh, 1998; Rolfe et al., 2003; Sylva *et al.*, 2004; CWDC in DFES, 2005a; Pugh & Duffey, 2006), but to redress the in-balance of SEN experience and expertise amongst practitioners. This would mean widening the training opportunities for all staff working in pre-schools (DCSF, 2008), not just the managers and SENCos (as already initiated with the Transformation Fund, see Appendix 7). Following on from the research findings of this case study, a training audit has begun to identify individual and group training needs of all practitioners in the LA and it is hoped that the Area SENCos can assist in guiding future training plans and monitoring the continued progress of providers.

And the “coat peg”?

What is clear from the pre-school providers and parents surveyed in this study is that inclusion is not achieved by just putting a child into a mainstream setting (Tutt, 2002) or by simply providing a “coat peg with his name on it”. Moreover, to realise the SureStart (DFES, 2003) vision of inclusion and to translate from “policy into practice” (Ball, 1990 & 1994), it is the awareness, response and attitude of everyone involved. As the model for this thesis suggests (p.187), effective pre-school inclusion requires the “4 Cs”:

‘Communication, Commitment, Clarity and Consistency’

It now feels timely to go back to the reality of the everyday situations with children and families, which prompted the investigation in the first place, to begin to test the robustness of the research model. For example, how might “effective pre-school inclusion” be achieved in different environments?

Can the key elements of the model be applied to a small pack-away playgroup, operating from a shared community hall with just twelve children and two members of staff? Equally, is the model useful to a chain of privately owned day nurseries, with over 100 children and 30 members of staff?

Only by applying the knowledge gained and the lessons learned from research can steps be made towards inclusive practice; hopefully leading to increasingly valuable and enjoyable outcomes for young children, and more successful “worm houses” being built (SENCo, District S)!

Appendix 1: SUMMARISED TIMETABLE OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

DATES & timescales	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>RESEARCH AIMS</u> (with further research questions also highlighted)</p>		
Start of PhD Research Sept 03	<p><u>INITIAL RESEARCH AIM:</u> To investigate pre-school “inclusion” and how, if at all, are children, parents and pre-school providers benefiting from the increased early intervention and training/support from the pre-school SEN team (Area SENCOs)?</p>		
September 2003	<p>What do parents regard as important considerations when choosing childcare provision for children with SEN?</p> <p>Design and pilot of postal questionnaire. For 92 parents/carers of 2-4 year olds with SEN. Across 5 districts of the county, including rural and urban communities, differing social and economic backgrounds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission gained from LEA gate-keepers to carry out research • Draft questionnaire circulated via email for consultation – CIS, LEA, EY & SEN management colleagues in own team, University tutors • Amendments made, eg. addition of logos, jargon explanation, layout, etc. • Piloted with small sample of parents, verbal feedback • Meeting with EY Management and CIS – to agree audit information 	<p>What aspects of pre-school SEN and inclusion training opportunities can be improved or developed further?</p> <p>Design and pilot of training survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission gained from LEA gate-keepers • Survey designed in consultation with team of Area SENCOs responsible for pre-school training • Semi-structured survey agreed, with written prompts and probes • Timetable of visits to pre-schools agreed for half-term (until end of October 03) Survey findings to be recorded in written form on the sheet provided, by each of the visiting pre-school teachers 	<p>Collation and comparative analysis of annual SEN statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school children supported at ‘Early Years Action Plus’ • Children entering reception classes with statements of SEN • Comparative data research (2001-2002 & 2002-2003)

Mid-October 2003	Postal questionnaires distributed. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Quantitative data to pull out key themesQualitative information to provide more detailed illustrations.Questionnaires retaining individuals anonymityColour coded to represent 5 districts.Return, stamped-addressed envelopes enclosed	“Face to face” training surveys to be carried out by end October 03 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Using semi-structured questionnaires12 pre-school teachers from SEN pre-school team visiting pre-school settings across 5 districts of the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Examination of LEA Policy documentation relating to SEN, inclusion and Early YearsAlso continuing to research national /international initiatives in relation to inclusion
December, 2003	Requested date for returned questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none">31 receivedReminder letter send out to all parents (and extension of time limit to end of January 2004)	Data collection of survey feedback Both Quantitative and qualitative data	
January, 2004	Analysis of questionnaire Summary of research findings submitted to CIS audit		
February, 2004	Submission of Paper for CEDAR conference & Presentation preparation		
15 th & 16 th March, 2004	CEDAR 10th International Conference – “Widening Participation: Research, Policy and Practice” Presentation of research findings so far in a paper entitled, ‘Investigating “Inclusion” of Pre-School Children with Special Educational Needs’		
March 2004			Presentation of SEN statistical analysis to Multi-Agency Management and County Pre-School Conference
April 2004		Preparation and piloting of postal training questionnaire to circulate via Early Years Newsletter. <ul style="list-style-type: none">DDA information also givenRespondent details requested in return for prizes offeredMore in-depth quantitative and qualitative data, following findings of earlier survey	
End July 2004		Postal questionnaires collated <ul style="list-style-type: none">26 receivedPotential interviewees? How can practitioners in settings become empowered to be more inclusive; self-evaluating their individual training needs each within their own unique set of circumstances?	Collation of annual SEN statistics (2003-2004)

October 2004		Analysis of postal questionnaire <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collating emerging findings to be followed up in more depth via case studies 	
January 2005		Preparing for Case Study interviews: Semi-structured interviews for interviewees from one district of the county <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample group (covering range of pre-school providers, SENCos and/or Managers) • Considering Ethics -Consulting Early Years and LEA Managers (gate-keepers & budget holders) 	Involved in producing analysis document for LEA: 'KEEP' (Key Elements of Effective Practice' (DFES)
March 2005		Refining aims and research questions for the interviews <u>AIMS</u> To examine the term 'inclusion' and what this means for pre-school providers. To explore in more depth areas identified in a previous 'Pre-school SEN training and professional development survey'. <u>QUESTIONS</u> What do practitioners in pre-school settings consider to be the benefits and challenges of including pre-school children with Special Educational Needs? What aspects of pre-school SEN and inclusion training opportunities can be improved or developed further?	Gathering statistical information relating to childcare provision and children with SEN within the sample district
June 2005		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting interviewees to participate • Piloting and reviewing interview schedule • Finalising Interview Schedule 	
July 2005		Conducting seven semi-structured interviews	

Appendix 2: Face-to-face Survey with Practitioners
PRE-SCHOOL SETTING VISIT

NAME OF SETTING:

NAME OF SENCO IN SETTING:

DATE OF VISIT:

Have you attended any SEN training in the last two years?

Which courses?

Who attended?

What have you done as a result of the training?

Shared with staff?

Produced documents, eg. SEN Policy?

Changed practice, eg. use of cue cards?

What training would be appropriate for SENCO/staff this year?

What SEN issues do you need to address in the setting this year?

Target for next visit

Date of next visit

Signed Pre-school SEN teacher
(Area SENCo)

..... SENCo (for setting)

Appendix 3: Parent Questionnaire

County W Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership & SEN

(county & service logos here)

Pre-school Team

(county & service logos here)

Childcare Audit 2003-2004: Parent/Carer Questionnaire

The SEN pre-school team and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership are reviewing the services that we provide for pre-school children and their families in *County W*. To assist with this, we would like to find out your views, ideas and experiences of childcare and pre-school services in your area. Please take the time to complete this questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided. All information will be treated in confidence and any individuals, pre-schools or childcare services will remain anonymous in all reported findings.

Thank you in advance for your help and we look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

ZOE HARWOOD

SEN Pre-school service leader

Please tick ☒ the relevant box in response to the following questions. (There may be more than one response to each question)

1a) Which of these childcare and/or early education provisions has your child accessed?

LEA Nursery Class/Nursery School ☐

Day Nursery ☐

Private Nursery School ☐

Pre-School/Playgroup ☐

Registered Childminder ☐

Assessment Nursery Unit ☐

Before/After School Club ☐

Holiday Club/Playscheme ☐

Respite Care (day time) ☐

Respite Care (residential) ☐

Relatives/Friends ☐

Nanny ☐

Other (Please specify below) ☐

1b) Would you have preferred any other sort of provision to have been available to your child?

LEA Nursery Class/Nursery School ☐

Day Nursery ☐

Private Nursery School ☐

Pre-School/Playgroup ☐

Registered Childminder ☐

Assessment Nursery Unit ☐

Before/After School Club ☐

Holiday Club/Playscheme ☐

Respite Care (day time) ☐

Respite Care (residential) ☐

Relatives/Friends ☐

Home Childcarer* ☐

Other (Please specify below) ☐

*(A home childcarer is a childminder who is registered to care for children in the child's home rather than the childminder's home. If you would like a leaflet about this scheme, contact Childcare Information Service on xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx).

Any other comments about questions 1a) and 1b) above?

2a) Are you claiming Working Tax Credit? YES ☐ NO ☐

2b) Are you claiming the Childcare element of Working Tax Credit? YES ☐ NO ☐

If you have answered No to 2a) or 2b) above and would like further information on tax credits please contact the Childcare Information Service helpline on (local rate) or by email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

PTO



Appendix 3: Parent Questionnaire

<p>3a) Have you attended any of the following parent/carer groups?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Play and Stay <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Child Development Centre (CDC) Groups <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Parent/Carer & Toddler Group <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">*Early Bird <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>*(Support group for parents of children with autism)</small></p> <p>Any other(please specify):</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<p>3b) Which of these would you have liked to attend, given the opportunity</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Play and Stay <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Child Development Centre (CDC) Groups <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Parent/Carer & Toddler Group <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;">*Early Bird <input style="width: 50px;" type="checkbox"/></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>*(Support group for parents of children with autism)</small></p> <p>Any other(please specify):</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>
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4) When you were looking for childcare, how important to you were the following considerations?
 (These questions are not in any particular order – please tick the relevant box)

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| a. Being near to home? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| b. The availability of transport? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| c. The cost? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Work or study commitments? (This could include wanting to return to work) | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| e. The times of sessions and/or available opening hours? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Recommendations of friends and family? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Fitting in with other family commitments, for example organisation of brothers and sisters? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| h. Confidence in the relevant training and qualifications of childcare staff ? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| i. Accessibility, equipment and furniture appropriate to the needs of your child? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |
| j. Health and medical needs? | Very Important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Quite important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Not that important <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> | Did not really consider this <input style="width: 40px;" type="checkbox"/> |

5) Were there any other considerations that you had to make? (Please give details below)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
 Please return it in the envelope provided.

Appendix 4: Postal Questionnaire for Practitioners

Special Educational Needs & the Disability Discrimination Act 2001 - Things you need to know! "Less Favourable Treatment" and "Reasonable Adjustments"

These duties came into force from September 2002 for schools and early education providers; preventing them by law, from discriminating against disabled pupils, or prospective pupils (and disabled staff/parents/carers).

Every aspect of education is covered, under 3 main headings:

- admissions
- education & associated services
- exclusions

There are two main duties (simplified below) :

- A child must not be treated "less favourably" for a reason relating to their disability
Eg. If a child's admission to school is deferred due to having incontinence difficulties relating to his/her disability - this is both *less favourable treatment* and is likely to be considered *unlawful discrimination*.

- "Reasonable adjustments" must be taken to ensure that a disabled child is not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with those who are not disabled

This might involve considering a number of factors for the disabled child - time, effort, inconvenience, indignity, discomfort, loss of opportunity or diminished progress in comparison with non-disabled peers.

(WHEN CONSIDERING BOTH DUTIES, HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES MUST ALWAYS BE PRIORITISED)

Further practical guidance is available from the Disability Rights Commission (DRC),
tel: 08457 622633 or from the website: www.drc-gb.org (Documents are usually available in alternative formats including Braille, audio cassette, large type and disk). The Pre-School SEN Team and Educational Psychology Service include specific advice in many of the Early Years SEN training courses (*new and repeat courses 2004/5 will be advertised towards the end of the summer term 2004*)

County W Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
& The
(county & service logos here) **Pre-school SEN Team** (county & service logos here)

Pre-School SEN Training & Professional Development Survey

If you are a SENCo or Manager of a pre-school setting, please take the time to complete the questionnaire on the adjacent page. Your views, ideas and experiences will significantly help the SEN pre-school team and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership to review SEN training and professional development opportunities in *County W*. All information will be treated in confidence and any individuals, pre-schools or childcare services will remain anonymous in all reported findings.

If you are willing to be contacted for further information, please indicate a contact telephone number. Also, as a potential reward for your time and an incentive for completion, there will be a **prize draw** - winners contactable by telephone:-



- 1ST PRIZE : A Hand-Made Wooden Spinning Wheel (as demonstrated on speech & language courses)
2ND PRIZE : A set of laminated Board-Maker Symbols (excellent cue cards for classroom use)

Thank you in advance for your help and I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire.

ZOE HARWOOD
SEN Pre-school Service Leader

Appendix 4: Postal Questionnaire for Practitioners

Pre-School SEN Training & Professional Development Survey

Please tick ☐ the relevant box in response to the following questions. (There may be more than one response to each question)

1a) Please indicate whether you are the following:-

SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) ☐ Manager ☐ Other (please specify) ☐

1b) How long has your pre-school setting's SENCO been in post?

Over 12 months ☐ Less than 12 months ☐ Newly appointed ☐ We have no SENCO at the moment ☐

Please add any comments below:-

2a) Which of these childcare provisions best describes your setting?

LEA Nursery Class/Nursery School ☐

Day Nursery ☐

Private Nursery School ☐

Pre-School/Playgroup ☐

Registered Childminder ☐

Assessment Nursery ☐

Other (Please specify) ☐

2b) Which District of *County W* is your pre-school situated in?

District N ☐

District N & B ☐

District R ☐

District W ☐

District S ☐

Other (Please specify) ☐

3 Are you registered to claim the Nursery Education Grant? YES ☐ NO ☐

4a) Have you attended any SEN training courses? YES ☐ NO ☐

Please specify:-

4b) Has a Pre-School SEN teacher visited your setting? YES ☐ NO ☐

4c) Have you identified any children with SEN? YES ☐ NO ☐

5a) How do you tend to find out about SEN training opportunities?

"Small Talk" Magazine ☐

Early Years Training HandBook ☐

From the pre-school SEN team ☐

At Cluster meetings ☐

Any other (please specify)

5b) How important are these considerations when choosing courses? (please tick the relevant box)

	Very	Quite	Not very	Did not really consider this
General SEN Awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A specific SEN interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timing of course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of Staff cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location & Venue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any other considerations (please specify):



Appendix 4: Postal Questionnaire for Practitioners

(continued)

6) To support "inclusion", which aspects of future SEN training courses would you consider to be important for your setting? (These questions are not in any particular order - please tick the relevant box)

a. A knowledge of the Code of Practice and any other SEN legislation?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

b. Partnership with Parents?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

c. A whole-staff approach and willingness to include children with SEN?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

d. An understanding of how to identify children with SEN?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

e. Regular opportunities to share ideas and information with other staff?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

f. An awareness of early child development?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

g. A willingness to try out new ideas and strategies?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

h. Managers who are keen to support inclusion?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

i. Accessibility, equipment and resources appropriate to the needs of the children?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

j. An awareness of Health and Safety needs?

Very Important ☐ Quite important ☐ Not that important ☐ Did not really consider this ☐

Any other important considerations? (Please describe)

7) To help determine the impact of training that you have attended, please give examples of how your attendance at SEN training courses has influenced your practice, eg. In terms of your own staff training, liaison with parents, use of resources and/or changes in practice:-

If you are willing to be contacted at a future date and would like to be considered for the prize draw, please write your contact telephone number below.



TELEPHONE No:



Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please cut out this sheet and return it to :-

ZOE HARWOOD, Service Leader for Pre-School SEN,
address

Please return by the end of July 2004.

THE PRIZE WINNERS WILL BE NOTIFIED IN SEPT 04 AT THE START OF THE AUTUMN TERM

Appendix 5: Interviews with Practitioners

EVALUATING SEN TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRE-SCHOOL PROVIDERS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Main aim of the interviews

- To examine the term 'inclusion' and what this means in practice for pre-school providers.
- To explore in more depth areas identified in a previous 'Pre-school SEN training and professional development survey'.

Research questions underpinning each interview

- What do practitioners in pre-school settings consider to be the benefits and challenges of including pre-school children with Special Educational Needs?
- What aspects of pre-school SEN and inclusion training opportunities can be improved or developed further?

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in these interviews. Your contribution will be very valuable in this research project, examining your views and experiences in relation to SEN training and professional development opportunities.

A recent postal survey raised some interesting responses from a range of pre-school settings across the county. Following on from this survey, it was felt that some individual interviews would help to gain additional, more detailed information about the benefits and challenges of including pre-school children with Special Educational Needs.

A copy of your completed questionnaire is available for us to refer to and will help to prompt today's discussions.

The interview should take no longer than an hour.

Please could the interview be tape-recorded, to help retain all the information as accurately as possible.

All individual responses will remain anonymous in any reported research findings.

BACKGROUND

1. What is your role at the moment in your setting?
(PROBE: SENCo; manager; do you have responsibilities for SEN? Or have you in the past? How long for?)
2. Have you any other responsibilities within your setting?
3. How many members of staff are there?

TERMINOLOGY

4. 'Special Educational Needs' can sometimes be interpreted in different ways. Have there been any children with Special Educational Needs in your setting?
If answer is "Yes":
Please could you describe their needs?
If answer is "No":
If you had any children with SEN in the future, what needs might these be?
(PROBE: physical difficulties, communication difficulties, hearing or vision difficulties, learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties)
For the purpose of the interview, please can we agree that all of these could be definitions of SEN?
5. a) Which children with special educational needs do you feel provide the most challenges for pre-schools?
(PROBE: physical difficulties, communication difficulties, hearing or vision difficulties, learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties)
b) Why do you think so?

We will revisit some of these challenges later on.

6. 'Inclusion' is another term that means different things to different people. What do you feel is important to support the inclusion of children with SEN in a pre-school setting (remembering the range of needs that we discussed these children might have)?
(PROBE: referring to question 6 on postal questionnaire - legislation; partnership with parents; a whole staff approach; opportunities to share information with other staff; an awareness of early child development; a willingness to try out new ideas and strategies; managers who support inclusion; access, equipment and resources; health and safety)

TRAINING ATTENDED

7. Please can you describe any recent SEN training that you have attended?
8. Has anyone else in your setting attended SEN training?
(*PROBE: with you, without you, as a group*)
9. Are you able to talk to colleagues about courses that you have attended?
(*PROBE: how?*)
10. Can you think of any other ways that training information could be shared?
11. How do you usually find out about SEN courses?
(*PROMPT: referring to question 5a on postal questionnaire*)
12. How do you make choices about which SEN courses to attend?
(*PROMPT: referring to question 5b on postal questionnaire*)

IMPACT OF TRAINING ATTENDED

(*Wording in brackets to be used if interviewee has not attended SEN training*)

13. What do you feel you have gained from attending SEN training (*or would be gained*)?
14. Which information has been (*would be*) most useful?
15. Are there any strategies that you have found to be beneficial in you setting?
(*or would be*)

INCLUSION AND THE CHALLENGES FACED

16. Please could you give an example of how your setting aims to include children with SEN?
(*PROMPT: this could be as a result of some training, any particular resources or strategies, any changes that have been put in place*)

17. What do you feel are some of the challenges of inclusion in a pre-school setting?

(PROBE: any anxieties that staff might have; parents; including children with particular SEN- see earlier question 5; building and environment; resources; funding; staffing; additional support; health and safety)

FINALLY

18. How do you think future SEN training could benefit your setting?

(PROMPT: bearing in mind some of the successes and challenges of inclusion that we have already discussed)

19. Do you have any further comments or questions that you would like to raise?

Thank you for taking part in this interview. Your contribution is much appreciated and the research findings will be summarised soon for your interest.

Appendix 6: Extract from ‘Specialist Nurseries Admissions Criteria’

Introduction

The LA currently has six specialist nurseries attached to special schools:

<u>Area of the County</u>	<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Number of places purchased by the LA</u>
North	School A	7 Full Time Equivalents (F.T.E.)
	School B	12 F.T.E.
	School C	10 F.T.E.
East	School D	13 F.T.E.
Centre	School E	14 F.T.E.
South	School F	14 F.T.E.

All nurseries have a high staff-pupil ratio, with staff experienced in teaching children with a wide range of SEN and disabilities. All nurseries have ready access to speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and frequent visits from a designated educational psychologist. Additional services such as occupational therapy can also be accessed. Working in close partnership with local mainstream provision, specialist nurseries undertake ongoing multi-disciplinary assessment of children’s needs. An appropriate learning environment is provided, following the framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

There is, by necessity, some local variation in the provision offered by the nurseries and details are included in the relevant school’s prospectus. Additionally, in close collaboration with the LA, the intake of children may sometimes vary, depending upon the complexity and levels of need in any one cohort.

Admissions Process

With parental consent, children to be considered for specialist nursery provision are raised at the 0-5 Allocation Meetings. Referrals are made via the ‘Single Business Process’ and a multi-disciplinary group meets *fortnightly* in each of three localities; (Centre/South), (East) and (North). The multi-disciplinary meetings discuss a range of support and opportunities for children and families, *including* specialist nursery placements (at least once per half term) – see page 3.

Entry Criteria

Subject to parental preference and consent, children with the following SEN could be considered for admission, if they present with needs that are consistent with one or more of the following (*in no order of priority*):

- Profound and multiple learning difficulties or potentially long term severe learning difficulties
- Significant delay or disorder in two or more areas of development and/or behaviour. For example, delay would be envisaged as being about 9 months or more at age 3
- Significant medical, physical, visual and/or hearing impairment

In consultation with parents and subject to parental preference and consent; these criteria would also provide benchmarks for reviewing whether a child's specialist nursery placement remained appropriate, or if alternative placement might be more appropriate.

Admission Age

Children could be admitted to specialist nurseries two years prior to school entry, but if appropriate, following their second birthday. The review of placements will be the responsibility of the head teacher.

Locality Provision

Parents will be offered a place for their child, wherever possible, in the specialist nursery in their area. If this provision is full, then the next nearest appropriate specialist nursery would be approached. In some instances the nursery attached to School A can additionally provide county-wide places for children with Visual Impairment, whose severity of need is such that admission to their nearest assessment nursery may not be appropriate. Priority for placement to any of the specialist nurseries will be given to children living within County W. If vacant places are available however, consideration will be given to children living outside of the county. Free transport will be offered for children to attend specialist nursery provision, according to LA Policy.

0-5 Allocation Meetings

Allocation meetings take place on a fortnightly basis in each of the three localities, with one meeting per half term assigned specifically to the allocation of specialist nursery placements. For these discussions, membership may consist of representation from the following, as appropriate:

- Child Development Service Coordinator
- Specialist Nursery/Special School Head
- Teaching & Learning (Area SENCo team)
- 0-3 Portage Service
- Psychology (Clinical/Educational)
- Speech & Language Therapy, Occupational/Physiotherapy
- Social Care

If necessary, it may be appropriate to discuss specialist nursery placements at other meetings, i.e. between those that are set half-termly, so that provision for children is not unnecessarily delayed. In these instances, head teachers (or specialist nursery representatives) will be contacted as soon as possible to share appropriate information.

Possible Outcomes

As part of a “menu of opportunities” that may be offered through the 0-5 Strategy, this may include (*in no order of priority*):

- Offer of a place in the child’s area specialist nursery
- Offer of a place in the child’s nearest appropriate specialist nursery, if the child’s area specialist nursery is full
- Offer of a place at School A for children with VI, if appropriate

Placement decisions will be communicated to parents by an appropriate professional known to the family in addition to the formal written response from the LA. All children are entitled to a mainstream pre-school placement, and parents will be encouraged to put their child’s name down for their local pre-school provision; whether they are already accessing mainstream provision, or should they wish to access this provision in the future (perhaps as a dual placement).

Appendix 7: Transformation Fund End of Award Report (extracted from LA audit)

Introduction

The Transformation Fund (was established to improve the quality of child care for under fives by developing the skills of early years workers through training and skill development. Its aims were to raise the quality of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare for the under fives, by supporting the development of the workforce whilst avoiding compromising the affordability and availability of childcare. Efforts to achieve this were targeted at several areas:

- 1) Providing financial support for training to achieve a new graduate-level status for early years professionals.
- 2) Attempting to ensure that all full-day childcare settings employ a graduate with early year's professional status by 2015 by providing recruitment incentives and quality premiums for eligible full daycare providers.
- 3) Investment in level 3-5 training and development in order to improve the skills/qualifications of staff in PVI childcare settings.
- 4) Training an increasing number of staff in this area of childcare to work with disabled children and those with SEN.

The Area SENCo Team, County W was awarded £80,000 to these ends, placing specific emphasis the fourth targeted area. In order to accrue the maximum benefit from this initiative, the funds were focused into numerous areas within this context. Resources were assigned for autism training, in terms of autism awareness, postgraduate and advanced certificates, and ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule); early years training in the form of pre-school, Portage, SEN and behaviour management training for team members; management training; baby signing; and communication software for use in nursery and pre-school settings. It was considered that the channelling of the funds into these specific areas would benefit children most effectively. The benefits produced in each individual area are described below. The breakdown of costs among these categories follows:

<u>Nature of Training</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Funding for 8 baby signers	£1,631.60
Autism awareness training	£2,073.92
AREA SENCO transfer for SEN courses across the county	£ 80,000.00
Portage training	£1,906.34
SEN training advanced certificate (ad cert)	£4,770
Excelling at managing people	£1,230.24
Using early support course	£190.00
Postgraduate certificate (PGCert) in Autism	£ 2,220.00
AREA SENCO Professional Development	£ 10,000.00
ADOS training	£21,883.35
Widgit comm software for PVI settings	£ 14,687.50
Protective behaviours training county wide	£ 1,800.00

As displayed above, the majority of funds were spent on *AREA SENCO* transfer for SEN courses across the county, with large proportions of the budget also dedicated to ADOS training, Widgit software and pre-school training. A detailed break-down, including a description of each area of funding and the benefits accumulated follows.

Baby Signing

Funding was provided for the training of eight baby signers in order for the trainees to enable and encourage communication with babies and young children experiencing language difficulties. Training for Area SENCOs in Makaton (stages 1-4) training commenced in autumn 2006. The training allowed them to use signing to communicate with children they were supporting in a pre-school setting; to introduce signing to enable a child to follow nursery routines, make requests and participate in nursery rhymes and story board sessions; and to support staff in introducing signing to their setting.

Child Development Advisers also completed a Makaton Baby Signing course in summer 2007. The first course was run in January and February 2008 in *District S* where six participants successfully completed a six-week Baby Signing course with their babies. The group was very successful and included training of the Health Visitors and Nursery Nurse for the area. The course delivered to participants included information on the use of sign and gesture and symbols for use with their children. It is an excellent preparation for when children move into to settings which use Makaton and visual timetables for communication. Follow ups are being arranged with the settings the children attend to ensure everyone is clear about communication. A follow up is also being arranged for fathers and grandparents. The packs and resources have been an invaluable resource for developing signing and symbols for use in settings with the children and for cascading information through the child's support network.

Autism Awareness Training

Autism awareness training was delivered by two different approaches. Awareness was extended through attendance of an Autism Awareness conference and by training staff on EarlyBird (NAS), a parenting programme that focused specifically on Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Nine members of the AREA SENCO team attended an Autism Awareness conference in May 2007. Sessions varied in terms of content and delivery, with some sessions including presentations from parents whose children have ASD and people who have ASD themselves.

“ It was a great opportunity to hear Temple Grandin talk about her life. Listening to Temple and John Simpson gave an insight into the experiences and difficulties they have gone through. It is important to understand Autism from personal experiences as this leads to an understanding on how strategies may work. In particular, the conference helped me to understand the anxiety that can result from the challenges of everyday life. This has enabled me in my practice to consider anxiety as being an underlying factor in challenging behaviour displayed by early years children. I have been able to make parents aware of this fact and help them to see and understand the world from their child's perspective.”

Four staff completed EarlyBird training in February 2008. Early Bird is a three-month parent programme for families with a pre-school child who has a diagnosis of an ASD. The programme has been written by the NAS (National Autistic Society) and training is available to teams of professionals with prior experience of working with autism. The 3-day training course at the NAS EarlyBird centre attended by staff equips teams of multi-disciplinary professionals to deliver the parent programme under licence to the NAS. The programme works in partnership with parents to put them in control, so as to develop the potential of their pre-school child. The programme uses existing good practice to give parents a sound understanding of ASD and effective practical strategies which help them understand and manage the effects of autism on their child's development. Parents then are asked to support staff training in Autism with other professionals and to talk at conferences. Since going on the course, 2 staff are presently running EarlyBird courses this term and 2 will run them in September.

AREA SENCO transfer for SEN courses across the county

Since a wide range of SEN courses have been provided county-wide under the funding umbrella of the Transformation Fund. These courses have covered a range of areas including behaviour management training (e.g., 'Catch Them Being Good'), training for children with specific SEN (e.g., 'Supporting Children with ASD in a Pre-School', 'Supporting Children with Down Syndrome') as well as developing specific skills for specific contexts (e.g., 'Developing Small Group Time', 'Story Time with Story Boards'). A break-down of the duration and cost of each course follows.

County Courses Academic Year 2006-2007

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Hours of Training Offered</u>	<u>Cost</u>
SEN Policy into Practice	2.5 days	£1, 875.00
IEP Writing	1.25 days	£937.50
Catch Them Being Good	2.5 days	£1, 875.00
Developing Listening and attention Skills	1.25 days	£1, 875.00
Developing Small group Time	1.25 days	£937.50
Pick up a Problem	2.5 days	£3, 750.00
Story Time with Story Boards	1.75 days	£1, 875.00
Supporting Children with ASD in a Pre-School	1 day	£1, 500.00
Supporting Children with a Hearing Impairment	0.75 days	£1, 125
Supporting children with Down Syndrome	1 day	£1, 500.00
Supporting Children with Visual Impairment	0.5 days	£750.00
Stress Management and Well-Being	0.25 days	£187.50
<u>Service:</u>		
Trainers costs including preparation time 06-07 Academic year		£19, 687.50
SLA with EPS		£15, 000
SLA with County administration		£8, 571.00
Venues and catering		£9, 648.00
Total cost of training 06-07 academic year		£52, 906.50

County Courses Academic Year 2007-2008

<u>Course Title</u>	<u>Hours of Training Offered</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Be Prepared	1 day	£962.00
IEP Writing	2.5 days	£1, 780.00
Catch Them Being Good	0.25 days	£530.00
SEN Policy into Practice in the Early Years	1 day	£2, 405.00
Pick up a Problem	1 day	£2, 405.00
Supporting Children with ASD in a Pre-School	1 day	£356.00
Supporting Children with a Hearing Impairment	1.5 days	£962.00
Supporting children with Down Syndrome	1 day	£962.00
Stress Management and Well-Being	0.5 days	£981.00
<u>Service:</u>		
Total course fees minus charges		£11, 343.00
SLA with EDS administration		£7, 887.00
Total cost of EDS training 06-07 academic year		£19, 320.00

Portage training for AREA SENCO

The *County W* Portage Service with the help of funding from the Transformation Fund were able to hold a very successful Region Portage Study Day. Over eighty delegates from Portage Services attended the event aimed to promote and share good advice. The theme of the day was “Let’s get sensitive” with key speakers and interactive workshops including Visual Impairment, Baby Signing, Working with Parents and making it Visual. The refreshment and lunch breaks provided vital opportunities to network with colleagues and look at a wide range of displays.

A sample of the comments taken from the delegates' evaluation sheets follow:

- 💡 • Great to meet the other professionals
 - Valuable presentations and workshops
 - The whole day was great. I learnt a lot and really enjoyed it! Thank you!
 - An enjoyable, relaxed but very informative day.
 - Great to link up, get ideas, and share views and ways of tackling shared problems.
 - The whole day was a lovely experience; all the activities and speakers were very relevant to my role as a portage worker. ”

SEN Training Advanced Certificate

Funds were also supplied for two staff members to attain an advanced certificate in autism.

Comments on the benefits of this process follow:

💡 Studying for the ACE has enabled me to take an analytical perspective in my practice supporting children with an ASD. In my first module, I focussed my study on including children with an ASD into mainstream settings. Parents of children with an ASD are often confused when considering which setting will meet their child's needs. After looking at the pro's and con's I feel more confident in supporting parents through the process.

In the second study, I have researched literature about explaining the diagnosis to children. Parents often ask the question when is the right time to explain. It is important to guide parents towards the literature and strategies, which will help them to make their children aware of the difficulties they may face. In my final study, I am planning to research the role of Portage supporting a family with a child with ASD. I hope this will enable me to further understand my role within the Birth to Three Family Service as well as developing strategies, which could be used by my co-workers. ”

Postgraduate Certificate Autism

Further to the advanced certificate, the transformation fund was also used to contribute to a postgraduate certificate in Autism for one staff member. She details her own experience of this course below.

💡 I received funding in 2007 which enabled me to enrol on a Postgraduate Certificate in Autism in Education. This has been a fantastic opportunity and has enabled me to further my theoretical understanding which underpins my everyday practice across settings.....The course has proven incredibly valuable and I am highly appreciative of receiving the funding which has enabled me to participate in the course. ”

Excelling at Managing People

Management training was a two-day management course attended by three key team members. This was part of a personal performance management target, which identified the need for training for middle management within the Early Years. This training was part of developing the personal knowledge and education of these staff members as Early Years practitioners and managers. Staff state that it has had both a direct influence on the way they promote team work and manage people within their teams and an influence on the way they work with other teams of people. The information which they learnt on this course is used constantly in their own practice, making the service which they provide to children and settings more effective. In addition information from this course has been used where appropriate to support training delivered to settings. Key points have been used within the “Effective Partnership with Parents” course and will be added to the “SEN Policy into Practice” course to be run in the next academic year. This will have a direct input on how settings deliver a service to families of children with SEN or disability. Course evaluations from Effective Partnership course just run, all received ‘good’ or ‘very good’ for content.

Using Early Support course

Two members of the Hearing Advisory Team participated in a course ‘Using the Early Support Monitoring Protocol to Enhance Audiological Practice’. This course was a full day course concentrating on using The Early Support Protocol for Deaf Babies. In particular it focused on the sounds deaf babies and children make and how this information is used by audiologists. It is an integral part of assessing the child’s use of hearing aids and their effectiveness.

Attendees reported that the course content was very well presented and extremely informative. The speakers had first hand knowledge of using the protocol in this way and were very knowledgeable. This was considered by the attendees to have great value in the work of an Educational Audiologists and Hearing Advisory Teachers.

“ There was a lot of useful information both formally in the course content and informally when talking with other delegates over lunch. The venue was in Central London and it was appropriate for the course set in a good acoustic and deaf friendly environment. The information that we gained is effective in our working practice and it has been shared within our team, especially with teachers and teaching assistance working with Early Years children (aged 0-5 years) who have a hearing loss. It has also been shared with some settings where our children attend. I have passed this information on to parents and Paediatric Audiologists that work within the Health Service. I would strongly recommend this course for other professionals working in this field because of its relevance and quality. ”

AREA SENCO Pre-School Training

Further training and funding for preschool setting was subsidised by the Transformation fund in a number of different channels through the AREA SENCO teaching and Learning Team 0-5.

This includes:

- On site training, specific to the needs of a child or group of children or staff development.
- Courses organised through the Education Development Service. These courses focus on specific aspects of SEN from the role of the SENCO to training on Autism Awareness.

These courses are delivered to groups of delegates in all or some of the 5 areas of the county. There may be up to 30 delegates on some courses.

The resources purchased through the Transformation Fund have covered both of the abovementioned aspects.

- Books and posters to support 'Catch them being Good' a Behaviour Management course and to be available to loan to settings.
- Resources to train staff and to deliver TACPAC (a 'Tactile Approach to Communication' for children who have difficulties in communicating in the usual ways)
- Resources to train staff on Manual Handling.
- Photocopiable resources to support skill development.
- Books to loan with information about areas of SEN.
- Resources to support development of early interaction through turn taking games.
- Resources to support use of Makaton signing and development of skills within our team.
- Soundfield portable speaker system to assist us when delivering training.
- Video cameras and tripod to record children's achievements and to video staff working so they can reflect on their practice.
- Materials to support development of listening skills through 'Sound Boxes' (these are used as exemplars on the 'Working with Children with Hearing Loss' course and as loan materials.
- Copying of DVDs to provide back up material when they are loaned to parents or settings.
- Specialised computer programmes for the purposes of creating interactive games to share with youngsters and to contribute to a website for parents to access to gain information about SEN issues and access a message board forum.

Funds were also provided for Dyspraxia and Developmental Coordination Disorder training for six staff members. This training has helped to raise awareness of the needs of children within pre-school settings. The training proved useful to staff and information has been used to support children within these settings. It also enabled information to be cascaded to settings where appropriate. For example, one setting has used the information regarding practical interventions to enhance spatial awareness and fine and gross motor skills. These were included within the child's Individual Education Plan.

ADOS Training

County W is currently developing a common Pathway for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) identification and diagnosis. Early identification and specialist intervention is crucial in order to ensure that children with this profile of needs receive appropriate support at the earliest possible time. As part of the harmonisation of approach across the County, training in the use of the ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) was provided by experienced colleagues from a neighbouring Authority, for all Early Years practitioners, as well as for relevant colleagues in the multidisciplinary teams which contribute to this process (Teachers, Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychology, Clinical Psychology). Alongside the initial training, additional training DVDs were purchased to ensure sustainability – to continue in-house and within-team training. The specialist kits of assessment materials for each of the bases across the County were also purchased.

Widgit Comm software for PVI settings

All County W schools have been licensed to use this symbolised computer programme since January 2006. Pre school non-maintained settings have now been added to the licence agreement by the contribution from the Transformation Fund. It will now be possible to train AREA SENCO staff who work in those settings to use the programme to make materials and resources, and for them to then train staff in the settings themselves. These materials and resources will support children who have difficulties with language and communication. The programme can also be used by settings to make their site 'communication friendly' and accessible to all users. All of these factors support inclusion. Pupils will also have consistency of symbols from pre-school into school settings. Staff from the Symbols Inclusion Project will be giving pre-school staff training during the summer term on how to use the programme, and then they will have the skills to pass on to staff in the pre-school settings.

Protective Behaviours training county-wide

After attending the Protective Behaviours training staff have been fortunate enough to access funding through the Transformation Fund to buy resources from the Incentive Plus catalogue. These resources purchased include training DVDs providing guidance on behaviour management techniques, strategies and games employed for encouraging emotional expression and emotional intelligence in young children, and cognitive intervention programmes aimed at positive behaviour management. These resources provide a consistent approach to behaviour management and allow users to develop their skills with respect to strategies for improving the behaviour of young children. They are being used in the Behaviour Management training that is delivered to childcare providers in County W, enabling early years workers in a variety of settings to benefit from these resources.

Conclusions

The Transformation Fund has enabled the AREA SENCO team to increase the efficacy of its services for young children in a number of key areas. The fund has provided the means for a broad scope of training for early years professionals as well as enabling several key staff members to complete postgraduate and advanced certificates in SEN qualifications. Training has covered a broad scope of different issues central to AREA SENCO, for examples, funds were extended for the purposes of Autism awareness training, portage training and improving communication with young children through strategies such as baby signing and the use of symbol-aided language programmes like Widgit. The benefits of these training opportunities have been numerous. Not only has it expanded the scope of staff skills, enabling team members to be more effective in their respective settings, it has also enabled staff to pass on their knowledge and skills to other early years workers and parents with children accessing Area SENCo support. Further to this, many of the activities and training days afforded by the Transition Fund have allowed staff to network with a wide range of professionals across the county from a variety of settings and disciplines committed to early years practice. This enhanced communication between departments and harmonisation of identification will benefit the Children and Young People of County W.

Appendix 8 Definition of SEN (as in Code of Practice, DFES 2001)
 – pre-school children put forward for statutory assessment, entering school in September 2003

Definition of SEN		Cognition & Learning				Behaviour, Emotional & Social	Communication & Interaction		Sensory and / or Physical Needs			
		Specific learning difficulties	Moderate learning difficulty	Severe learning difficulty	Profound learning difficulty		Speech, Language & Communication	ASD	HI	VI	Multi-sensory impairment	Physical disability
Number of children in each District	N = 6			TWO 1 + 1 (DS)	ONE 1			THREE 3				
	N&B = 25			TWELVE 10 + 1 (DS) 1 (med)		TWO 1 + 1 (S&L)	TWO 2	FIVE 5			ONE ← 1 →	THREE 2 + 1 (S&L)
	W = 22			TEN 9 + 1 (DS)	ONE 1	ONE 1 (S&L)	TWO 2	SEVEN 7				ONE 1 (S&L)
	S = 12			FOUR 2 + 1 (phys) 1 (phys, med, comm.)	TWO 2	ONE 1 (S&L)	ONE 1 (phys)	FOUR 2 (+2)				
	R = 18			NINE 6 + 1 (DS) 1 (med) 1 (S&L)		ONE 1 (med + comm.)	ONE 1	FIVE 4 + 1 (add)				TWO 2
TOTAL = 83		41				5	30		7			

DS = Down Syndrome
 add = additional needs

phys = physical needs med = medical needs
 comm. = communication needs

S&L = specific speech & language needs

Appendix 8a
AN OVERVIEW OF PRE-SCHOOL SEN SUPPORT IN LA 2001-2003
Some Background Information

Pre-School Providers in receipt of Nursery Education Grant

(+ 6 Assessment Nurseries)

Total number of settings receiving Nursery Education Grant in 2001-2002 = 363

Total number of settings receiving Nursery Education Grant in 2002-2003 = 346

County's 3 Year old Population

Estimated 3 year old population, Spring 02 (Health Authority Data) = 5950

Estimated 3 year old population, Spring 03 (Health Authority Data) = 5749

Pre-School Children at "Early Years Action Plus" (EYA+) and those then put forward for Statutory Assessment (DFES 2001)

Academic Year	Children supported by Area SENCos at EYA+ (includes children, other than those in pre-school year)	Children referred for Statutory Assessment (with Area SENCo involvement)	Total number of children referred for Statutory Assessment
01 – 02	221	31	82
02 – 03	320	48	88*

*In 2002 – 2003, of the 88 children put forward for statutory assessment:-

2 children in District R and 1 child in District S moved out of county

1 request for statutory assessment in District W was turned down

1 request for statutory assessment in District S was turned down

***Therefore, 83 children went forward for statutory assessment in 2003**

Area SENCo involvement in Statutory Assessments

(total statutory assessments indicated in brackets, to include children in specialist nurseries attached to special schools)

Academic Year	N	N&B	W	S	R
2001-2002	0 (4)	3 (22)	14 (27)	7 (17)	7 (12)
2002-2003	4 (6)	16 (25)	12 (23)	6** (14)	12 (20)

(** out of these 6, there were 2 children where Area SENCo involvement was discontinued)

Appendix 9: List of Local Authority Documentary Sources

CIS (2001)	<i>Childcare Information Service: Annual Report</i>
CIS (2004)	<i>Childcare Information Service: Annual Report</i>
Census (2001)	<i>County and District Census Information</i>
EYDCP (2001a)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Strategic Plan 2001-2004</i>
EYDCP (2001b)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Implementation Plan 2001-2002</i>
EYDCP (2002a)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Strategic Plan 2002-2003</i>
EYDCP (2002b)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Implementation Plan 2002-2003</i>
EYDCP (2002c)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: 'GAP' Survey Autumn 2002: Analysis of Results</i>
EYDCP (2003a)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Childcare Audit 2002-2003</i>
EYDCP (2003b)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Implementation Plan Summary 2003-2004</i>
EYDCP (2003c)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: 'GAP' Survey Interim Analysis November 2003</i>
EYDCP (2003d)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Requirements of Nursery Education Grant (letter dated 13th February 2003)</i>
EYDCP (2004a)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Childcare Audit Final Report, February 2004</i>
EYDCP (2004b)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: 'GAP' Survey Final Report February 2004</i>
EYDCP (2004c)	<i>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership: Strategic Plan Summary 2004-2006</i>
LA (2002)	<i>Strategic Plan: 2002/03 – 2006/07</i>
LA (2003a)	<i>School Organisation Plan: 2003-2008</i>
LA (2003b)	<i>Strategic Plan: 2002/03 – 2006/07 Priorities, Activities and Headline Targets 2003/04</i>
LA (2003c)	<i>Quality Standards for Safety: Health Promoting School Scheme</i>
LA (2003d)	<i>SEN and Inclusion in County W: Policy for the inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs</i>
LA (2003e)	<i>Early Years Training and Development Packs</i>
LA (2004 - 2008)	<i>Area SENCo Development Plans</i>
LA (2007)	<i>Childcare Audit and Sufficiency Assessment 2006/07</i>

Glossary

Key Workers (information extracted from www.earlysupport.org.uk)

Key workers act as a single point of contact when parents and carers are looking for relating to their child with SEN and/or disability, aiming to reduce stress by encouraging everyone who is in contact with a family to work better together as a group. Where families are juggling many appointments and meetings, they may also be able to help by co-ordinating such appointments. The aim of Key Working is to achieve better co-ordinated packages of help and advice and to keep parents and carers at the heart of discussion and decision-making about their child. This is particularly important when a lot of different services and people are involved. Key working is intended to improve outcomes for families and children by viewing service provision from the perspective of the people who use services and making best use of the resources available.

NAS EarlyBird Programme (NAS 2008)

The NAS EarlyBird Programme is a three-month programme for parents of pre-school children with autism. The programme combines group training sessions for parents, with individual home visits. Video feedback is used to help parents apply what they have learnt when interacting with their child. The EarlyBird approach aims to develop an understanding of autism and how children experience the world; analysing their behaviour, interaction and communication and how best to develop these areas. (The National Autistic Society Website)

Tax Credits (LA 2003) – information correct at the time of the research

Child Tax Credit – Parents/carers are eligible if they are responsible for children aged 0-16 and have a family income of less than £58 000 (parents do not have to be working to claim but the amount they receive is income dependent). An extra baby element is awarded if a child is under 1.

Working Tax Credit - This has a childcare element which will pay up to 80% of childcare costs (amount paid is dependent on income). To be eligible each parent in a child's primary residence must be over 16 and work for at least 16 hours per week. (HMRC website)

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