

Young Children's Representations of Emotions  
and Attachment in Their Spontaneous Patterns  
of Behaviour: An Exploration of a Researcher's  
Understanding

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last thirty years in the UK and a small number of other countries, workers and researchers have developed a robust theory of cognitive development by studying young children's patterns of behaviour (known as 'schemas') (Athey, 1990; Matthews, 2003; Pan, 2004). The research has shown that young children across cultures, are intrinsically motivated to explore patterns through their actions, symbolic behaviour, functional dependencies and thought.

By working closely with parents and workers and drawing on their intimate knowledge of each child and their family context, I have extended this theory to include the children's explorations of emotional issues, such as attachment and separation.

During the study, I made video observations of eight children, aged two, three and four years, over one to two years, engaging in spontaneous play in the nursery. I viewed the filmed sequences alongside their parents and workers to gain their insights into each child's motivations and interests.

I then revisited the filmed sequences over time and used journaling, as a technique, to record my responses and reflections. I constructed a case study about each child using schema theory and attachment theory as theoretical frameworks for analysing the data. I also constructed a case study about my own growing awareness of my responses to emotions.

I identified some basic psychological needs in the data about each child, that seemed to link with the cluster of schemas each child explored. There seemed to be a gender bias.

The boys studied seemed more focussed on 'doing' and expressed this by using a cluster of predominant schemas such as 'trajectory' and 'connecting'. The girls studied seemed more focussed on 'having' and 'relating' and expressed these needs by exploring a cluster of schemas, including 'transporting', 'containing' and 'enveloping'. Children seemed to use these repeated patterns in four ways; to gain comfort; to give form to experiences or feelings; to explore or work through painful experiences or feelings, and; to come to understand abstract concepts.

I articulated my understanding of Piaget's concept of 'reflective abstraction' by applying it to data gathered and to the literature. I proposed extending this concept to include 'reflective expansion'. The child takes actions forward onto a higher plane within the cognitive domain, when developmentally ready (reflective abstraction), and simultaneously draws on earlier actions to make links in the affective domain when faced with complex abstract concepts beyond their current level of development (reflective expansion).

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I am dedicating this study to my family; my husband, Terry, who has encouraged me to continue studying for many years and has supported me by being here for me and by doing the washing, shopping, cooking and cleaning; my children, Colette, Paul and Eloise and my grandchildren Georgia and Harry, who all seem to realise how important this quest has been to me and who have all encouraged me in different ways to continue and to finish.

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- Chris Athey, my guru and friend, and
- Colette Tait, my daughter and colleague

I can't thank you enough. You have all made this possible for me.

### **Conventions Used In This Study**

Long quotes are indented and single spaced.

Schemas are underlined.

Video observations are double spaced, indented and italicised.

Quotes at the beginning of sections are in bold, italicised and in inverted commas.

Findings in section four are in bold and italicised.

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## **Introduction**

Recently I read a journal article about an exciting project in an American Laboratory Preschool for three and four year olds, with Hurricane Katrina as the focus (Aghayan, Schellhaas, Wayne, Burts, Buchanan and Benedict, 2005). The authors described the children's interest in what, for them, was a real and recent event that affected all of their lives. Four children were taken into the Preschool as evacuees after the hurricane struck.

Hurricane Katrina was not the original focus for their work at that time, but it was what the children were talking about and interested in, so the teachers decided to make it their project for the term. I have always admired workers, who have the confidence to go with the children's interests and to create an authentic curriculum based on 'uncovering the curriculum' in each child (Lawrence, 2005). Five years ago, I would have seen this as a really good example of a project that began with the children's own lives, concerns and experiences and grew from there. I eagerly read what happened. The project was exciting and interesting. Children became involved in many different ways in talking about, writing about and representing the hurricane in many ways. There was a great deal of learning happening and reported...but there was something missing...there was very little mention of anyone's feelings. There was very little acknowledgement of what must have been a frightening and traumatic experience for some of the children and adults there in the classroom. That does not mean to say that feelings were not talked about but they were not reported in the article. The report made me think about what we value, as education.

As a teacher of young children, I have focussed almost exclusively, on researching, studying and reporting on the cognitive aspects of the curriculum for many years. For the

last five years, I have been redressing the balance somewhat by considering an association between cognition and affect. Five years ago, I would probably not have noticed the lack of 'feeling' words in the report by Aghayan et al.

More than ten years ago Elfer raised this issue, making the point that cognition had been given a lot of attention and relatively little attention had been given to 'the emotional content of children's relationships with adults and its importance to their learning' (Elfer, 1996, p.30). Recently, Elfer has questioned what we see as our 'primary task' (Elfer, 2007, p.116). In his study, he found that 'one (setting) with a long history as a nursery school for three and four year olds had recently been extended to include under-threes' (ibid, p.117). The emphasis was still on 'the education task of the nursery', thereby 'implicitly downgrading other tasks' of a more emotional nature, and causing resentment among those staff working with the younger children. Elfer found that in a community nursery, where the focus was primarily on 'childcare and parenting support', inspectors advised the staff to 'strengthen its educational role' (ibid). It seems that in all settings we need to search for a balance between children's emotions and cognition.

As an early years teacher, I have become very practised in articulating young children's cognitive learning but less practised in articulating their emotional or social development and learning. I began this study with a hunch that there was always an emotional aspect as well as a cognitive aspect to young children's explorations. Colwyn Trevarthen stated that 'emotion is the motor of cognition' (2003), but how does it work? How do we recognise it? How can I make myself see it? I remembered a little boy called Alex, aged three, and a conversation we had many years ago. It went something like this:

*Alex “Do you know Martin?”*

*Cath “No”*

*Alex “Say Martin”*

*Cath “Martin”*

*Alex “You know Martin now!”*

Alex seemed to be philosophising about how we get to know people. I was wondering about how I could deeply understand emotions as well as cognition. This study is the story of how I approached the task of valuing emotional development and learning alongside cognitive development and learning in young children. Although my journey has been roughly five years, many aspects have been with me for much longer than five years. The story is about the individual children and their families and about the changes in my understanding and awareness of my own motivations for action.

I decided that this study was primarily about the children’s actions, and, mine and their parents’ and workers’, reflections on those actions. There are four sections:

- Setting the Scene (the literature and background to the study)
- Preparing for the Action (the method and design)
- The Action (case studies)
- Reflections on the Action (conclusions and implications for practice)

I will now introduce myself, as observer of the action, the setting, where the action took place and the children and families, as the actors.

## **Me, as Observer of the Action**

I have worked with young children for just over thirty years, in care and education settings. For eighteen of those years, I have worked at the Pen Green Centre for Under-Fives and Their Families, in Corby, Northants. I went to work in the nursery at Pen Green without formal qualifications and qualified as an Early Years Teacher in 1992. Subsequently I studied for a Master's Degree in Education. Although my professional heritage is education, I have been part of a multi-disciplinary team at Pen Green for many years and have benefited from the sharing of ideas with workers from Health and Social Care.

Throughout my career, so far, I have been fascinated by how children learn, valuing the family and home learning and using video to document and discuss children's learning and the role of the adult.

This study has brought together all of my fascinations and has also expanded my world to include a greater awareness of emotions in the children and in myself.

## **The Setting Where the Action Took Place**

All of the observations of the children were made in the Pen Green Nursery, which is a Local Authority nursery in a disadvantaged area in an ex Steel Town in the Midlands. Pen Green has always been different to other nurseries in the town, opening longer days and during school holidays. The nursery opened in 1983 as a Community Nursery for two to five year olds. There has always been a strong emphasis on Pen Green, as a learning

community, for children, parents and staff. Staff and parents wrote Pen Green Curriculum Document in 1986 and within the document stated,

What we are aiming to offer children at the Centre, we also want to offer parents and staff...enabling personal growth, development and learning, the enjoyment that comes with friendships, time to be active and time to reflect, to listen and to be listened to (Pen Green, 1986).

Pen Green has traditionally employed workers from Education, Health and Social Care. The organisation was housed in an old 1930s style secondary school building. There was room to expand services and, over the years, the Centre has grown. In 2007 we offer services to children and families, which include; a nursery for one to two year olds; the nursery for two to five year olds; After School Club five nights a week; groups for children and parents, such as Baby Massage, Messy Play; groups for adults focussing on health issues, education or therapy, and; Family Support services, such as Homestart.

Eleven years ago, we began a small Research and Training Base (in a small room with two members of staff), which has since expanded to a Research and Training Base, with Conference Centre. About eighteen workers are employed in the Research Base, plus several associated consultants. There is a small specialist library with books and journals on Early Years and on Leadership in the Early Years.

## **The Actors**

Introducing:

**Harry**, who is my grandson, born in May 1993 and although not part of this study, his story was the inspiration for my interest in studying emotions, attachment and cognition (Arnold, 2003).

**Evan**, born in February 1998, who was one of the two children, who took part in the Pilot Study. With very little expressive language at first, he communicated his need for a ritualistic separation from his parents, Jenny and Gary.

**Jordan**, born in March 2000, who expressed his wish to be connected to other people at nursery, indirectly. He was supported by his parents, Andrew and Maria.

**Chloe**, born in July 2000, who enjoyed containing and transporting and was supported in her emotional, intellectual and social development, by her mum, Arlene.

**Steffi**, born in November 1999, who enjoyed stories and storying, and was supported by her parents, Jackie and Mark.

**Susan**, born in November 2000, who showed her emotions very subtly, and was supported by her mum, Sian.

**Courtney**, born in October 1999, who was very interested in feelings and who experienced a death in her family during the study. Courtney's story is shorter than the others, as she was not one of the focus children in this study.

These children and other children I have studied are referred to in examples used throughout all sections of my writing. Whenever I have judged a case to be extra sensitive, I have used pseudonyms.

## **1. PART ONE SETTING THE SCENE**

### 1.1 Child Development – Standing on the Shoulders of Piaget and Vygotsky

## **How Young Children Learn Through Repeating Patterns and Through Social Interactions**

*‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’* Sir Isaac Newton,  
1675

### **Introduction and Background**

In this section, I focus mainly on the two theorists who have influenced me most, Piaget and Vygotsky. I also acknowledge the influence of another giant, Freud, whose research carried out in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has impacted on Western civilization, probably more than any other researcher.

Over 100 years ago, in 1896, two very influential men were born. Each was brought up in a very different family context; Jean Piaget, as an only child of fairly serious and studious parents in Switzerland; Lev Vygotsky, in a busy household where he was one of eight children in Russia. Vygotsky was a teacher for a short time but only lived for 38 years, the last few of which he was ill with tuberculosis. Piaget was a psychologist and never a teacher of young children, although his theories have greatly influenced teachers and teaching in the UK and elsewhere. Piaget was a prolific writer, who lived into his eighties.



Although Vygotsky wrote many books and papers during his short life, only two of his books are widely available in English.

Although I have not studied Freud in any depth, it would be remiss of me to refer to late nineteenth or early twentieth century Europe without mentioning Freud's great influence and insights. Freud was born in 1856, 40 years before the other two giants to which I refer. Freud's family were Jewish and he saw himself as something of an outsider in Vienna, where he spent most of his life (Osborne, 1993). When his father died in 1896 (the year that Piaget and Vygotsky were born), Freud felt guilty and began a period of self-analysis. Osborne (1993, p.32) explained that 'Freud employed the free association technique, which was to become the hallmark of psychoanalysis'. Freud realised that 'his patients suffered from resistance' and that he, himself, also had repressed his feelings. The so-called 'talking-cure' was invented.

Subsequently Freud studied dreams, claiming that '...the function of dreams is to discharge the tensions of repressed and forbidden wishes' (p.49). Freud discovered 'the unconscious' which he saw as 'the site of repressed forces struggling to break into consciousness' (p.55). We dream in symbols which reveal 'unconscious content' related to 'immediate problems' (Wickes, 1978, p.24). Freud claimed that in everyday life we often show what is happening in our unconscious minds by making 'slips of the tongue, errors, omissions, faulty memories etc', hence the common use of the phrase 'a Freudian slip' (Osborne, 1993, p.59).

Freud saw a relation between jokes and the unconscious, as a way of 'releasing an inhibition' (p.61). Freud also discovered that all of us employ '*defence mechanisms*'

which we use to protect ourselves from pain (Avery, 1996, p.4). It is only by becoming aware of these defence mechanisms in our own behaviour that we can be open to understanding ourselves and begin to behave differently. Freud had many followers, some of whom broke away and developed psychoanalytic theory in different ways.

In the following sections, I will show how Piaget and Vygotsky have influenced my thinking about young children's development and learning.

### **The Theories of Jean Piaget**

I begin with Piaget, because I was influenced by his research before I ever came across the work of Vygotsky. I first came across Piaget during my original training in the 1960s. Although I did not access any of his original work at the time, the idea of learning through discovery appealed to me, even then. Piaget called himself a 'genetic epistemologist'. He was interested in 'how we come to know and what it is we know' (epistemology) (Pulaski, 1980, p.2). Pulaski (1980, p.3) explained that Piaget himself 'coined the term genetic (developmental) epistemology to describe his unique approach to the study of knowledge'. In Piaget's own words (1972, p.15),

Genetic Epistemology aims to study the origins of the various kinds of knowledge, starting with their most elementary forms, and to follow their development to later levels up to and including scientific thought.

Piaget was a biologist, a child prodigy, who published his first paper at a very early age. His interest in plants and animals led to an interest in the human mind. Early in his investigations, he became interested in why children fail tests and in the thought processes involved. He adopted what he referred to as 'the clinical method' to investigate children's knowledge. This was a way of open questioning in order to identify the children's thinking

and knowledge. During the first decade of his research, Piaget published five books about his research and 'gained worldwide attention' (Pulaski, 1980, p.4).

Subsequently, Piaget married one of his students and they had three children, two daughters, Jacqueline and Lucienne and a son, Laurent. He and his wife kept detailed written observations of their three children's early development. Piaget used this material as the basis for his theory of development. Piaget was deeply fascinated by what each child did and said. He wanted to find out about how children think and acquire knowledge and how the nature of that knowledge develops over time. He would devise little tests of his children's knowledge, mostly embedded in what they were doing at the time. Brearley and Hitchfield (1966, p.146) drew attention to some of his observations,

At 0;7 (29) he searches on the floor for everything I drop above him, if he has in the least perceived the beginning of the movement of falling. At 0;8 (1) he searches on the floor for a toy which I held in my hand and which I have just let drop without his knowledge. Not finding it, his eyes return to my hand which he examines at length, and then he again searches the floor.

Piaget was able to trace the small differences that marked significant development in his children's repeated actions.

I was attracted by his many observations of his three children, particularly in his volume on 'Play, Dreams and Imitation'. The examples he presented of his children from birth to the age of seven, gathered in naturalistic situations, somehow 'spoke' to me and connected with the observations I had been making of young children during the last twenty years (Arnold, 1990; 1997; 1999; 2003). Having access to some of the original 'raw data' was important to my understanding, as a practitioner.

## **Theories Put Forward by Piaget**

Piaget's basic theory was that human beings are organisms constantly adapting to their environment. Knowledge is not pre-formed in people and cannot therefore, be transmitted from one person to another, but must be invented or constructed by each learner through their actions (Piaget, 1972, p.12).

## **Schemas, Assimilation, Accommodation and Equilibrium**

A major contribution to my understanding of how children learn, was Piaget's theory about schemas or repeated patterns of action. Piaget proposed that human beings learn through repeatedly acting on objects and materials within the environment. He identified many of these early actions,

...like putting things next to one another (proximity) or in series (order), actions of enclosing, of tightening or loosening, changing viewpoints, cutting, rotating, folding or unfolding, enlarging and reducing and so on' (Piaget, 1956, p.453).

Piaget believed that as human beings, we build up working theories through repeating these actions. We assimilate new content into our current models or structures and sometimes have to accommodate our actions and knowledge when something unexpected happens. Piaget (1971, p.63) described 'assimilation' as 'the process whereby an action is actively reproduced and comes to incorporate new objects into itself (for example, thumb sucking as a case of sucking)'. In my study when Steffi (aged 3 years 10 months) was exploring 'enveloping', she used water, then lentils and then wet spaghetti to 'envelop' or

cover objects. She reproduced her action but with different materials thereby assimilating them into her knowledge about covering. Accommodation, on the other hand, involves 'schemas being modified in being applied to a diversity of objects'. For example, Harry (aged 1 year 7 months) liked to carry his toy cars around in a cardboard box. He knew that the box would 'contain' several cars and enable him to 'transport' them from one place to another. One day the cars were too heavy and fell 'through' the bottom of his container. He realised that the box would no longer 'contain' his cars and that, in its new form, it had other properties, that is, he could run his cars through it like a tunnel. Shortly after this, he became very interested in making himself and objects 'go through boundaries' (Arnold, 2003, p.25). Harry had extended his actions and knowledge to include a new pattern of action, 'going through'.

A third process that Piaget claimed, comes into play, is that of 'regulating in order to preserve a state of equilibrium' (1971, p.47). A further explanation that made the concept clearer to me, '...there is equilibrium when an external intrusion is compensated by the actions of the subject' (Piaget, 1980, p.151). So we might deduce that in the above example, Harry compensated by using his box as a tunnel. He changed the function of the object.

Another concept Piaget introduced was 'reflective abstraction' (Piaget, 1971, p.64). His explanation was that,

...as soon as the child begins to represent and think, he uses reflective abstractions: certain connections are "drawn out" of the sensori-motor schemata and "projected upon" the new plane of thought...

Although I have been able to see a connection, for example, between placing objects in order physically and mentally ordering, as in counting or ranking, I did not have a clear idea of how the process developed (Arnold, 2003, p.43). As this study has involved an exploration of my understanding of children's 'representations' of emotions and attachment, the concept of 'reflective abstraction' has been useful in helping me to understand how the children used their schemas or repeated patterns in re-presenting earlier experiences and feelings.

### **Re-Presentation and Symbolic Play**

Piaget (1956, p.17) defined 'representation' as involving 'the evocation of objects in their absence'. Children literally 're-present' earlier experiences during their play. As adult observers, who know the children well, we can often recognise the link between their current actions and the experiences being re-presented. Children's representations also provide a window into their feelings (Oaklander, 1988; Alvarez, 1992, p.166).

Piaget and Inhelder (1969, p.114) acknowledged that representation 'is just as important for the development of affectivity and social relations as it is for the development of cognitive functions'.

When young children re-present their earlier experiences, they often use 'symbols' to signify or to stand for the objects, people or events they are re-enacting. These symbols can be actions, objects, pictures or words. Piaget (2001, p.137) explained that a 'symbol is defined as implying a bond of similarity between the significant and the significate'. He differentiated between symbols and signs. 'The sign is arbitrary, and of necessity based on

convention' (ibid). Symbols can be individual and not necessarily shared with other people, whereas signs are symbols agreed socially.

Piaget (1980, p.23) described the function of symbolic play,

Its function is to satisfy the self by transforming what is real into what is desired...He relives all his pleasures, resolves all his conflicts.

Piaget (1995, p.226) pointed out that whereas with adults,

...inner thoughts permit us to return to subjects that have impressed us, children's thoughts, because they are less socialized, less conceptual and less discursive than our own, need symbolic representation and play.

He inferred that young children need concrete symbols in order to reflect on and to process what has happened during their daily lives. It would appear that Piaget polarised children's and adults' learning and saw children as **always** needing concrete examples and adults as **never** needing those examples. Within my experience, I often find that I need a concrete example in order to understand more fully. I think human development and learning may be a lot more fluid than Piaget conveyed and I am open to ideas about children being a lot more able than he thought.

In 'Play, Dreams and Imitation', Piaget (1951, p.169) took his ideas a step further by referring to 'secondary symbolism'. Piaget referred to Freud's use of the 'unconscious symbol, whose meaning is hidden from the subject' (p.170). In Piaget's terms, secondary symbolism 'is more directly related to the child's ego, and involves relatively permanent affective schemas' (1951, p.175). Primary symbols are used

...to express what interests him in the widest sense of the word and there is certainly assimilation of reality to the ego. But these interests are only temporary, they are on the surface of the ego, while in the case of secondary symbols it is a matter of intimate, permanent concerns of secret and often inexpressible desires (ibid)

Piaget (1951, pp 175-6) identified what he saw as the sources of secondary symbolism:

- Identification with the mother, pointing out that ‘rebellion against the mother is much more disturbing than against the father’
- ‘all those with whom the child lives give rise to a kind of “affective schema” a summary or blending of the various feelings aroused by them...’
- ‘the anxiety resulting from the absurd education which refuses to give children a true explanation when babies are born...’

Piaget went on to describe the link between children’s dreams and symbolic play, both of which contain content from the unconscious. He pointed out that ‘...matters are settled more easily in play than in dreams...’ as ‘in play there is always more or less conscious control’ (ibid, p.180).

### **Key Theories from Piaget’s Research**

Central to my study are ideas about adaptation to one’s environment including the family context and changes within the family. Children learn to cope with those changes but we are not quite sure how those processes of coping and coming to terms with change work. I am most interested in schemas and will use the concepts of assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium to understand observations of the focus children. I hope to show why children are motivated to explore certain schemas rather than others at particular times in



their lives. I also hope to explore and extend my understanding of the concept of reflective abstraction.

### **The Theories of Lev Vygotsky**

I came across Vygotsky's work during the 1990s when I was studying for a Master's Degree. I believe this was the time when Vygotsky's ideas and theories had become widely known in the UK, particularly within the field of Early Education with Care. I first heard about the 'zone of proximal development' which struck me as a very useful concept when trying to plan for children's learning in a nursery setting. In Vygotsky's own words,

The discrepancy between a child's actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance indicates his zone of proximal development (1986, p.187)

According to Vygotsky, we need to be looking ahead to what children may be able to do next, rather than testing what they have already achieved. He saw 'imitation as indispensable', whether 'in learning to speak' or in 'learning school subjects' (p.188). He also recognised that 'to imitate, it is necessary to possess the means of stepping from something one knows to something new' (p.187). He made the powerful assertion that 'What a child can do in co-operation today he can do alone tomorrow' (p.188). The pedagogy he described entailed considering the 'ripening functions' in each child (1986, p.188; 1978, p.86).

## **The Importance of Social Context**

Vygotsky's basic integrating theory was that children learn from being part of a social context. What appears first on the social plane is internalised and becomes part of a child's thinking. Vygotsky (1978, p.46) stated that

Within a general process of development, two qualitatively different lines of development, differing in origin, can be distinguished: the elementary processes, which are of biological origin, on the one hand, and the higher psychological functions, of sociocultural origin, on the other. The history of child behaviour is born from the interweaving of these two lines.

This theme of the importance of the cultural context runs through all of Vygotsky's writing. He identified the 'use of tools and human speech' as the 'two fundamental cultural forms of behaviour that arise in infancy' (ibid). Vygotsky's research has added an important dimension to my study with the clear focus on the role of other people in helping children to learn and in motivating them to explore particular concepts connected to their social environment at different times.

## **Mediation**

Another strong theme in Vygotsky's research and writing is 'mediation'. Just as he saw an able peer or adult as 'mediator' of a child's learning when they were in their 'zone of proximal development', he talked about 'signs' and 'tools' being used as 'mediators' in human endeavour. The idea of the 'tool' came from Marx's ideas of working tools used 'as forces that affect other objects in order to fulfil personal goals' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.54). Tools and signs enable human beings to progress in their thinking and in their adaptation to their environment. Hedegaard (1990, p.351) explained,

According to Vygotsky, the development of psychic tools determines humans' relations with their environment and with themselves. Psychic tools are analogous to industrial tools and are also characterized by being produced through social activity, rather than arising organically (Vygotsky, 1985-1987, p.309). Psychic tools may be very complex systems; as examples, Vygotsky mentioned spoken language, systems of notation, works of art, written language, schemata, diagrams, maps and drawings.

Vygotsky differentiated between tools and signs,

The tool's function is to serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature. The sign, on the other hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented (1978, p.55).

Vygotsky described how a simple action becomes a gesture or sign with meaning, shared between people. 'Pointing' begins as 'an unsuccessful attempt to grasp something', a mere movement towards an object (1978, p.56). He continued

When the mother comes to the child's aid and realizes his movement indicates something, the situation changes fundamentally. Pointing becomes a gesture for others. The child's unsuccessful attempt engenders a reaction not from the object he seeks but from another person. Consequently, the primary meaning of that unsuccessful grasping movement is established by others.

Subsequently, the child learns to point with the primary intention of communicating what he wants, to other people. What began as an external action 'is reconstructed and begins to occur internally (ibid, p.57). In a similar way, Vygotsky's theory was that,

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts (ibid).

### **The Development of Thought**

Vygotsky (1986) traced the development of thought and believed that thought developed in a similar way, interpersonal to intrapersonal. Rather than seeing 'egocentric speech' as 'not yet socialized' or deficit, as Piaget appeared to, Vygotsky viewed 'egocentric speech' as 'already social' and reported that it 'gives rise to inner speech' (Kozulin, 1986, p.xxxv). Vygotsky (1986, p.30) repeated some of Piaget's experiments but tried to prevent 'free activity' in order to make the children 'face problems'. Vygotsky found that 'a disruption in the smooth flow of an activity is an important stimulus for egocentric speech'. Therefore, to Vygotsky, egocentric speech meant thinking aloud and problemsolving. As children matured, they less frequently vocalised their thoughts and they gradually began to use inner speech or thinking at the beginning of an activity, to plan what they would do in advance.

Vygotsky noticed a similar pattern in the development of drawing. Very young children would draw first and, afterwards, decide and name what they had drawn. Gradually, as they developed, the children would decide what to draw beforehand, and then draw, thereby 'raising their acts to the level of purposeful behaviour' (1986, p.31).

## **The Development of Scientific Concepts**

In a similar way, Vygotsky traced the development of spontaneous and scientific concepts. Vygotsky was much more interested than Piaget in the role of others, including teachers, in relation to children's development and learning. While Piaget engaged in a quest to understand children's thinking through their actions and explanations, Vygotsky wanted to understand how everyday knowledge, gained spontaneously, connected with knowledge presented verbally to children in school. Vygotsky claimed that Piaget saw spontaneous concepts as naïve and as ideas that would be left behind once children developed as mature thinkers. Vygotsky (1986, p.149) acknowledged the role of development,

Concept formation...is a complex and genuine act of thought that cannot be taught by drilling, but can be accomplished only when the children's mental development itself has reached the requisite level.

Vygotsky (1986, p.161) deduced that '...the acquisition of scientific concepts is carried out with the mediation provided by already acquired concepts'. We use what we know already, when faced with new learning. We need to be able to make connections between what we have discovered spontaneously and the concepts presented to us verbally.

Piaget responded to Vygotsky's critique of his view by pointing out that he agreed with Vygotsky's statement that 'scientific and spontaneous concepts start from different points but eventually meet' (Vygotsky, 1986, p.271). However the point on which the two powerful theoreticians seemed to differ was the role of other people. Piaget saw the role of the teacher as setting up an environment where children could actively explore and that would 'evoke spontaneous elaboration on the part of the child' of his current structures;

Vygotsky, on the other hand, saw the teacher as providing verbally a whole system of concepts with general rules to follow, that would help children understand their spontaneous concepts in relation to the whole system (ibid).

Relating this idea to some of the research data, Steffi was faced with the prospect of her parents separating. She could not fully understand that concept (a complex 'scientific' concept) or how the separation would feel before it happened. So she explored the aspect she had previously discovered of 'here and gone' by 'enveloping' objects and re-presenting different versions of 'gone', for example, sleep, jail and death.

### **Re-presentation and Symbols**

Vygotsky was interested in how children re-present their experiences. He reported that

...the child's thinking depends first of all on his memory...Their general representations of the world are based on the recall of concrete instances and do not yet possess the character of abstraction (1978, p.50)

Vygotsky described how a 'human being ties a knot in her handkerchief as a reminder...' (p.51). The knot is a 'temporary link', an external reminder or symbol that stands for something internal. This is not a good example as it is not something a young child would be able or inclined to do. Within the research data, Jordan appeared to re-enact his mum arriving and leaving the nursery when he was puzzled about her taking his younger sister home before his home time. Jordan seemed to be 're-presenting' through his actions, his internal concern or worry about his mum leaving him.

Vygotsky wrote about play, ‘...in play a child creates an imaginary situation’ (1978, p.93). Vygotsky argued that all play contains rules, ‘...the imaginary situation has to contain rules of behaviour, so every game with rules contains an imaginary situation’ (p.95). In Vygotsky’s view, even a game like chess is a ‘kind of imaginary situation’ (ibid). The rules in Jordan’s representation involved going through the gate, waiting and saying “hello” and “bye, bye”. He had drawn or abstracted what he saw as the essentials from his real experience of his mum.

Vygotsky also talked about symbolic play,

In play thought is separated from objects and action arises from ideas rather than from things: a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse (1978, p.97).

Vygotsky saw it as ‘terribly difficult for a child to sever thought (the meaning of a word) from object’ and said that ‘play provides a transitional stage in this direction whenever an object (for example a stick) becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse’ (ibid). He also talked about ‘Action as a pivot to replace the real action’ (1978, p.100). In the last example Jordan seemed to use his actions as a pivot to replace and reflect on his separation from his mum.

Vygotsky explained that

From the point of view of development, creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought

So the action is once removed from the original act being replayed. ‘...children’s symbolic play can be understood as a very complex system of “speech” through gestures that communicate and indicate the meaning of things’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.108)

Vygotsky saw ‘written language as a system of second order symbolism’ (p.110). The degree of abstraction is greater when using conventional signs. Even the idea of marks as symbols separates the representation from the original actions.

Vygotsky also commented on the development of drawing. He stated that ‘children are much more symbolists than naturalists and are in no way concerned with complete and exact similarity...’ (p.112). When a child draws, he ‘tells a story’ rather than tries to produce an image. Vygotsky viewed young children’s drawings as ‘...graphic speech that arises on the basis of verbal speech’ (ibid). There is ‘a certain degree of abstraction’ but, at first, drawing seems much more closely linked to action.

### **Methods Used by Vygotsky**

Vygotsky frequently used research carried out by other researchers, including Piaget, to illustrate his hypotheses. Research mentioned in the works I have read, depended on experimental methods. Unlike Piaget’s writing, Vygotsky gave very little information in his writing about the research methods used and very little raw data was included. Vygotsky seemed to ‘cut to the chase’ in much of his research (Fletcher, 2006). He often used examples from literature to illuminate or back up what he was claiming. This may have been because of the short time he was able to spend carrying out research and his short life.



Although I am drawn to some of Vygotsky's work because of its simplicity and pure common sense approach, his method is not something I want to emulate in this study. Many researchers use experimental methods to try to understand children's emotions and cognition (Mostow et al, 2002; Schult, 2002; Mumme and Fernald, 2003). These methods often involve using some sort of stimulus such as 'picture completion'. The aspect I am most interested in, is what occurs naturally and, therefore, experimental methods are not suitable.

### **Key Theories from Vygotsky's Research**

I think the idea of having a 'zone of proximal development' is useful, whether we are referring to cognition or emotions or both aspects of development. I have thought a great deal about the 'zone' in relation to emotional understanding. In some ways, emotional learning is thrust upon us because of changes beyond our control and therefore we learn to accept or deal with those in some way. Vygotsky's strong focus on 'mediation' has helped me to think about schemas as mediators of those much bigger concepts, such as death and divorce, that might be overwhelming and impossible to conceptualise for most children. Also I have found Vygotsky's exposition of representation and symbolic play more explicit and easier to understand than Piaget's even though the two men were often saying very much the same thing.

## **Discussion of Piaget's and Vygotsky's Theories and Their Relevance to This Study**

Piaget and Vygotsky have traditionally been viewed as holding opposing views about the process of development and learning. However, recent analyses of their work indicate that they had a great deal in common (Tryphon and Voneche, 1996). Marti (1996, p.57) described the debate,

In a certain way, the rational and individualistic optimism of Piaget (whose motto could be “rationality is constructed despite other people”) is set against Vygotsky’s social optimism (“it’s thanks to others that we become conscious”)

Marti concluded that it was as useful to consider similarities in their two approaches as to examine differences. He examined the concepts of ‘internalisation and externalisation’ as explored by the two great researchers (p.58). He recounted that Piaget’s view is often expressed as ‘inside-out’, ‘...cognitive processes are constructed internally and it is only subsequently and secondarily that this construction has external repercussions which modify the child’s relationship with his or her familiars and environment’. ‘Vygotsky’s conception, on the other hand, is described as being ‘outside-in’, that is, the child first establishes relationships with others and these relationships, once they are internalised, constitute the basis of the child’s cognitive processes’ (ibid). Marti thought that these ‘uni-directional models’ were an over-simplification of what both men said and that both were talking about ‘a constant mutation throughout development’ (ibid). Piaget and Vygotsky both believed that ‘internalisation’ was key in understanding development and that knowledge is not merely ‘transmitted’ but ‘transformed’ during the constructivist process (ibid, p.82).

Bruner (1997, p.195) saw the two great men as ‘profoundly different’ and ‘incommensurate’ or not comparable. He noted that ‘Each was surely a child of his time and place’ (p.193). Bruner saw Piaget as,

Preoccupied with the invariant order of mental development, Vygotsky was on his part preoccupied with how others provide the cultural patterning that makes the process of development possible (p.192).

Bruner concluded that Piaget was primarily concerned with ‘explaining’ and Vygotsky with ‘interpreting’ and that ‘the two (processes) are not antithetic to each other’ but they do have ‘different developmental trajectories’ (p.194). Bruner saluted their differences and commented that ‘we are better for having both even though at times it may seem overwhelming’ (p.195).

In terms of my own understanding, I first recognised and researched the ‘the repeated patterns in children’s play’ that Piaget referred to as schemas in 1989-90 (Arnold, 1990). However, almost from the start, I was interested in the role of other people in the children’s explorations of schemas. I was also curious about whether children who played together were doing so because they were exploring similar patterns or schemas. The children’s explorations were rooted in their actions, for example, throwing, covering, connecting, and therefore I could see that these actions might be in opposition to each other. I did find that children, who wanted to act on objects in similar ways, were drawn together but I also felt that there was more to discover than just who played together (Arnold, 1990).

Sharing ideas with parents about schemas was an important aspect of that first study and of my ongoing work. The parents very quickly recognised the patterns in their children’s play

and became excited about the developments they were seeing (Whalley, 1997, 2001; Arnold, 1990, 1997). Spotting schemas demonstrated what children were learning and the research showed that learning is more complex than a simple hierarchical system. Other researchers with whom I discussed schemas did not seem to know why the children latched on to particular schemas and explored them extensively, sometimes for a very long time. Tina Bruce's explanation was that 'some children are specialists and others are all-rounders' (1989-2000, Personal Communication). Chris Athey stated that 'It is within the human repertoire to employ schemas...they are not learned ...schemas are the universals' (2007, Personal Communication). This question of what motivates children to explore particular schemas has cropped up again and again in the intervening years.

My main thesis is that the bringing together of the observed and identified patterns or schemas with each child's socio-cultural context at that time, illuminates the question of motivation to act in particular ways. Often, the motivation to act has deep, emotional significance. I would agree with Athey that all humans have a 'repertoire of schemas' and that the schemas are 'universals' but that the cultural context, including emotional aspects, flesh out particular behaviours at certain times.

As far as the title of this study is concerned, I am happy to report that Piaget and Vygotsky more or less agreed on the idea that children 're-present' their earlier experiences in order to make sense of them in some way. They also agreed that the use of symbols demonstrates a degree of abstraction that shows development. Although Piaget offered the idea of 'reflective abstraction', I did not gain a clear idea from his writing about how that abstraction occurred. However, in Vygotsky's explanation of symbols and symbolic play, I began to be able to trace the journey from concrete experiences, 'replayed as memories', to

using an object or action ‘as a pivot to replace the real action’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.100). I began to conceptualise the schema as a pivot to either grasp something of the meaning, not yet understood, or to represent something of a feeling that was unexpressed.

I think Piaget’s idea of ‘secondary symbolism’ is useful in the sense of conceptualising the content in children’s play that is out of their conscious awareness. For example, Harry (aged 2 years 10 months) played with Teddy Tom, ‘he carried him carefully, saying “He’s got no daddy”, then “he’s got no mummy” – “no brothers, no sisters”’ (Arnold, 2003, p.60). Harry knew he was playing out a story with a teddy but did not know and was unable to articulate that he was expressing his own fear of abandonment.

So if many of Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s ideas were similar or at least philosophically coherent, why have they been received and expressed as being so different to each other? For this, I want to go right back to their experiences as children, that I briefly described at the beginning of this section. Piaget was an only child, engaged in study as a solitary thinker from an early age. He was brought up in capitalist Switzerland. Vygotsky was one of eight children. Engaging in dialogue and debate was probably more typical of his childhood experiences. He was brought up in Russia during a time of great unrest, prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

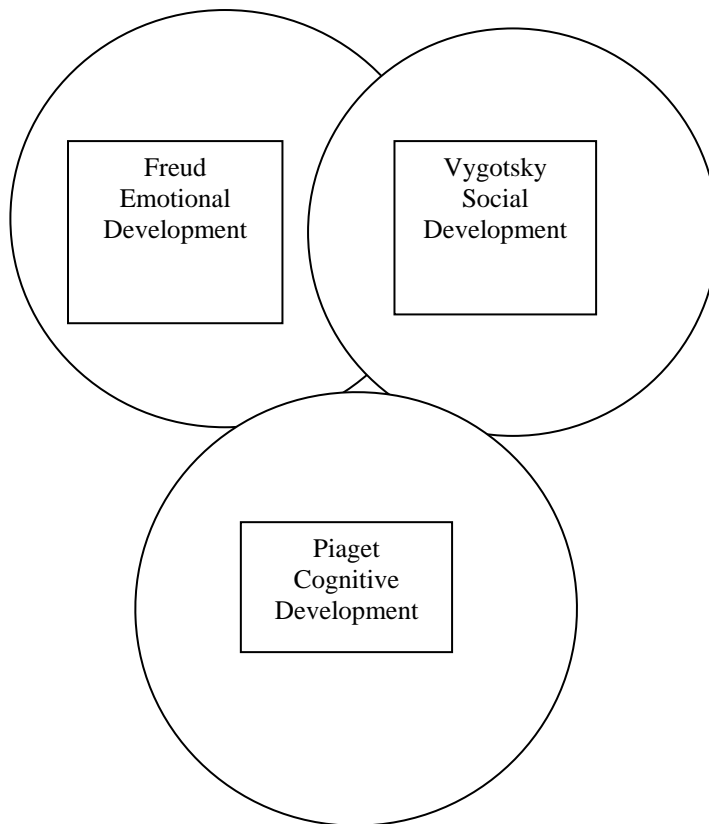
This brings me to my second hypothesis, that we, as human beings, all understand our experiences through our constructions of the world made during childhood. We take some things as ‘given’, unless we have had opportunities to reflect and to become aware of the impact of our context and experiences on our thinking. So it is not surprising that Piaget’s view of development and learning conveyed the image of a child as a ‘lone explorer’ as he

was in childhood. Vygotsky's view of development and learning, on the other hand, was completely embedded in the busy social context of his childhood. Within this study, I will refer to my own growing awareness of how my understanding of development and learning has been shaped by my experiences as a child and as a parent to my children.

With regard to methodology, I have chosen to use those methods and techniques that have resonated with me in my reading. From Piaget, I take the idea of naturalistic observation, carried out with the extra advantage of a video camera. From Vygotsky, I take the idea of dialogue with parents and workers as part of an iterative process in order to interpret and understand more fully.

## Afterword

In this section I have referred to three giants, Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Each foregrounded and studied different aspects of development and left legacies and followers who continued to develop and adapt their life's work. By drawing on each man's theories and those of their successors, I hope to make connections between cognition, emotions and each child's social context.



## 1.2 Piaget's Work Carried Forward by Chris Athey and Other Writers and Researchers

In this section I show how Athey, in her seminal text, and other researchers have carried forward the work of Piaget.

Chris Athey has made a major contribution to our understanding of Piaget's work. Athey directed the Froebel Project in London in the early 1970s and wrote up the findings in her seminal text on 'Extending Thought in Young Children: A Parent - Teacher Partnership'. Athey was able to take Piaget's research and to apply his theory about schemas to children aged 2-5 years, an age group he was less preoccupied with. Athey argued against using 'deficit descriptions' of young children, as many people thought that Piaget had done and stated that she and her team had focussed on 'what children, parents and teachers **can do**' rather than cannot yet do, in the study (Athey, 1990, p.xii).

### **Working with Parents in a More Equal Way**

Athey was innovative in her approach to both the children and their families. She noted that it was usual to use a compensatory approach and did not wish to see the children or parents in a deficit way. She and her team drew on the Headstart findings from the US, noticing that 'where parents were involved in early education programmes children made considerable IQ gains' (ibid, p.20).

Athey shared theory about schemas with the parents of the twenty children she studied for two years. Parents were inspired when they observed the project children (and their siblings) at home and shared their observations with the project team. Athey reported that



‘Ongoing analysis of observations made daily during the project provided the main substance of communication with parents’ (ibid, p.51).

What was unusual at that time was that ‘...parents were genuinely respected and recognised as experts on their own children...’ (ibid, p.61). Powerfully, Athey reported that ‘Nothing gets under a parent’s skin more quickly and more permanently than the illumination of his or her own child’s behaviour. The effect of participation can be profound’ (ibid, p.66).

### **Constructivist Pedagogy**

Athey articulated her pedagogy near the beginning of her book, declaring herself a ‘constructivist teacher’, which she defined as someone ‘who seriously considers what the child brings to the learning situation as well as what he or she wishes to transmit’ (ibid, p.30). Constructivism is based on Piaget’s idea that each learner constructs their own knowledge and understanding ‘through the coordination of assimilated firsthand experiences to existing schemas’ (Athey, 2006). Athey saw the teacher’s role as ‘arranging things so that knowledge is actively constructed and not simply copied’ (Athey, 1990, p.31). She adhered to Piaget’s belief that ‘thought is internalised action’ but acknowledged that ‘it is difficult to test’ (ibid, p.33).

Athey was very clear about the role of the teacher, whether it was parent or professional, ‘Adults do not ‘teach’ as much as ‘validate’ with interest and approval’ (ibid, p.103). One hypothesis was that ‘speech is acquired in synchrony with acquired meanings’ (ibid, p.179).

Athey commented that

The highest level of adult help in the Froebel Project was where children's speech was extended in relation to their schematic concerns (ibid, p.75).

### **Schemas**

Athey offered a much clearer idea of specific schemas with numerous examples from the twenty project children (ibid, p.35). She identified 'eight distinguishable categories of action schemas:

1. Dynamic vertical
2. Dynamic back and forth or side to side
3. Dynamic circular
4. Going over or under
5. Going round a boundary
6. Enveloping and containing
7. Going through a boundary
8. Thought'

(ibid, p.130).

Athey also explained and exemplified the different levels at which children explore these schemas:

- Motor

- Symbolic representation
- Functional dependency
- Thought

Athey offered definitions; motor (or more commonly referred to as sensori motor), ‘where a child performs actions that do not appear to have representational significance’ (ibid, p.68); symbolic representation, ‘being able to re-play in the mind the ‘look’ of objects or the movement patterns of objects or other features of objects that have been experienced’ (ibid, p.40); functional dependency relationships, ‘when children observe the effects of their actions on objects or material’ (ibid, p.70); thought, ‘internalizations of earlier schematic concerns’ (ibid, p.69). Athey has more recently stated that we have evidence of children’s actual thinking when ‘children discuss experiences in the absence of concrete reminders’ (Personal Communication, 2004).

What also has relevance to this study was Athey’s statement that ‘symbolic representation consisted of three sub-divisions:

1. Graphic representation of the static state of objects (configurational or ikonic)
2. Action representation of the dynamic aspects of objects and events
3. Speech representation of either the static or dynamic aspects of objects or events that accompanied representations 1 and 2

I think this has relevance for my study because, often when workers and parents are talking about symbolic representation, they are not explicit about the different ways young children represent their earlier experiences. In focussing on schemas, the action

representation often seems to provide a link or similarity, but, as early years educators, we get more excited about the graphic representation and see that as a developmental progression. Matthews (2003) has shown how closely linked the action and the graphic representations are.

### **The Affective Dimension of Schemas**

Athey acknowledged that ‘with all schemas there is a social and affective dimension. A horse is placed ‘safely’ inside an enclosure’ (ibid, p.196). Categories of affect were noted but Athey and her team found it ‘too difficult to record relationships between different kinds of affective response and diagnosed schemas’ (ibid, p.76).

The data indicated that there might be a connection between enveloping and sibling rivalry but Athey rejected this on the grounds that other ‘interpretations’ based on cognitive gains were ‘more positive’ than interpretations of what parents saw as ‘good or bad behaviour’ (ibid, p.52). This is precisely the sort of lead that I intend to follow. Although I acknowledge that ‘enveloping’ behaviour is very common and can be interpreted as helping children to understand ‘area’, ‘volume and capacity’, ‘here and gone’ and ‘inside’, I also want to be open to making links with each child’s family context and emotional life. In the example that Athey presented of Lois ‘covering over the drawing of her brother and suggesting that the cot should be put in a cupboard and the cupboard in a cave’, I want to be open to understanding and accepting Lois’ possible negative feelings about her brother. For me, that would not mean seeing Lois in a less positive light, but having a more rounded understanding of Lois, as a complex human being with positive and negative feelings about her brother.

## **Other Studies That Support Athey's Findings**

Many small scale studies have been carried out using Athey's work as the basis for understanding young children's actions and representations and for making sense of Piaget's research in a modern context. However, very few of those studies have been published and, even fewer, in peer-reviewed journals. The following four writers and researchers have made significant contributions to my understanding and to understanding in the field of early education with care.

### **Tina Bruce**

As far as my own learning was concerned, Tina Bruce translated for me into simple language, the main ideas in Athey's research (Bruce, 1991, 1997, 2005). Tina Bruce was part of the Froebel Project Team as class teacher, and, therefore, 'lived' the project for two years. Tina Bruce supported the nursery team at Pen Green for many years as a pedagogical adviser and critical friend (Bruce, 1996). As a nursery worker and then head of nursery, I worked closely with Tina Bruce for many years, introducing ideas about schemas to parents and supporting and extending the children's learning in the nursery by identifying the schemas they were exploring (Whalley, 1994, 1997, 2001; Bruce and Bartholomew, 1993). Bruce has spent many years since the Froebel Project speaking at conferences and providing professional development opportunities for staff teams on schemas.

In her books, Bruce has made links between schemas and; ‘human development’ (2005, p.73); the work of the pioneers such as Froebel, Montessori, Steiner and Darwin, as well as Piaget (ibid, pp78-80); and with Laevers’ work on ‘involvement’ (Bruce, 2005, p.90; Laevers, 1997). Bruce has linked schemas and feelings, but in a very general way. Bruce went on to direct the Blockplay Project in London, reported in Gura (Ed), 1992.

In terms of ‘symbolic’ behaviour, Bruce drew on brain research and stated that ‘Symbolic behaviour has layers that become more and more co-ordinated as the network strengthens’ (2005, p.102). She explained that

Actively seeking out things in the environment that echo, match and resonate biologically with schemas within the person or raising schemas to the surface through recognition that what is ‘out there’ matches with internalized schema clusters, are both important socio-cultural influences on schemas

I think that young children (and adults too) ‘seek out things in the environment’ that ‘echo or resonate’ with their inner worlds, just as Lois may have done in Athey’s study.

### **Cathy Nutbrown**

Another contemporary researcher and writer, who has helped to make the research on schemas more accessible is Cathy Nutbrown (2006). Nutbrown carried out a study of 40 children, aged 3-5, over a year during the 1980s and has also drawn on other rich examples observed by others, including Athey. Nutbrown has taken the research on schemas forward, particularly in making links with ‘children’s developing understanding of mathematical and scientific ideas’ (Nutbrown, 2006, p.59) and with ‘patterns of literacy’ (ibid, p.74). With regard to mathematics, ‘three major schemas emerged...dynamic

vertical, dynamic circular and enveloping/containing...with each schema one idea appeared to dominate...

- Dynamic vertical – children were involved in activities to do with height
- Dynamic circular – children were exploring aspects of rotation and roundness
- Containing/enveloping – instances to do with capacity were observed’ (ibid, p.60)

I have always thought that I could easily see the connections between schemas and young children’s mathematical explorations and understanding, so Nutbrown’s analysis affirmed my thinking. These connections have also been explored and confirmed by Worthington and Carruthers in their research into children’s mathematics (Worthington and Carruthers, 2003).

In terms of how children learn to write and ‘nourishing young children’s thinking through stories’, Nutbrown has done some sterling work (Nutbrown, 2006, p.90). Like Athey, Nutbrown identified links between the ‘form and content of young children’s writing and other underpinning threads of children’s thought and action’ (ibid, p.80). Nutbrown illustrated these links with the following example: ‘Sophie (7:5) was writing about a train ride’. Nutbrown pointed out that ‘the content of her writing included several references to connections: a tunnel; gates at the station; stepping stones across a river’ (ibid, pp. 80/81). At the same time, Sophie was interested in ‘joined up writing’ even though the class had not tackled it yet (another connection) (ibid, p.81). The pattern or form of ‘connecting’ was revealed in Sophie’s story and in what she was trying to achieve physically (mastering ‘joined up’ writing).

Nutbrown also observed that children ‘represent writing as an activity, practising the *feel* of writing’ (ibid). She noted that children begin to recognise the ‘form’ of particular letters, often from their own names and to practise writing ‘the beginnings of their name *because they can*’ (ibid, p.83). Workers and researchers at Pen Green have gathered further evidence of the link between schemas and emergent writing in several studies (Arnold, 1997, 1999, 2003; Hayward, 2003). The connection with one’s own name is an emotional one. Marian Whitehead has described what this might mean, ‘Personal names are charged with meaning: they encapsulate our sense of self-worth and our place in the world’ (Whitehead, 1997, p.140).

In my view, the greatest contribution Nutbrown has made is in reminding workers and parents of the importance of stories to nourish young children’s thinking (Nutbrown, 2006, p.90). She suggested that a match can be made between children’s own experiences and emotions and what is contained in a story (ibid, p.93). Nutbrown suggested stories that ‘fuel children’s ideas’ about ‘insideness’, ‘up and down’, ‘rotation and roundness’ and ‘journeys and journeying’ (ibid, pp. 106-109). Certainly within this study, Steffi consistently made up, listened to and repeated stories that connected with the schemas she was exploring. There was usually an emotional dimension to those explorations. For example, Steffi often used ‘seriation’ (ordering in relation to size) to represent power and conflict in her storying. Many traditional stories, for example, ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ contain those ideas within them.



## **John Matthews**

John Matthews studied his own three children and was particularly interested in their drawing and painting (Matthews, 2003). He traced their development from movement to mark making and the repertoires that each child developed. He acknowledged that children 'show emotion' in their 'expression (in speech, action or images)' and that 'they use anything they can get their hands on for the purposes of expression and representation' (ibid, p.3).

Matthews stated that '...especially with drawing and painting media, children learn how to form representations, symbols and signs. This forms the basis for all thinking' (ibid, p.1). Matthews put forward the view that 'children's art has a central part to play in cognitive development' (ibid).

Matthews did not see children's early representations in a deficit way. Unlike many psychologists, he did not view children as working towards providing a sort of 'correct' form or 'visual realism' (ibid, p.3). Matthews thought that the practice of encouraging children to paint still life was misguided. If we search for visual realism (or correct copying) then we misunderstand 'children's art and its meaning and significance, to the detriment of children's intellectual and emotional development' (ibid). Matthews even went as far as to observe that within education systems of today, children's spontaneous drawings 'are systematically suppressed' (ibid, p.4).

Matthews, like Athey, developed a view about the role of the adult, whether parent or professional. He argued for 'the need of adult interaction and support...of a special and

subtle kind' assisted by 'a knowledge of the developmental significance of children's spontaneous use and organisation of visual media' (ibid, p.5). He stated that 'the best teachers relate to very young children as fellow learners. A teacher is an adult companion to the child on an intellectual adventure' (ibid, p.139). I wonder whether an adult can also accompany children on an emotional adventure? I think this idea is implicit in Matthews research, particularly because many of his observations are of parent and child. He emphasised 'shared understandings' and the child's 'illusion of complete mastery and control' (ibid, p.207). These ideas link with the work of Colwyn Trevarthen on the relationship between adult and child, which he has described as 'companionship' (2002) and also with Winnicott's ideas about the space between adult and child and the 'illusion' created. Winnicott explained, 'The mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the *illusion* that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create' (Winnicott, 1991, p.12). In this study, one worker, Margaret, seemed to engage with Steffi in this way, allowing Steffi to take the lead but with enough 'shared understanding' to be able to 'tune into' Steffi's world (Stern, 1985; 2003). It was probably no coincidence that Margaret has a great love of stories and, like Steffi, often interacted through storytelling and listening to and recording children's own stories.

Matthews acknowledged that children use schemas '...actions she has discovered and developed in a number of contexts...' (Matthews, 2003, p.23). He explained,

When the same or similar action is applied in different contexts and upon different objects, the child receives valuable information about the object and how the movement has affected the object (ibid).

Matthews described his son, Ben's, representation of a car. Ben commented on the movement of the car, while making a rotating movement. He combined this with a push/pull movement and noticed a shape which he named 'car' (ibid).

Matthews reported that Piaget thought of action schemas as 'blueprints for action' and figurative schemas as 'mental pictures' (ibid). Matthews has drawn on recent brain research to describe 'these actions as *attractors*, not stored as representations in the brain, as Piaget thought, but emerging in specific contexts' (ibid). Matthews drew on the research of Thelen and Smith (1994), who described,

...two sorts of 'attractor systems', each focussed on a different aspect of objects and events, which they term the 'what' and 'where' aspects. Work in neuroscience also confirms two streams of visual information in the human visual system, one that carries 'where' information and one that carries 'what' information (Elliott, 1999). These correspond approximately to the configurative (shape) and the dynamic aspects (movement) of objects and events. 'What' and 'where' attractors flow into each other to make more complex sequences of action and also to form dynamic categories which can be both more generalised or differentiated when set in motion by similar or related stimuli (ibid).

Perhaps this explanation of 'attractors' offers an insight into how the brain develops and becomes capable of 'abstracting' information from earlier action and figurative schemas? For example, this might explain how a line of objects, going from smallest to biggest, can later be used on a higher plane of thought when thinking about counting or who is the tallest or who is the best at something. The same 'attractors' emerge when placing the objects in a line and thinking about a line of objects or features in a seriation. So this may help us to understand what Piaget called 'reflective abstraction'.

Matthews pointed out that ‘although representation does often try to make sense of previous experiences, it is not a copy of that experience. Representation is an essentially dynamic, constructive act which shapes the experience itself’ (Matthews, 2003, p.24).

Just as children might abstract or generalise from their previous experiences, they also seem to ‘differentiate’ aspects of more complex concepts, not yet fully understood. Children might be observed reaching back (in time) to their previously experienced and practised action or figurative schemas in order to understand new concepts. In the current study, Steffi, trying to understand that her parents were going to separate, reached back to her action of ‘covering’ or ‘enveloping’ objects in order to think ‘as if’ her dad was not in the family home (the figurative aspect or how things would look without him), a kind of ‘reflective expansion’.

Matthews reiterated Athey’s view on the connection between language and schemas noting that the ‘where’ and ‘what’ ‘concerns are also reflected in language, which seems to be divided into *dynamic* or *stative* aspects, that is, language is divided into utterances about either the states of things or the states of events’ (ibid, p.25). Matthews noted that these concerns about ‘where things are’ and ‘what things are’ are reflected externally in ‘painting, drawing and three-dimensional activities, plus dance-like and musical actions’ (ibid).

### **Janet Shaw**

Janet Shaw (1991) foregrounded emotions in her study of ‘parents’ conceptual development in the context of dialogue with a community teacher’. Shaw was working in

the North East of England with vulnerable families. She was, at that time, a home visiting teacher, who drew on the research of Athey and others, to consider whether it was 'possible to apply a model of conceptual development to the parent's thinking in relationship to their child's development' (Shaw, 1991, p.1).

Shaw was critical of Athey's approach in the sense that the agenda (discussing schemas) was defined by the professionals, rather than negotiated with the parents (ibid, p.33). Shaw questioned whether 'this constituted a true partnership with parents' (ibid). Shaw also noticed that there was an implicit message in Athey's study that 'parents appeared to have undergone perspective changes in the way in which they viewed aspects of the child's behaviour' (ibid, p.51). However, this was not Athey's central concern and she was not clear about 'whether this was the case with all parents and to what degree or extent this happened' (ibid). Shaw decided to 'explicitly explore the parents' learning process in relation to understanding their child's behaviour' (ibid, p.52).

Shaw shared schematic theory with the parents in her study when she felt that was an appropriate and acceptable alternative interpretation of their child's behaviour. She demonstrated, through family case studies, that the parents gradually considered these different interpretations of behaviour and subsequently changed their attitudes and behaviour towards their children. This occurred to different degrees in the families that took part.

Although Shaw's primary concern was with the parents' development, she also wrote about the children's development. Shaw saw 'every act of the child's spontaneous behaviour (as) perhaps an expression of her emotional and intellectual development' (ibid,

p.6). She viewed 'The child's formation of symbols' as creating 'a link between emotional and intellectual development' (ibid, p.5).

Shaw questioned whether

...schemas become the symbolic vehicles for the expression of the child's emotional and intellectual development. The child is not, however, consciously aware of this process. Indeed, it is possible that this process is the foundation of the formation of the unconscious mind (ibid).

This idea seems to link with my idea of the schema as 'mediator' of feelings and emotional events. Shaw went as far as to suggest that recognising a child's schemas 'appears to give the parent and teacher access to the child's emotional experience in addition to her intellectual development' (ibid, p.6).

Shaw drew on child development and psychoanalytic theory and asserted that

The recognition of the importance of symbolism for a child's emotional and intellectual development could have far reaching consequences in education (Ibid, p.64).

Shaw pointed out that 'play and learning are often in conflict in education' (ibid, p.63). Matthews mentioned children's creativity in drawing being suppressed in our educational context. Shaw thought that, whereas in psychoanalysis children's play is valued and recognised as an important expression of their inner world, in education we sometimes view learning as more important than play.

In her study, Shaw increasingly drew on the psychoanalytic literature to support her understanding of the parents' relationships with their children and also her relationships with the parents.

With regard to the children, Shaw concluded that

An infant's concept of objects is initially formed through the projection onto them of aspects of her inner life...Symbolising anxiety through projection onto objects provided the child with a defence against directly experiencing the anxiety (ibid, p.364)

She also explained that, in relation to separation, 'fantasy play appeared to provide a containment for this anxiety through its indirect expression and a defence against directly experiencing the anxiety' (ibid, p.365).

An even greater implication for education and for working with parents, was her finding that

The meanings the parents attached to the child's behaviour determined the child's emotional and intellectual growth. The child's act of behaviour and the parent's interpretation of it, formed the core of the child's development (ibid, p.370)

## **Afterword**

Although Athey and the four researchers and writers in this section have each 'foregrounded' different aspects of the work on schemas, the central theory has not changed. We have, however, through the brain research, gained a clearer understanding of some of the processes involved. Matthews further explained the idea of 'attractors',

There are two types of basic attractor systems set off with emergent representation. One traces around the contours of shapes in terms of action, while another system records the features of objects. Gradually the child learns the name for shapes ('round' for example) and this word may cause families of attractors to form around it. The word acts like a 'pivot' around which utterances and linguistic, visual and kinaesthetic representations (to do with movement and the sensation of movement) are formed (Matthews, 2003, p.29)

This idea would explain why Jordan, in this study, repeatedly dropped a tea towel on the floor and studied the configuration made. He was giving attention to the movement and the configuration. A helpful adult could show interest and offer language to describe his actions. That language could serve as a 'pivot' when Jordan repeated his actions with different objects, thereby assimilating new content into his 'trajectory' schema.

Seymour Papert, in the foreword to his book on computers, talked about how he 'fell in love with gears before he was two years old' (1980, p.viii). As a young child he had 'developed an intense involvement with automobiles' (p.vi). Through his interest, 'playing with gears became a favourite pastime...I loved rotating objects against one another in gearlike motions...' (ibid). As an adult, he met Piaget and discussed the 'affective component' of assimilation, seemingly neglected by Piaget in his writing. Papert deduced that Piaget was 'modest' rather than 'arrogant' about the impact of emotions on learning. Papert referred to the gear as a '*transitional object*',

As well as connecting with the formal knowledge of mathematics, it also connects with the "body knowledge", the sensorimotor schemata of a child. You can *be* the gear, you can understand how it turns by projecting yourself into its place and turning with it. It is this double relationship-both abstract and sensory-that gives the gear the power to carry powerful mathematics into the mind (ibid, p.viii)

Papert reflected that falling in love with gears could not be 'reduced to purely "cognitive" terms' (ibid).



Papert's work illustrated how emotions aid cognition. I also wanted to discover how cognition aids emotions.

### **Key Issues**

In all of these studies, naturalistic observations were made either at home or in settings. The researchers were either close to the children and families to begin with, like Matthews, or made closer relationships with them during the research studies. Only Athey mentioned having a 'control group' in order to establish the enhanced development of the focus children. Considering that her study was conducted during the 1970s, this is not surprising. This was right at the beginning of a move to acknowledge the subjective nature of all research and to accept research of a much more qualitative nature (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

All of these researchers effectively used schematic theory as a lens to understand children's development. Matthews and Shaw made an explicit link with emotional development as I intend to do. Matthews' contribution included a description of brain activity that has made much clearer to me the possible role of action in recalling and representing and in making connections between experiences and concepts.

### 1.3 Vygotsky's Work Carried Forward by Bruner and Other Writers and Researchers

In this section I show how world leaders in Early Education today have connected and built on the work of Vygotsky.

#### **Jerome Bruner**

Bruner has had a long and distinguished career spent leading research on Early Education in the United States and the United Kingdom. He has drawn on the research of both Piaget and Vygotsky to inform his thinking. During his career he has expounded concepts such as the 'spiral curriculum', the idea that we revisit learning at different levels. Like Vygotsky, Bruner was trying to connect early 'intuitive' learning with a 'later more formal or structured' learning (Bruner, 2006b, p.152). He claimed that 'Any subject could be taught to any child at any age in some form that was honest' (2006b, p.153). Learning could be thought of as a spiral, whereby we 'begin with an intuitive account within (our) reach' and then 'circle back later in a more powerful, more generative, more structured way to understand it more deeply' until it becomes 'a way of thinking (Bruner, 2006b, p.145). In Bruner's view, 'Readiness is not only born but made' (2006b, p.153). Bruner, like Vygotsky, was concerned with pedagogy.

Bruner also reframed Piaget's ideas about stages of development by referring to the more flexible and less hierarchical modes. Garvey (1990, p.42) in her book on play, described the three modes or ways of organising mental activities put forward by Bruner:

...this mode of representing an action-object experience, he referred to as the "enactive mode"

...the nature of the child's representations of actions and their relations to objects next moves towards what Bruner has called the "iconic mode", the mode in which images or pictures of events and experiences organise the child's mental activities...

...Finally as the child learns to associate the arbitrary and conventional labels of Language with his own experiences, he moves into the "symbolic mode" of representation.

Although Bruner described himself as 'hardly a Vygotskian in any strict sense of the term' he has increasingly been drawn towards the idea that 'the role of culture in mental development is enormously helpful in thinking about education' (Bruner, 1996, p.xiii).

Bruner has reflected on his earlier work and has admitted that 'he was too preoccupied with solo, intrapsychic processes of knowing' (ibid, p.xi). Bruner began to realise that life circumstances, particularly in the U.S., mattered and affected children's development. Bruner became involved in the Headstart Programme in the U.S. in the belief that 'preschools could counteract the serious impact of poverty on the family care of young children' (Bruner, 2006a, p.5; The Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983). This brought cultural and family context right into the picture of development and learning.

In an experimental study published in 1976, Bruner, Wood and Ross coined the term 'scaffolding' to describe how an adult might assist young children in achieving a task that 'is initially beyond them' (Bruner, 2006a, p.198). The researchers were interested in the 'nature of the tutorial process' (ibid). The fatal flaw, in my view, was that the task was not chosen by the children. Interestingly, the younger children, aged 3, often 'ignored the tutor's suggestions' whereas the 4 and 5 year olds accepted tutoring (ibid, p.203).

Much later, during the mid 1990s Bruner was invited to be a consultant to the schools in Reggio Emilia, then and now considered to be world leaders in Early Years education. Although Bruner has not written a great deal about those experiences, writers in Reggio have discussed his ideas about their practice (Rinaldi, 2006).

During the last twenty years or so and through collaborating with his wife and other researchers, Bruner has discovered and written about the power of narrative. Bruner has come to the conclusion that there are ‘two natural modes of thought, the narrative and the paradigmatic (Bruner, 2006b, p.116). These modes help us to ‘order experience’ and to ‘construct reality’ (ibid). While the paradigmatic is using hypotheses and searching for proof, the narrative is constructing believable stories of ‘human intentions in the context of action’ (Bruner, 2006b, p.118).

Bruner’s discovery of the role of culture in development has been in two stages: firstly, the idea that ‘culture gives shape to our thoughts’ (2006b, p.4); secondly, Bruner has acknowledged that he has made a ‘shift’ in that he has come to believe that ‘the *local cultural setting* of a story and its *peripeteia* were what mattered most’ (ibid). Therefore each narrative needs to include the local context in detail and within that detail we find ‘evaluative messages’ and ‘warnings’ and can therefore truly understand the significance of events and actions (ibid). Bruner has now concluded that social context is of great importance in understanding development and learning.

Bruner did not set out to follow Vygotsky but over a long career, has been drawn towards many similar themes connected to pedagogy, the development of concepts, the role of culture and the importance of family context in making sense of our lives and events.

## **Post-Vygotskian Research**

During the 1990s when I first discovered Vygotsky, there was very little written about his work and his own books were hard to access from libraries, presumably because he was so popular in England at that time. In 1990 Luis C. Moll edited a book of research in education using Vygotskian ideas (Moll, 1990). Moll dedicated the volume 'to the memory of the "troika", the founders of the sociohistorical school of psychology: Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, Alexander Romanovich Luria and Alexei Nikolaevich Leontiev' (1990, p.xi). Luria and Leontiev both lived until the late 1970s and continued the work begun with Vygotsky.

Much of the research in Moll's volume mirrored Barbara Rogoff's research of learning and pedagogy in third world cultures (1990, 2003). Rogoff regarded context 'as inseparable from human actions in cognitive events or activities...all human activity is embedded in context' (1990, 27). Rogoff pointed out that

Vygotsky was concerned with using a unit of analysis that preserved the inner workings of larger events of interest, rather than separating an event into elements that no longer function as does the larger living unit (1990, p.32).

Rogoff and Vygotsky were interested in studying events and interactions rather than smaller units in which the human connections were missing.

Moll saw the 'zone of proximal development' as a 'connecting concept' which

...integrated key elements of Vygotsky's theory: the emphasis on social activity and cultural practices as sources of thinking, the importance of mediation in human psychological functioning, the centrality of pedagogy in development and the inseparability of the individual from the social (Moll, 1990, p.15).

In a chapter entitled 'Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction', Moll and Greenberg studied 'households' social histories, especially their labor and language' and tried to replicate what was successful in homes, at school (Moll and Greenberg, 1990, p.323). They used the idea that households were in fact educational settings and that 'survival' depended on learning from each other. They found that in a poor Mexican community, 'funds of knowledge' held by individuals and families, were the 'nuts and bolts for survival' (ibid). These 'funds of knowledge' included gardening and repair skills, transportation and a whole variety of other skills. Children gained knowledge and skills from their parents. The parents expected their children to take part in household tasks,

There seems to be an implicit understanding that, even though it might be easier not to have the children's help, his participation in the whole task is an essential part of learning (ibid, p.324).

They noted that in these poor communities often 'knowledge is *obtained* by the children, not imposed by the adults' (ibid, p.326). Within families and communities 'reciprocity was the glue maintaining the structure of important relationships' (ibid). The researchers drew on families' 'funds of knowledge' by inviting parents into the classroom as experts to talk to the children, to answer questions and to make 'a substantive intellectual contribution to the content and process of classroom learning' (ibid, p.339).

Rogoff described the involvement of children in community learning as ‘intent participation’ and stated that it was most likely to occur when ‘children have opportunities to observe and pitch in to mature community activities’ (Rogoff, 2006).

Another theme pursued by the post-Vygotskians was “whole language” classrooms. Vygotsky (1978, p.118) had advised that,

The best method (for teaching reading and writing) is one in which children do not learn to read and write but in which both these skills are found in play situations...In the same way as children learn to speak, they should be able to learn to read and write.

This theme became a movement and a philosophy across many English speaking countries and beyond during the 1970’s. Within the ‘whole language’ movement, schools were expected to adapt to children rather than children having to adapt to schools. The aim was to provide ‘authentic learning experiences’ to encourage children to invent, make mistakes and to participate socially within schools as well as outside of schools (Goodman and Goodman, 1990, p.224).

Goodman and Goodman (1990, p.236) articulated the role of the teacher in whole language classrooms as:

- ‘Initiator of authentic contexts in which learners can make the most of their zones of proximal development
- Kid watcher, who is skilled at observing the potential zones of proximal development of learners
- Mediator, providing just enough support to help the learner make the most of their zone of proximal development (in this instance ‘less is more’)

- Liberator, who frees children to control their own learning (building on Freire's views (Freire, 1970) of education as liberating)

Whole language learners were free to take risks and 'to learn from their failures with the support of their teachers' (ibid, p.239). Through this freedom, children's home learning and values were accepted and built on. Goodman and Goodman (ibid, p.224) reported that New Zealand 'has the longest continuous tradition of progressive, holistic education' as seen in the work on 'reading recovery' by Clay and the bi-cultural curriculum, Te Whariki, which builds on both Maori and Pakeha values.

### **The Influence of Vygotsky on World Leaders in Early Education and Care**

Through personal contacts, visits and reading, I have had opportunities to study early years education and care in Reggio Emilia, Northern Italy and in New Zealand, both considered world leaders in the field. While the history of early years education and care has been different in these two areas, both have been influenced somewhat by Vygotsky's theories about development and learning.

#### **Reggio Emilia**

Carla Rinaldi (2006, p.11) discussed the 'pedagogical experiment' begun by Loris Malaguzzi and carried out in Reggio since World War Two and stated that

We thus consider knowledge to be a process of construction by the individual in relation with others, a true act of co-construction



In my view this idea of co-construction, expresses and brings together the essence of both Piaget and Vygotsky, the construction of knowledge by each individual (Piaget) and the fact that ‘children’s learning is situated in a socio-cultural context and takes place in interrelationships’ (Vygotsky) (ibid, p.6). I would see internalisation and externalisation as an iterative process, with motivation from both the inner and outer world.

Rinaldi acknowledged ‘the precious insights of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky’,

Reggio’s very conscious strategies to use other children in the group as a pedagogical tool in the process of co-construction have much in common with Vygotsky’s idea about the zone of proximal development (ibid).

Rinaldi reported that in Reggio they have acknowledged the work of ‘Vygotsky and other semiotic thinkers on verbal and oral language’ but have ‘widened the idea of language into what they have called ‘the hundred languages of children’’(ibid, p.7). She explained,

I see the hundred languages as a lake with many, many sources flowing into it. I think the number of a hundred was chosen to be very provocative, to claim for all these languages not only the same dignity but the right to expression and to communicate with each other (ibid, p.193).

The Reggio schools have become very famous for their artwork, assigning an ‘atelierista’ or art specialist to each school and producing wonderful portfolios to demonstrate the projects in which the children have become involved. Rinaldi also referred to ‘introducing many new tools as semiotic mediators into their schools, such as video, digital cameras and computers’ (ibid, p.7).

Rinaldi talked about valuing theory and practice as ‘inseparable’ (ibid, p.17) and ‘not being imprisoned by the theory but being prepared to move beyond individual theories and theorists’ (ibid, p.181). Rinaldi and her colleagues have been theorising about a ‘pedagogy of listening’ (ibid, p.65). She proposed that the theory itself ‘needs to be listened to by others’ because ‘Expressing our theories to others makes it possible to transform a world not intrinsically ours into something shared. Sharing theory is a response to uncertainty’ (ibid, p.64).

Rinaldi offered new ways of thinking about the concept of ‘scaffolding’, ‘It is the context, the web of reciprocal expectations that sustain individual and group processes’ (ibid, p.68). Through ‘observing, documenting and interpreting the processes that the children undergo autonomously’ teachers will learn how to teach (ibid).

## **New Zealand**

Margaret Carr, writing about early years practice in New Zealand, has come to realise that ‘learning always takes some of its context with it, and that, as James Wertsch has suggested, the learner is a ‘learner-in-action’’ (2001, p.4).

Carr acknowledged that

This viewpoint derives mainly from Lev Vygotsky’s notion of ‘mediated action’. It takes a view of learning that focuses on the relationship between the learner and the environment, and seeks ways to define and document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in that environment (ibid, p.5).

Carr has captured some of the complexity of early learning processes by extending the work of Lilian Katz on 'learning dispositions', demonstrating that children can be 'ready', 'willing' and 'able to participate in various ways' (ibid, p.21). Carr has critiqued the idea of the adult 'scaffolding' learning for the child, in the sense that scaffolding assumes 'willing teachers' and 'eager learners' (ibid). Carr drew from her own experience and was reminded that 'children are not always eager (ready and willing) to learn in the domain that we are willing to teach' (ibid). Her question became 'How can eager learning be described and encouraged?' (ibid).

Carr (2001, p.49) concluded that children follow their deep interests in three ways or children's interests are 'mediated' in three ways:

...by using artefacts (objects, languages, and story-lines that cultural stories and myths have provided), activities (ways of employing the artefacts for a range of purposes; routines and practices) and social communities.

Carr's examples included some with very obvious emotional content, such as the use of artefacts by a child at play whose mother had died. However, Carr stated that 'It may well be fear or grief underlie these interests, but while we can observe the artefacts and activities and social communities that children pay attention to, **we can only guess at their metaphorical or psychological significance**' (ibid). (My emphasis) Again I feel that this account brings me to where I came with Athey in deeply understanding Lois. Maybe the learning for me is to be satisfied with guessing, not knowing for sure, feeling rather than knowing.

Carr went on to describe ‘learning stories’, the method adopted in New Zealand to capture and document the learning of individuals and groups of children. Carr noted that ‘stories integrate the social with the cognitive and the affective’ (ibid, p.95).

## **Afterword**

Bruner, after a long journey, has come to believe and to understand that narratives help us to make sense of our lives and to construct our understanding of events. Susan Harter (1999, p.32) pointed out that ‘With the emergence of language comes the ability to construct a narrative of one’s “life story” and therefore to develop a more enduring portrait of the self’. According to Harter and other developmentalists, we form an ‘autobiographical memory’ by ‘codifying experiences of the self’ (ibid, p.33). Of course young children are heavily influenced by the stories told to them by their parents and by interactions with others. They gradually incorporate the stories told to them and their firsthand experiences to form a sense of self.

In Reggio Emilia, workers have used documentation of children’s projects as a way of making processes visible. Pedagogical documentation, as a tool, has enabled workers, parents and children to discuss the children’s ‘ways of constructing knowledge (and thus also including the relational and emotional aspects)’(Rinaldi, 2006, p.57).

In New Zealand, workers have adopted the idea of documenting learning stories, often from different perspectives, to celebrate, assess and understand children’s learning.

At the Pen Green Centre, for the last twelve years, workers and parents have been documenting Children's Special Interests by making portfolios. We have also experimented with making short videos that put forward multiple perspectives on individual children in order to increase our understanding (Lawrence, 2001 ; Tait, 2003).

It is quite striking how Bruner and other world leaders in early childhood education and care are all engaged in constructing narratives in order to understand complex learning processes in young children. The narrative somehow gives a form to disparate events and actions. The narrative does not always provide proof of our hypotheses but it does make events seem more coherent.

In this study I am drawing on observations of the children and reflections I have made over time to construct narrative accounts of short periods in their lives and to document my learning so far.

### **Key Issues**

Bruner's journey towards accepting the 'narrative' as significant, supports my decision to present 'stories' of the children's experiences, validated by their parents and workers. The sense making has come about through discussions of each child's family context and also nursery context. Chloe and Susan were both affected by having a Family Worker, who was off sick because of a problematic pregnancy. The loss of their worker as a secure person in the setting, meant that they had to draw on their inner resources, with the support of their parents, to make other close relationships to substitute.

Vygotsky and the post Vygotskians have brought pedagogy and the role of the adult to the fore. One of my problems will be to articulate what I have learned about that role in the concluding section of my study.

Another theme, of reflecting and making learning visible, has emerged from the practices of educators influenced by Vygotsky's writings. The use of video to reflect on and celebrate children's relationships, explorations and understandings has been at the heart of this study.

### **Reconciling Piagetian and Vygotskian Perspectives**

I 'lived' with a Piagetian perspective on young children for a long time before discovering the Vygotskian perspective. This was a little like living with nature before discovering nurture. It was also quite timely in that I had already discovered that taking a didactic approach to teaching young children only occasionally 'connected' with their concerns. Tina Bruce (2005, p.2) writing about 'empiricism' and drawn from the writings of 'John Locke (1712-1778), Watson (1878-1958) and Skinner (1904-1990)' stated that

...in this approach, children are seen as something to be moulded into shape and given experiences that are appropriate and necessary for them to take their place in society

The adult led and each child was seen as 'a passive recipient' of knowledge (ibid, p.3).

Alternatively, another historical view of the child was 'the nativist or biologically pre-programmed view' in which development unfolded and, as educators, we made no

contribution (ibid). In this model, the child led and the adults took a 'laissez-faire' approach.

Although these two views were extreme, educators tended towards either the more didactic, adult led view or the freer 'laissez-faire' view of teaching. In terms of Piaget's research, because he was interested in learning more than teaching, then the emphasis was on the developing child and how he constructed his knowledge from his firsthand experiences (Das Gupta, 1994, p.31). His approach was called 'constructivism',

Children construct higher levels of knowledge from elements contributed *both* by innate capacities and by environmental information. The child plays an active role in developmental change by deriving information from the environment and using it to modify existing mental structures (ibid, p.31).

Vygotsky's contribution, which I think, added to Piaget's ideas, or emphases, was that the

same biological or environmental factors may have very different effects, depending on the people among whom the child grows up, both in terms of the culture(s) of those people and their characteristics as individuals (ibid, p.33)

Vygotsky's approach was called 'social constructivism' and I believe, added to the theory already accepted in the Western world (ibid).

I think the debate is about whether inner patterns or schemas spark off interest in the 'outer world' including people, or the 'outer world' including people, sparks off interest and is internalised. Margaret Donaldson (1978, p.24) repeated many of Piaget's later experiments and found that children were not able to demonstrate their knowledge when tasks did not make 'human sense' to them. This would suggest that children can never learn in isolation from their human context. There is a great body of recent research showing that even very young babies are looking for social connections from birth and learn from the people and

actions around them (Stern, 2003, Trevarthen et al, 2006). The Reggio idea of ‘co-construction’ also adds weight to this idea of inner and outer worlds interacting. This leads me to believe that nature and nurture interact within human beings and therefore I can reconcile the perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky by believing that somehow the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ interact, with neither taking a stronger lead in development and learning.

Finally, I am reminded of Froebel’s writing in which he spoke of the inner becoming outer and the outer becoming inner,

To make the internal external, and the external internal, to find the unity for both, this is the general form in which man’s destiny is expressed. Therefore every external object comes to man with the invitation to determine its nature and relationships (Froebel, 1887, p. 42, cited in Bruce et al, 1995, p.37).



#### 1.4 A Critical Incident – Harry and Connecting – Introducing a Winnicottian Perspective

*‘Meanings, like feelings, are far older than speech...’(Isaacs, 1952, p.89).*

##### **The Background**

Following in the tradition of famous baby biographers such as Pestalozzi, Darwin and Piaget, I, along with my daughter and her partner, kept narrative records of their two children’s early development and learning during their first five years of life (Bartholomew and Bruce, 1993, p.8). We also kept a somewhat idiosyncratic video diary about each of the two children. Georgia was born in January 1991 and became part of my Master’s study of four children in September 1994 when one of the original participants dropped out and Georgia was just starting to attend the nursery where I worked (Arnold, 1997).

Harry was born in May 1993 and, with more knowledge this time, we kept records, took photos and gathered video of when Harry was ‘deeply involved’ in any activity (Laevers, 1997). We embarked on both of these ventures for sheer pleasure and to have records to look back on, as the children grew up. Subsequently I was given opportunities to have a book published on each of the two children and I wrote the two books with the family’s active involvement and encouragement (Arnold, 1999; 2003).

Sadly my daughter and her partner separated when Georgia was five and Harry was three, just before Harry started attending the nursery where I was the Headteacher. I was able to observe both of the children at home, in my home and at nursery. The two children were very different. Whereas Georgia was quite difficult to film because she was very sociable

with whoever was filming her, Harry always had the ability and tendency to be very focussed on whatever he was doing. Around the age of three, Harry became very involved in 'connecting' with string. He would tie up the whole kitchen in my house when they came to visit. I was keen to capture his play and deep involvement on video and to learn from what he was doing. We knew a great deal about schemas by this time and so encouraged his spontaneous 'connecting' behaviour (Athey, 1990). We even sent a video to Chris Athey (the expert on schemas) for analysis. Chris made us aware of Piaget's paper on 'Knots' and of Harry's learning from his investigations. With the family's permission, I began to use video vignettes of 'Harry Connecting' in training sessions for others, to illustrate his strong connecting schema and for participants to analyse the learning taking place (Jordan and Henderson, 1995).

### **A Critical Incident**

Some four years after filming Harry with string, I was showing a video sequence of Harry to a group of MA students. The session was about Piaget's work and a colleague was going to talk about the work of Winnicott afterwards. My daughter (Harry's mother) had joined the group because of an interest in the theory, although she was not studying at the time.

I can only describe myself as 'shocked' when my colleague, in his talk about Winnicott, referred back to the video sequence I had just shown of Harry and introduced the group to a paper written by Winnicott in 1960 on the subject of 'String: A Technique of Communication' (Winnicott, 1990, p.153). In the paper, Winnicott referred to a boy, aged seven, who was 'obsessed with everything to do with string' (ibid, p.154). As well as connecting bits of furniture together with string (in a similar way to what we had just

observed Harry doing on film) the boy's parents were worried that 'He had recently tied a string around his sister's neck' (ibid). Winnicott

Explained to the mother that this boy was dealing with a fear of separation, attempting to deny separation by his use of string, as one would deny separation from a friend by using the telephone (ibid).

Winnicott suggested to the mother that she broached the subject of separation with the boy 'and then developed the theme of separation according to the boy's response' (ibid, p.155). Although the mother thought that Winnicott's idea was 'silly' she did as he suggested and found the boy 'eager to talk about his relation to her and his fear of lack of contact with her' (ibid). She talked through with him all of the separations there had been, including 'the loss of her when she was seriously depressed' which 'she felt the most important' (ibid). The mother reported that from the moment of their conversation, 'the string play ceased' (ibid). The boy did resume string play about a year later when the mother was about to go into hospital for a minor operation but she realised his fear and was able to reassure him that she would only be away for a few days.

Here was a completely different interpretation of Harry's play with string to the interpretation that had been our focus. My initial reaction was to think that Winnicott was a paediatrician dealing with a problem. Harry had never used string dangerously or threatened anyone with it. At the most, he had exercised his control by tying up a whole room and expecting the adults and his sister to clamber over or under the string. (I now realise that this was my defensive response). We had, by then, begun reflecting and thinking that Harry's 'connecting' behaviour was helping him work through his pain in some way. However, four years on, I was still presenting the material to students as a purely cognitive concern.

In that room, in front of a group of students, I felt embarrassed and slightly humiliated. My daughter was upset. One of the students rushed out of the room. It turned out that she had recently separated from her daughter's father and that her daughter was playing with string all of the time. She seemed to be feeling guilty and upset as though she was causing her daughter pain.

On reflection, the action of my colleague gave me a huge jolt or emotional jar. It disequibrated me temporarily but it also set me on a journey of discovery about emotional development generally and my own responses to emotions in particular.

### **Winnicott and String**

I began to become interested in Winnicott's work. In his paper on 'String' he stated that

String can be looked upon as an extension of all other techniques of communication. String joins just as it also helps in the wrapping up of objects and in the holding of unintegrated material. In this respect string has a symbolic meaning for everyone... (ibid, p.156)

Since then I have heard many anecdotal accounts of children 'connecting' when their parents separate and the children have to come to terms with living in two homes. I was also interested in Winnicott's technique of sharing his idea with the boy's mother, in the hope that she would be able to respond to her son and to make the space emotionally to hear his concerns. This somehow normalised the problem in my mind. This was also similar to the technique (described earlier) of sharing theoretical concepts with parents (Athey, 1990; Shaw, 1991; Whalley, 1997; 2001).

I was concerned that Winnicott described the string play as ‘a denial of separation’ (ibid, p.156). I felt intuitively that it might, at first, be a denial but would, at some point, also be an acceptance of separation. Alvarez, in a paper entitled ‘The Clinician’s Debt to Winnicott’, drew on the work of Segal and Winnicott in stating that,

One of Winnicott’s greatest theoretical and clinical achievements was the identification of a third area, a transitional zone which lay between what Segal had pointed out, were two highly distinct methods of relating to an object, the first via a symbolic equation and the second via the true symbol (Segal, 1957; Winnicott, 1958)  
(Alvarez, 1996, p.377)

Alvarez was acknowledging a continuum or developmental path from the symbolic equation – ‘one who does not feel he has ever lost his object’ to the transitional stage – ‘partly an owner and partly not’ and then to the symbolic – ‘one who accepts and mourns it and can move on to new objects symbolic of the lost one’ (ibid, p.379). This analysis seemed to make sense and helped to clarify the issue of symbolic behaviour and its possible meanings for me.

I was suddenly reminded of Janusz Korczak, a Jewish paediatrician, who ran a children’s orphanage in Poland, between the wars and during the Second World War. He is best remembered for walking in a procession with almost 200 children, who were being taken to Treblinka Extermination Camp. Although he was offered a chance to be rescued, he opted to go with the children to his death. Janusz Korczak published A Declaration of Children’s Rights, which included: ‘The child has the right to respect for his grief’... ‘Even though it be for the loss of a pebble’ (<http://korczak.com/Biography>). I already knew that helping young children to acknowledge small losses during their daily lives helps them

accept change and loss and to move on but I was not sure whether I was tuned in to actually doing that in my work with the children..

Other writers in the field of psychoanalysis have made observations of young children exploring loss and separation symbolically. Isaacs (1952, p.72) cited an observation made by Freud of 'a boy of eighteen months' who was very well behaved and seemed to cope with separations from his mother well,

Occasionally, however, this well-behaved child evinced the troublesome habit of flinging into the corner of the room or under the bed all the little things he could lay his hands on...

He would say 'o-o-o-oh' which his mother thought meant "Gone away"

Freud observed him

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string wound around it...he kept throwing it with considerable skill, held by the string, over the side of his little draped cot, so that the reel disappeared into it, then said his significant "o-o-o-oh" and drew the reel by the string out of the cot again, greeting its reappearance with a joyful "Da" (there)

The game consisted of 'disappearance and return' and the boy 'enjoyed the phantasied satisfaction of controlling his mother's comings and goings' (ibid). Freud deduced that this repeated play helped the boy to cope well with brief separations from his mother.

Other examples Isaacs presented in her paper on 'The Nature and Function of Phantasy' resonated with my experiences of children's play:

She observed in many cases that when a two year old child was left in the nursery school for the first time and was feeling lonely and anxious because of the parting

with his mother and being in a strange world, the plaything which most readily comforted him was the 'posting box', a box into which he could drop a number of small bricks, the lid being then taken off and the lost objects rediscovered (Isaacs, 1952, p.115).

Isaacs explained that he seemed able 'to overcome the feelings of loss about his mother by means of this play, in which he lost and rediscovered objects at his own will' (ibid). This was very similar to a game played by Evan in the current study using a marble run. He frequently played with the run dropping the marbles in, to disappear and reappear. Evan did this while he was being settled in to nursery by his mother. It was as if he was rehearsing what would happen and replaying the disappearance and reappearance of the marbles to reassure himself that his mother would come back at the end of the morning.

Another example provided by Isaacs was of another two year old boy, distressed on his second day at nursery.

He stood by the observer, holding her hand and at first sobbing, occasionally asking 'Mummy coming, Mummy coming?' A tower of small bricks was placed on a chair near him. At first he ignored the bricks, then when another child had a box of bricks nearby, he quickly carried to this box all but two of the bricks on the chair. The remaining two, a small cube and a large triangular brick, he placed together on the chair, touching each other, in a position similar to that of himself and the observer who was seated beside him. He then came back and again held the adult's hand. Now he was able to stop crying, and seemed much calmer (ibid).

Isaacs explained that 'here again we see a child comforting himself and overcoming feelings of loss and terror by a symbolic act with two material objects' (ibid, p.116). In this instance, the boy seemed to represent his wish to be reunited with his mother but was also comforted by placing two objects in close proximity to each other. He was also further

comforted by being close to the observer in whom Isaacs suggested he placed his trust that 'she would enable him to find his mother again' (ibid).

### **The Meaning of Phantasy**

Isaacs defined 'phantasy' as '*unconscious* mental content, which may or may not become conscious' (1952, p.81). She made the point that 'our views about phantasy in these earliest years are based almost wholly on inference' but that that is also 'the case in relation to adult unconscious material' (ibid, p.69). Isaacs added 'We can often observe quite directly emotions and attitudes of which the patient himself is unaware...' (ibid).

Kathy Hunt, in a paper on how Sally, a girl of three years with very little expressive language, made sense of her mother's death, introduced David Groves' idea of 'Healing Metaphor Therapy' to the reader (1999, p.13). His approach involved adults in 'constructing metaphors to make sense of present symptoms... connected to earlier traumas' (ibid). Hunt closely observed Sally over time at nursery and deduced that Sally had 'created metaphors' in her play that acted as 'containers' and 'held the power for self-healing' (ibid). The adults 'accepted the wisdom of a three year old child' (ibid). The nursery workers provided 'the right psychological climate for growth and development...attitudes of acceptance, genuineness and non-possessive love, as characterised by Carl Rogers (1983)' (ibid, p.9). They also provided 'a child-centred environment in which children could be independent...' (ibid).



Isaacs explained that

there is a wealth of evidence to show that phantasies are active in the mind long before language has developed and that even in the adult they continue to operate alongside and independently of words. Meanings, like feelings, are far older than speech...(Isaacs, 1952, p.89).

This idea would seem to suggest that children (and adults) do represent their feelings in their actions and that repeated actions might help give form to unconscious material as well as conscious material.

### **Other Concepts from Winnicott's Work**

Winnicott was a paediatrician as well as a psychoanalyst. This was a unique position that he held 'for two or three decades' (Winnicott, 1965, p.172). He claimed to have 'a knack for getting mothers to tell me about their children' (ibid). Most of his concepts of psychoanalysis were derived from Freud and because Freud worked mostly with adults, Winnicott found the concepts both enlightening and lacking, in relation to the young children and families he was working with (ibid). The lack of conceptual knowledge about young children at that time, led Winnicott to consider the work of Melanie Klein, who 'used sets of small toys' to help her understand young children. (Melanie Klein shared a flat with Susan Isaacs for some time. We can see the overlap and continuity of ideas presented by Isaacs and Klein). Winnicott stated that he 'grew up thinking of the child's manipulation of the little toys, and other special and circumscribed playing, as glimpses into the child's inner world...' (1965, p.174). Subsequently, Winnicott developed two techniques that he used when meeting children: firstly for babies and mothers coming to his clinic, what he described as the 'set situation' which comprised placing a shiny metal

spatula within the baby's reach and observing what happened (1975, p.52). He claimed to be able to tell a lot about baby and mother from how the task of grasping the spatula was approached and handled. Winnicott seemed particularly interested in the 'period of hesitation' before the baby accepted the reality of his desire to grasp the spatula and put it into his mouth (ibid, p.54). This seemed to be a sort of 'transitional phase' and a theme throughout the whole of Winnicott's work; secondly for older children, Winnicott developed the 'squiggle game' described as 'a game in which first I make a squiggle and he turns it into something, and then he makes a squiggle and I turn it into something' (ibid, p.108). This was a 'symbol of their togetherness' and also often gave Winnicott and the child access to a child's inner world just as the small toys had for Klein (Padel, 2001a, p.7) The essence of the game was 'mutuality' and 'creativity', 'playing' in the space between therapist and child (Farhi, 2001b.' p.67).

Winnicott is most widely recognised beyond the field of psychoanalysis for his concepts of

- Good-enough mothering
- Holding, and
- Transitional Phenomena

According to Winnicott's conceptualisation (1991, p.10)

The good-enough mother starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure.

The mother creates the 'illusion' of omnipotence in her infant and gradually 'disillusions' him, but he must first of all experience the illusion of complete power in order to become disillusioned (ibid). Matthews used a similar idea in relation to pedagogy when he referred to 'shared understandings' and the child's 'illusion of complete mastery and control' (2003, p.207). Being completely responsive at all times is not realistic and does not help children to eventually adapt to a reality over which they have some control but not complete control.

'Holding' referred initially to the physical holding of a young infant and connected with the infant feeling safely held. Davis and Wallbridge advised that 'Holding is the basis for what gradually becomes a self-experiencing being' (Davis and Wallbridge, 1981, p.97). The feeling of being held is gradually internalised by the infant.

Winnicott also talked about the 'holding environment' as a safe environment that holds people and their pain and uncertainty (Astis, 2001b, p.192). Alvarez (1992, p.4) noted that 'Winnicott's concept of 'holding' has much in common with the notion of 'containment' proposed by Wilfred Bion, in fact they are used interchangeably in some recent works on Winnicott (Bertolini et al, 2001b). A holding environment might be one in which there is continuity in the sense of seeing the same person in the same room at the same time each week. Alvarez (1992, p.4) explained that from a therapeutic viewpoint, the continuity 'contains' or 'holds' a patient 'to provide an opportunity for something new to happen within the child'. This concept has been widened to include the 'holding in mind' of others when we are apart or between meetings (Woodhead, 2002).

The most widely known concept from Winnicott's work, particularly in relation to young children attending education and care settings, is the concept of 'transitional phenomena' and specifically the 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1991, p.96). Winnicott was interested in the 'potential space' between mother and infant (Hernandez and Giannakoulas, 2001a, p.152). It was within this space that the illusion of omnipotence was created. Winnicott advised that mother and child gradually established their separateness. Very young infants often adopt soft toys, blankets or thumbs as 'transitional objects' (Winnicott, 1991, p.8),

The transitional object stands for the breast, or the object of the first relationship...

It has special qualities:

1. The infant assumes rights over the object, and we agree to this assumption. Nevertheless, some abrogation of 'omnipotence' is a feature from the start.
2. The object is affectionately cuddled as well as excitedly loved and mutilated.
3. It must never change, unless changed by the infant.
4. It must survive instinctual loving, and also hating and, if it be a feature, pure aggression.
5. Yet it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own.
6. It comes from without from our point of view, but not so from the point of view of the baby. Neither does it come from within ; it is not a hallucination.
7. Its fate is to be gradually 'decathected', so that in the course of years, it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean in health the transitional object does not go 'inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common', that is to say, over the whole cultural field. (Winnicott, 1991, p.5)

Winnicott described transitional objects as the first 'not-me possession', 'a defence against anxiety' and acknowledged that they were symbolic of the mother (Winnicott, 1991, p.4).

Workers in early years settings usually respect young children's need for and attachment to their 'transitional objects' (Bruce, 2004, p.139). Children also use 'objects of transition' to help them move from home to nursery and between settings (Pen Green, 2000-2004; Bruce, 2004, p.140). For this purpose, children use different objects which are less

personal and precious but do help with transitions from one place to another. For example Hattie liked to bring her doll's buggy from home to nursery.

## **Afterword**

The critical incident described in this section was an emotional event that helped me to begin to expand and to transform my view of young children's development and learning. I realised that although I wanted to equally value cognition and affect, my habit of viewing children's actions through a cognitive lens was deeply ingrained in my psyche.

At the same time as I was exploring Winnicott's research, I also began to study attachment theory, which seemed to me to be the overarching theory which helped me to understand young children's motivation to act and to represent unconscious material in those actions.

The examples I have drawn on from other researchers showed young children playing with ideas about 'comings and goings' and 'proximity seeking'. These examples have led me to choose Bowlby's 'attachment theory' as a second robust and well-researched framework (along with Piaget and Athey's schema theory) for thinking about the observations of the children in this study. I will explore attachment theory in the next section.

## 1.5 Considering Bowlby's Concept of Attachment and More Recent Psychoanalytic Studies of Development

*'From time immemorial mothers and poets have been alive to the distress caused to a child by loss of his mother; but it is only in the last fifty years that, by fits and starts, science has awoken to it'*

*John Bowlby, 1997, p.24*

*'In order to understand, one must first have been understood'*

*Sebastian Kraemer, 2000, p.10*

### **Introduction**

While Freud had focussed his attention on the human drives towards 'the need for nourishment' and sex, Bowlby introduced the idea that young humans have a tendency or drive to stay close to their mothers or carers (Bowlby, 1997, p.211). John Bowlby was born in 1907. Like Piaget and Vygotsky, Bowlby seemed to be strongly influenced by his early experiences within his own family. His brother, Tony, only 13 months older than John, was his mother's clear favourite. The children were raised mostly by nurses (Holmes, 1993). John's nurse was responsive and was said to be the only one among the staff to play with the children (John Bowlby Conference, 2001). At the beginning of World War One, John (aged 7) and his brother, were sent away to boarding school. We can only speculate about the pain this separation may have caused him. As a young man, before going to medical school, John worked in a 'progressive school for maladjusted children'. He found he could

communicate with the disturbed children 'whose difficulties seem to be related to their unhappy and disrupted childhood' (Holmes, 1993: 18).

### **Attachment Theory**

Building on observations of animal behaviour, and subsequently the behaviour of children during temporary separations from their parents, Bowlby began to conceptualise a theory about attachment (Bowlby, 1997; Holmes, 1993; Cassidy and Shaver, 1999). Bowlby defined 'attachment behaviour' as 'seeking and maintaining proximity to another individual' (Bowlby, 1997, p.195). Bowlby observed that young animals and humans very quickly (within weeks of birth) 'recognised their primary caregiver' and that this 'preference was extremely strong and persistent' (ibid, p.196). Of all the species, the human baby is most dependent and 'for some months the infant is kept in proximity to the mother only by the mother's own actions' (ibid, p.199). By three months of age a baby 'already responds differently to the mother as compared to other people' (ibid). Bowlby noticed that

Proximity-maintaining behaviour is seen at its most obvious when mother leaves the room and the infant cries or cries and attempts to follow her (ibid, p.200)

He also reported that there are changes with age. Towards nine months of age, babies demonstrate these behaviours 'more frequently' and 'with more vigour' (ibid). Towards one year old 'Attachment behaviour is shown towards other familiar adults' (ibid, p.201). A significant change reported by Bowlby, which he attributed to maturation, took place around the end of the third year when '...most children become increasingly able in a strange place to feel secure with subordinate attachment figures' (ibid, p.205). Bowlby

emphasised that there was wide variation in these average ages. Much of the data about children was derived from studies by the Robertsons of 'children aged eighteen months to four years, who had gone to either a residential nursery or to hospital, some for a week or two and some for much longer periods' (ibid, p.25). The children were observed and in some cases filmed before, during and after their separations. The filmed footage was shocking and resulted in very different practices being adopted for children spending time in hospital ie the provision was subsequently made for parents to stay with their children at the hospital for the duration of the children's stay. The research on attachment has also gradually informed practice in nurseries. For many years in England, it has been considered appropriate for children to begin attending nursery part time at around the age of three, when they were thought to be mature enough to cope with a short, planned separation. Bowlby's research was first published at the end of World War Two. It was no coincidence that the government of the day, wanting jobs to be available for soldiers returning from war, used the research as a rationale for 'withdrawing childcare facilities for the children of working women' (Riley, 1983, p.92). The message at that time was that young children need their mothers at home with them during their first three years.

However, attachment theory was more complex and Bowlby had some guidance to offer about 'subordinate attachment figures'

- They need to be familiar to the child, '...those whom the child has got to know whilst in the company of his mother'
  - 'The child must be healthy and not alarmed'
  - The child needs to know that 'he can resume contact with mother at short notice'
- (Bowlby, 1997, p.205)



In recent years, building on this research, curriculum guidance for the early years in England has promoted many of the following ideas that are now considered to be good practice in early years settings:

- A key worker system whereby a worker builds an intimate relationship with a small number of children and their families
- The key worker often visits children at home prior to the child attending the setting
- The parent or important adult carer visits the setting with the child before they start attending
- There is a flexible settling-in period when an important adult stays with the child in the setting (QCA, 2000; Birth – Three Matters, 2003; EYFS, 2007)

Another related concept explored by Bowlby was the idea of the ‘secure base’ from which a young child could explore the world. He noted that ‘confident exploration comes to an abrupt end (a) if the child is frightened or hurt (b) if the mother moves away’ (Bowlby, 1997, p.209). The infant is only confident to explore in the knowledge and trust that their caregiver will keep them safe from harm. Young children use increasingly ‘sophisticated systems mediating attachment’ sometimes monitoring their mother’s every movement (ibid, p.251). In the current study, although his mother had said ‘Goodbye’ and he was playing, Evan seemed to sense when his mother reached the door. He cried out and she rushed back and walked to the door with him for a last cuddle and ‘Goodbye’. When Evan walked back to where he had been playing, he did so with a satisfied look. Another child, Edward, on the other hand, collapsed in a heap near the doorway when his mum left and was inconsolable for several minutes. Evan was beginning to regulate his behaviour around

separation but Edward had still not developed a strategy for coping with separating from his mother.

Bowlby also put forward the idea that

How a child behaves on his mother's return...depends on how his relationship to his mother has become patterned (ibid, p.257)

Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues carried out research to identify what were the main patterns of behaviour on the reunion of young children with their carers (Bowlby, 1997, p.336; Solomon and George, 1999, p.290; Holmes, 1993, p.110).

### **Patterns of Attachment Behaviour**

Ainsworth et al (1978) developed 'a laboratory procedure that was designed to capture the balance of attachment and exploratory behaviour under conditions of increasing though moderate stress' (Solomon and George, 1999, p.290). The laboratory test was administered to children of twelve months and their mothers. Firstly the children were observed with their mothers in a well resourced playroom. A stranger entered the room, then the mother left the room for a couple of minutes before returning. Bowlby explained that,

A particularly valuable index of the security of a child's attachment to his mother has proved in fact to be the way in which he responds to her on her return from a brief absence. A secure child shows an organised sequence of goal-corrected behaviour: after welcoming mother and approaching her, he either seeks to be picked up and to cling or else remains close to her. Responses shown by other children are of two main sorts: one is apparent disinterest in mother's return and/or avoidance of her, the other an ambivalent response, half wanting and half resisting her (Bowlby, 1997, p.337).

Ainsworth et al identified three main attachment categories: 'securely attached to mother', 'anxiously attached to mother and avoidant', and 'anxiously attached to mother and resistant' (ibid, p.338). Subsequently Main and Solomon (1990) added a fourth category of attachment behaviour, described as 'disorganised or disoriented' characterized by a 'lack of coherent attachment strategy' (Solomon and George, 1999, p.291).

Although I had studied and written about Bowlby's attachment theory over a number of years, this study has deepened my knowledge and raised my awareness in an unprecedented way (Arnold, 1997; 2003; Pen Green Team, 2000-2004). Somehow, through keeping a reflective journal, and allowing my own feelings to be expressed, I was able to gain an increased understanding of my own actions in relation to attachment behaviour. These ideas are explored in the section entitled 'The Inside Story'.

Bowlby saw the strong attachment of a child 'to a specific figure' as 'an attribute of the child' (1997, p.371). However, he noted towards the end of Volume One, that he had given little attention to the role of the caregiver (ibid, p.377). Cassidy (1999, p.10) linked the 'attachment behaviour of the child' to the 'caregiving' behaviour of the adult. For example, if a mother took her child to the park with plenty of opportunities to explore, the mother might follow him around watching him carefully. In this instance, the child does not need to monitor his mother's whereabouts and is free to explore, trusting that she will keep him safe.

Similarly when children are being settled in to nursery, some parents feel comfortable to join their child at play and to gradually withdraw. Others sit somewhere where they can be

easily seen and tell their child if they are leaving to have a cup of tea, so that the child can choose to stay near or have a very short separation. Other parents feel that they can protect their child from pain by leaving without saying when their child seems involved in play. I can now see that this strategy is designed to protect the adult from pain. It is not surprising that children mirror their parent's behaviour, avoiding the feelings associated with separation.

In my study, I found it quite stressful when a parent wanted to leave without acknowledging their departure to their child. Twice when I was filming, I found myself telling the parent, in quite a didactic way, that they must tell their child they were going. I was not taking into account the parent's anxiety and it was not as well handled as it might have been for their child.

### **Internal Working Models (IWMs)**

Bowlby conceptualised each human as having one or more 'internal working models' related to attachment, that governed their behaviour in times of stress (Bowlby, 1997, p.79). Bretherton and Munholland explained,

Beyond infancy, attachment relations come to be additionally governed by internal (mental) working models that young individuals construct from the experienced interaction patterns with their principal attachment figures. These internal working models are conceived as "operable" models of self and attachment partner, based on their joint relationship history (1999, p.89).

This notion was similar to Stern's idea of 'being with an *evoked companion*' (Stern, 2003, p.111). Stern expanded on this idea and stated that

...specific (similar) episodes will be generalized and encoded as a Representation of Interaction that has been Generalized (RIG). When a similar but not identical specific episode is next encountered, some of its attributes act as a retrieval cue to the RIG (Stern, 2003, p.112)

Stern explained that RIGs are more specific than IWMs but also responses to a wider range of situations than separation and attachment,

RIGs embody expectations about any and all interactions that can result in mutually created alterations in self-experience, such as arousal, affect, mastery, physiological state, state of consciousness, and curiosity, and not just those related to attachment (ibid, p.115).

Stern went on to explicate that ‘the evoked companion comes closer to the vividness of subjective experience, rather than taking the more experientially remote position of a guiding model’ (ibid). Stern’s concept of ‘evoked companion’ seemed to be a refinement of what Bowlby was describing, which was based on a kind of mechanical model. The very use of the word ‘companion’ makes the concept more relational.

Bretherton and Munholland (1999, p.91) took up the point that ‘Bowlby was not aware of George Herbert Mead’s and other symbolic interactionists’ notions about the social self’. This view was a kind of precursor to attachment theory and particularly the idea of models. ‘Mead proposed that young children learn about themselves from the responses of important others (usually parents) to their social acts’(ibid). If an act by a child was not responded to by the parent, it lost its meaning. This idea was similar to Vygotsky’s notion that meaning is constructed in the interactions between people. However, with regard to

attachment, Bowlby was saying that the expectation was that a response would be made so not responding 'amounted to rejection' (ibid).

IWMs are not set for life and can be adjusted if individuals have access to the memories that form them and their own motives for current behaviour. Similarly Stern saw RIGs as

They are permanent, healthy parts of the mental landscape that undergo continual growth and elaboration. They are the active constitutions of a memory that encodes, integrates and recalls experience, and thereby guides behaviour (Stern, 2003, p.119).

### **Intergenerational Patterns of Attachment**

A very important finding was that sometimes these models are passed on from one generation to the next.

Importantly Main and her colleagues (Main, 1995; Main et al, 1985) discovered a strong link between these infant behavioural attachment strategies and parental representational strategies (based on analyses of parental narratives based on lengthy open-ended interviews about parental attachment experiences in the family of origin) (Bretherton and Munholland, 1999, p.100)

Main and her colleagues developed an Adult Attachment Interview, to measure the 'coherence' of adults' narratives about their attachment histories (ibid). The accounts were not necessarily coherent because the parents had experienced a secure childhood, but seemed to be linked to their ability to reflect on their adverse experiences, to understand their parents' actions and to move on. The key to offering children security seemed to be about

...the parents' capacity for self-reflectiveness, defined as understanding self and other in mentalizing terms... A highly self-reflective parent, Fonagy and colleagues maintain, is better able to see a situation from his or her infant's perspective, to empathize with the infant's emotions, and hence to respond to the infant's attachment signals with caring behaviour that successfully meets the infant's needs for comforting (ibid, p.101).

On the other hand, 'insecure parents appear inadvertently to teach infants the very defensive strategies they themselves employ' (ibid).

This finding has major implications for workers in the field, working with young children and families. Firstly, from the perspective of being a key worker and needing to reflect on our own early experiences and how these are linked to our interactions with the children in the here and now in our care; secondly, from the perspective of a professional working with children and families and our responsibility to share theory with parents that might inform and improve their understanding of themselves and their young children (Charlwood and Steele, 2004).

### **Other Recent Research on Attachment**

I have been reluctant to draw on the psychoanalytic literature in my study as often the cases seemed too extreme to relate to the children I was studying. The meaning attributed to children's play when the children were in therapy, at times, seemed far fetched. Often I could see other explanations for the children's actions. I realised that I, like Athey, wanted to work with what were considered positive aspects of behaviour rather than with negative or difficult aspects, that might result in children and families being labelled or stigmatised

in some way. In the end, I decided that I needed to have a more open mind and to learn from the research but that I could reject whatever seemed too extreme.

Jackson (2004) focussed on one child in therapy and wrote about how she had been traumatised by her early experiences. Yasmin had been abandoned at birth and placed in an orphanage, where she had no 'primary carer'. She came for treatment at the age of five years because she was being extremely aggressive towards her adoptive parent. In his paper, Jackson described the first two years of treatment. He stated that

I consider the importance of play, not only as a vehicle for symbolic communication or as a means of re-playing and re-working internal object relationships, but also as the arena in which new experiences can be forged into internal reality, often for the first time (Jackson, 2004, p.53).

At first Yasmin searched for 'sameness', things she had at home. Jackson explained that 'When Yasmin managed to focus her attention on something more familiar and known, she seemed to feel held together and her terror was mitigated' (ibid, p.55). This reminded me of Courtney, in my study, engaging in sensori-motor play with cornflour, at a low level in terms of exploration, but comforted by watching the cornflour drip from a large spoon. This was on a day soon after there had been a death in the family and her world felt threatened.

Another action of Yasmin's that resonated with my observations, was a repeated use of selotape. Jackson explained



Yasmin's use of the selotape was particularly pronounced in our last assessment session in what felt like a frantic and desperate bid to anchor herself when it was uncertain whether we would ever see each other again (ibid, p.56).

Within my study, Edward frequently used selotape to 'connect' but was also drawn to anything he could take apart and re-connect as though he was practising disintegrating and re-integrating repeatedly.

Balbernie (2003) focussed on parents' representations of their relationships with their children. He carried out a piece of research with a 'sample of five mothers, who had all been seen for infant-parent psychotherapy and one other as (a) control' parent within his study (Balbernie, 2003, p.393). He was interested in how 'the parents described their infants and the relationship between the pair of them' (ibid). Balbernie stated that 'the parents' facility in naming feelings gives the child the ability to represent internal states' (ibid, p.394). He also acknowledged that it was not only language but also 'non-verbal interactions, such as pretend play, mutual referencing and shared states that all contributed to making the child feel secure and consolidate a reflective function' in the child (ibid, p.395).

Balbernie used a set of interview questions designed to encourage the mothers to talk about their relationships with their children. The control parent 'provides strong evidence for reflective function' (ibid, p.400). She switched between talking about 'inner and outer worlds' (ibid, p.401). Balbernie described this 'as an example of caregiving sensitivity translated into action' (ibid).

With a second parent, Balbernie used 'video feedback...about ten minutes of them playing together' (ibid, p.402). Using video helped this parent to take 'an outside

perspective...and was a spur to mentalization' (ibid). The video helped her to remove herself from the heat of the interaction and to see some of the things she was doing well. Over time, reflecting alongside Balbernie, resulted in something of a turnaround in her attitude to her daughter. At first, she felt very aggressive towards her daughter, but gradually she began to see her daughter as defiant, like her, and to feel quite proud of their similar traits.

Video feedback is a technique I have used in my study to encourage the parents to interpret their children's actions in the light of their greater knowledge of their children. Sometimes the video material showed them with their child. At other times, their child was alone or interacting with other children or adults at nursery.

Marvin et al used a similar technique (video feedback) in the Circle of Security Project (2002). The team carried out a twenty week intervention, during which they taught a group of parents about attachment theory, using video to encourage 'reflective functioning' (Marvin et al, 2002, p.107). Through watching video vignettes of themselves and their children, the parents identified their strengths and also 'under-used capacities/points of struggle' when interacting with their children (ibid, p.118). Often during the viewing of the video the focus was on 'how the child 'miscues' the parent (a miscue is described as a misleading cue used to protect the child or caregiver from the pain of having a specific need exposed and/or met)' (ibid). Marvin et al reported significant changes in behaviour and in attachment patterns.

Graham Music (2004) in his paper discussing the need for a more integrated approach to therapy, that would involve combining the typical 'empathic-female' and 'interpretive-

male' responses, came up with a very useful metaphor (Music, 2004, p.21). He described the therapist in relation to the client as needing to have 'one foot in the ditch' (ibid, p.22).

This metaphor could also be used to describe parents with their children, 'these parents could be playfully in touch with, but not feel overly threatened by their infants' emotions' (ibid, p.31). This is quite a subtle approach and only available to parents that do not overidentify with their child's pain. In my study, Arlene (mother) seemed able to achieve this balance with her daughter, Chloe, mainly because she frequently used humour but was also open to hearing Chloe's pain.

Returning to the issue of what goes on in the parent-child interactions that form attachment behaviour, I have found a special issue of the *Infant Mental Health Journal* (2005) most helpful. Easterbrooks and Biringen (2005, p.291) introduced the idea of an 'Emotional Availability Scale' (EAS) and referred back to a 2000 issue of the journal in which they described the 'EA in early parent-child interactions as the "connective tissue of healthy socioemotional development" (p.123)' (ibid).

In the first paper of the series, Biringen et al described the features of adult behaviour included in the scale

Four parental dimensions (sensitivity, structuring, nonintrusiveness, and nonhostility) and two child dimensions (responsiveness to parent and involvement of parent) (Biringen et al, 2005, pp 297-298)

I believe this research moves us on in thinking about attachment behaviour as the quality of a relationship that depends on the actions and interactions of both partners. The authors

have also articulated, through describing the scale, how parents and workers could facilitate secure attachment in young children. Biringen et al found that

More sensitive, structuring and nonhostile mothers during reunion in the prekindergarten year, were likely to have children with better social skills...Similarly more responsive and involving children upon reunion with mother during the prekindergarten year, were more likely to have better social skills a year later (2005, p.305)

These findings corroborated Charlwood and Steele's study, who found that 'A mother's experience of having a loving mother and father was strongly correlated to higher levels of agency, social skills, positive affect and compliance in her child' (2004, p.70).

I have also been thinking about Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' (Grenfell and James, 1998). Diane Reay (2002) applied the concept of capital to emotions in her study of how much support mothers were able to offer their children, in relation to success at school. Reay found that there was a 'very thin dividing line between empathy and overidentification when children were experiencing difficulties at school' (2002, p.8). Parents who could be 'sensitive, offer emotional support and encouragement' combined these factors 'to enhance their children's emotional capital' (ibid, p.11). Parents who were still in pain because of their poor experiences at school, did not have the resources to support their children or to enhance their emotional capital. Ironically, 'a number of mothers seemed to pursue educational success at the expense of their children's emotional well-being' (ibid, p.15). I would also like to apply the concept of 'emotional capital' to how some parents are able to equip their young children to deal with the emotional and social context once they move beyond the family context.

## Afterword

The advantage of using attachment theory as an analytical framework on which to project data is that a huge amount of data on attachment has been accumulated since Bowlby first wrote about it. There is therefore a huge body of knowledge on which to draw. The theory is universal and, therefore, any human being can draw on their own experiences to further understand their actions and motivations.

I was never interested in assessing the strength or security of the focus children's attachment to their parents in the way that Ainsworth did. I wanted to be informed by the theory in a way that enabled me to make sense of what the children were doing.

Much of what Bowlby discovered about *when* babies respond to adults has now been refuted by recent research on babies and young children. Trevarthen (2002, p.6) reported

By analysing films, video and sound tracks of young children at talk and play with their companions, we have discovered that infants possess a special human motivation to create, acquire and elaborate shared ideas, to express them in the making...A newborn imitates expressions of voice, face and gesture conversationally, with emotion modulated in intimacy, and with anticipation of appropriate qualities of response.

One of the strands running through all of the research I have considered is that of pedagogy, whether it be parent and child or child and worker. Colwyn Trevarthen has also made a useful contribution with his concept of 'companionship', which he tends to write about, rather than attachment (2002). He did not suggest that attachment theory was wrong but that it did not give 'an adequate account of the emotions that normally operate in development of a baby's self confident possession of knowledge' (Trevarthen, 2002, p.8).

Like Bruner, Trevarthen has recognised the importance of cultural learning. Trevarthen described a 'revolution in psychological theory', whereby we have come to believe in 'two-head thinking' rather than one head thinking. He explained that 'no meaning can be represented in and for one human head, except in an imaginary theatre of remembered company...' (ibid, p.6).

I have noticed that I have a tendency to polarise aspects of the theory so it was quite refreshing and enlightening to hear Daniel Stern talk about attachment behaviours as adaptations. He passed no judgement on avoidant strategies but saw them as an adaptation to circumstances and noted that those strategies were often very effective (Stern, 2004). I am left wondering whether we are all working towards feeling more secure or towards being more aware.

## 1.6 Reflective Practice – Considering the Work of Dewey, Schön and Freire and Their Relevance to This Study

*‘When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case’*

*Schön, 1983, p.68*

### **Introduction**

I can identify closely with Schön’s description of being a ‘researcher in the practice context’. For many years, I carried out research to improve my practice, while working directly with children and families. Often there was no time to record the processes and changes made. I rarely had time to think about the reflective process and what it meant to me. During my Master’s Study (1994-1997) I kept a research journal, in which I jotted down any ‘extraneous material’ related to the four children I was studying (Dexter, 1961-64). Often the jottings were about each child’s family context and the small changes that were occurring at home or in the nursery, for example, when one child’s Family Worker was on holiday, he was less settled and less confident. The journal turned out to be an important source of data when it came to constructing case studies. My journal provided the ‘glue’ that helped to join up the accounts and made them coherent for the reader. Once again I have used journaling as a technique, but I think I have taken my journaling to a new level in this study, by recording and linking my thoughts and feelings with information about the children.

## Thinking about Reflective Thinking

In terms of my own process, I approached reflection through practice and only gradually and comparatively recently became aware of the related theory. When embarking on writing this section of my study, I spent time reading Dewey, Freire, Schön and writers on Bourdieu. I made detailed notes of relevant pieces I wanted to quote and began to draw out some main points. I began to write but nothing was flowing and I became quite stuck. The weather was sunny and warm. I sat in the garden and desperately tried to commit to paper my ideas about reflection. I decided to go for a walk. While I was walking, I tried to reflect on my problem of not being able to write coherently or fluently about reflection.

Firstly, I realised that I was treating the theory about reflection as the gospel. I was not acknowledging what I had learned about reflection through practice. I needed to connect the theory with my own experience. 'I' was not in the writing yet and without me, the information was stilted, dry and unbalanced. I had been reading Freire for a number of years and was probably most familiar with his work and yet I was not able to write coherently about his ideas in this section of my study.

Secondly, I came to realise that although I valued learning by doing or practice wisdom, I still held a deeply ingrained belief that this was not *real* research and I was not a *real* researcher. I needed affirmation from the literature. If it was not forthcoming, then I just needed to read more. I was in a panic that I had missed out an important source of information about reflective practice, something that would be the key to unlocking my understanding. Like the Holy Grail, I would find the answer in the literature, not within my own experience.



This got me thinking about Andrew Pollard, whose work I greatly admire. I remembered his book on 'Reflective Teaching' and looked at what he had said about reflection and reflective thinking. He had used Dewey as a core text for thinking about reflection, so maybe I was on a right track after all.

Through stopping and reflecting on my own problem, I was beginning to see Freire's work in action. I was coming to a new view of the world by thinking about why writing this section was so difficult. My own deeply held view came into my conscious awareness and has helped me to move forward (Freire, 1970). No-one could 'name the world' or 'unveil the world' for me (Freire, 1970, p.150). I had to go through that struggle in order to understand myself a little better than I did before.

### **Reflective Thinking**

John Dewey (1933, p.9) described reflective thinking as

Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends...

Dewey believed that reflective thinking involved logic, 'a sequence of ideas, but also a consequence...Each phase is a step from something to something...' (ibid, pp4/5). In Dewey's view, reflective thinking involved a plan of action,

In every case of reflective activity, a person finds himself confronted with a given, present situation from which he has to arrive at, or conclude to, something else that is not present (ibid, p.95).

Dewey stated that the logical steps involved making inferences based on evidence gathered.

Schön emphasised the value of practice learning and reflection-in-action. He thought that 'Reflection-in-action necessarily involves experiment' (Schön, 1983, p.141). He suggested that 'The practitioner has built up a *repertoire* of examples, images, understandings and actions' (ibid, p.138). When faced with a new problem or situation, a practitioner draws on their experience and finds similarities, but also differences. Schön pointed out that 'The familiar situation functions as a precedent or a metaphor...for the unfamiliar one' (ibid, p.138).

This 'seeing-as' similar also encouraged 'doing' something similar or a variation on a previously tried strategy (ibid, p.139). In relation to my problem of being stuck when trying to write, I have often found that walking frees up my thinking. As soon as I began to walk, I began to ask "What's missing? What's different about this piece of writing to other writing that flows?" This led me to think about "Where am I in this piece of writing? What do I say I value? What am I valuing here?"

In relation to my study data on the children, although I saw each child and their story as unique, I was often able to make inferences about the motives behind their actions, based on other cases I had studied. For example, when Chloe surrounded herself with buckets, I reflected on the actions of L (Arnold, 1997), who 'would establish an enclosure in the block area...to establish her territory'. I noted that L's body language indicated her

satisfaction with her arrangement of the blocks. Chloe, however, seemed to be ‘surrounding herself with containers, as a protective layer, between her and the rest of the world’ at a time when she was feeling vulnerable. Both were acting to separate or define a boundary around themselves. Their emotions, as expressed in their body language, were different.

Schön has helped practitioners to acknowledge the value of practice experience and its major contribution to research and knowledge across several fields of work. Another important point that Schön made was that,

Practitioners, like architects, musicians and therapists construct virtual worlds in which the pace of action can be slowed down and iterations and variations of action can be tried (Schön, 1983, p.279)

For me, the slowing down of processes in thinking and on video has enabled deep reflection to take place.

### **Dealing with Uncertainty**

Dewey reported that

Reflective thinking involves (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity’ (Dewey, 1933, p.12).

I found the idea of being in a 'state of doubt' quite difficult. It went against my desire for security and certainty and meant that I could not polarise ideas as I may have done in the past.

Dewey advised that one needs to be 'critical', 'willing to endure suspense' and 'willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt' (ibid, p.16). I found that some of the observations I was reflecting on contained ideas that were out of my reach at times. I knew, intuitively, that there was something in my hunch about the connection between schemas (repeated patterns of action) and emotions, but articulating what I meant was a really difficult task and meant that I had to 'endure suspense'.

## **Dialogue**

Freire, the famous Brazilian educator, focussed on the concept of 'dialogue' in his book on 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. He was interested in helping the people of Brazil to liberation through seeing themselves and the world differently. He also advised 'reflection and action' (Freire, 2005, p.20). Freire reported that

As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena...

Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their "background awareness" and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition (Freire, 1970, p.63).

Freire recommended 'problem-posing education', a radical departure from the 'banking concept' of education, whereby those who have knowledge 'deposit' their knowledge with

those who are not (traditionally) the holders of knowledge (ibid, p.52). He saw the banking concept as replicating society rather than transforming lives (ibid). Freire wanted to encourage critical thinking, to see peasants as owners of knowledge, to see everyone 'in the process of *becoming*' (Freire, 1970, p.65). Freire advised that reflection alone was not enough, it was mere 'verbalism'. Action without reflection was 'activism' (ibid, p.68). He saw 'dialogue' as 'an encounter among women and men who name the world' (ibid, p.70). Just as one person cannot name the world 'on behalf of others', neither can one 'unveil the world for another' (ibid, p.150).

Freire advised that people need to come together as equals and to dialogue, each listening and respecting the views of others. Freire was particularly interested in the role of literacy. He stated that

Learning to read and write has meaning in that, by requiring men and women to reflect about themselves and about the world they are in and with, it makes them discover that the world is also theirs, that their work is not the price they pay for being citizens, but rather a way of loving-and of helping the world to be a better place (ibid, p.106).

Within our centre, we have drawn on Freire's ideas in relation to how we see our work with parents, valuing the views of each parent, encouraging the parents to reflect on their knowledge of their children and to share their knowledge with workers. Easen et al (1992, p.283) described this as a 'Developmental Partnership' in which power was shared and 'children's spontaneous behaviour' was 'the generator of dialogue between parents and educators'. In order to ensure that the partnership was equal, Easen et al suggested that 'the starting point for the focus of the work' needed to be 'the parents' firsthand experience' of their child (ibid, p.288). They explained that

The parents' interpretations of their child's behaviour reveal their perspective which underpin their behaviour towards their child and it is this process of reflecting on firsthand experience that results in the development and elaboration of these perspectives (ibid)

Although Easen et al emphasised the parents' learning through dialogue, they also acknowledged that 'the educator, too, learns in partnership' (ibid, p.294). This idea links closely with my story of my own learning through observation, dialogue and journaling.

### **Connecting with Recent Theory on Reflective Practice**

By chance and when I was feeling stuck in my efforts to write about reflection, a colleague gave me a paper on 'Experiences of reflective teaching' by Kuit, Reay and Freeman (2001). I was able to relate to three issues raised in this paper that connected with my own recent experiences of reflecting on my research data:

- Pain: 'Reflective practice was and is difficult and sometimes painful' (Kuit et al, 2001, p.131)
- Time: 'Reflection clearly takes time but none had been apportioned...' (ibid, p.139)
- Other people: 'Reflection is difficult when done in isolation...' (ibid)

I have found the process of reflecting on current and past experiences painful at times, but also revealing, in terms of my interactions with others. The biggest challenge was to reflect on my parenting of my own children. I had relegated those feelings to a place where they were not easily accessible. I knew, from my professional learning, how I should have

interacted with my children, particularly as infants. It was easier not to think about how I had actually parented my children. The reflective process I engaged in, much of which was concerned with adult-child interactions and feelings, required me to think about what had happened. The hardest thing was to forgive myself for not being perfect. I also needed to take into account the context, at the time and my own experiences of being parented.

Reflection is a slow process which takes time. I have often considered observations of the focus children over and over again. Firstly I observed what happened, when I was there, in real time. Secondly, I revisited the observations with the parents and/or workers. Thirdly, I reflected on observations in the light of information offered by parents and/or workers and with the benefit of the related literature. Some sequences I watched over and over again to reflect on possible meanings.

Although I would have liked to reflect on my data with others on a regular basis as the stories were unfolding, this was not always possible or practicable. I watched the filmed sequences with the parents and workers (often separately) whenever possible. I found it useful to discuss the case studies with the parents, workers involved and also research colleagues. I found that the power (in the relationships) was often held by me, as researcher, and it was my own colleagues from the Research Base, who could most easily challenge and question my interpretations. It was they who made me think more deeply about what I had written and I found this useful and productive.

Another recent and contrasting paper on 'Narrative and Reflective Practice...' (Chambers, 2003) helped me to reflect on the different narratives within my 'stories'. Chambers linked the 'narrative itself' and 'reflections on the narrative' stating that both 'would appear to

facilitate understanding and to generate new knowledge' (ibid, p.404). He suggested that other readers might offer a different interpretation or 'provide alternative readings' (ibid). I realised that Piaget's observations of his own children and other naturalistic observational studies had given me opportunities to make my own meaning from the narratives or observations presented (Piaget, 1951; Isaacs, 1930; 1933). This was why I was keen to read raw data and also to present some unanalysed data in my study.

Chamber's paper also made me reflect on the so-called raw data I was presenting, in the sense that I held the camera and therefore where I directed my 'gaze' had a major impact on the data that was gathered (Chambers, 2003, p.406).

I could not help comparing my journaling to the first narrative in Chamber's paper, vivid and raw, with an elusive feel to it, conveying the feeling and the picture of 'being there' rather than presenting a constructed narrative or story. Like my journal, the account was a sort of 'stream of consciousness' account which had an 'enunciative function' and was 'in (the) white heat of inspiration' (ibid) p.405). It reminded me very much of the Impressionist paintings I admire.

This observation contrasted sharply with the other two observations, in which the writers attempted to 'replicate a scene' (ibid, p.408) and to 'tell an anecdote' (ibid, p.409) but with very clear moral messages underpinning each of them. Chambers discussed the question of 'voice' and, again, this issue was very pertinent to my study. I have attempted to include the 'voices' of the children, parents and, to some extent, workers, but the strongest voice in this work is still mine.



Chambers spoke about the value of metaphor ‘as an analogue to leap from the familiar to the unfamiliar’ (ibid, p.412). I think that in using schemas, young children are able to make some leaps from the known to the unknown. This idea is integral to my study.

## **Journaling**

An important source of data in my study was journaling. Somehow, journaling provided an anchor for me within a sea of uncertainty. I could say anything in my journal without losing face or sounding crass. It was the first place to try out a new idea or thought.

Journaling is a technique recommended to Early Years leaders engaging in study for the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). Within the NPQICL materials, the authors have drawn on the research of Marlene Morrison, Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown and John Elliott, who have all recommended journaling as a way of recording processes of learning (NPQICL, Booklet 2, 2004, p.47).

The authors of the NPQICL also recommend the work of Tristine Rainer on keeping a diary. Tristine Rainer is the Director of the Center for Autobiographic Studies in Pasadena, California. Rainer described a diary as a ‘tool that allows them to make personal sense out of all the platitudes, theories, philosophies, and cultural conditioning about happiness’ (Rainer, [www.soulfulliving.com/discoveringjoy.htm](http://www.soulfulliving.com/discoveringjoy.htm)). She advised that diarists ‘discover happiness inductively; the evidence is drawn from their feelings and experience’ (ibid). These ideas fit well with ideas of humanistic education, whereby personal feelings and experiences are drawn on to inform current practice (Whitaker, 1986). During the second half of the twentieth century, the emphasis in leadership and management theory changed

to ‘creating the conditions to release the actualizing tendency in all individuals’ (Whitaker, 1993, p.30). Whitaker talked about ‘releasing’ the learning from within (2007). Rainer’s idea was that a diary enables you to ‘stay in touch with your true feelings’ ([www.soulfulliving.com/discoveringjoy.htm](http://www.soulfulliving.com/discoveringjoy.htm)).

## **Afterword**

My new learning was that I could access most of my significant learning through my lived experiences, rather than through the theory alone. Whenever I made a major ‘accommodation’, to use Piaget’s term, I often did so through seeing something differently, rather than by reading or hearing about what someone else had found out. This was a real turning point for me as I think that I had internalised a fairly hierarchical working model of knowledge, based on; knowers and researchers at the top, who carried out positivist research studies with control groups and big numbers. They claimed to hold the knowledge in the field of Early Education with Care. I knew about the children and families I had worked with but could not compete with these giant ‘knowers’; at the bottom of the hierarchy were practitioners, who hold everyday experience of working with children and families, who know about Early Education with Care through doing. I now see that ‘knowing how to interact with children and families on a daily basis’ is important knowledge and if those workers have opportunities to reflect on their interactions as well as on the theory, then there is potential for a great deal of learning.

I realise that those ways of knowing are a lot more fluid and less set than I was seeing and thinking of them. Researchers can learn from practitioners and vice versa. The two ways of

knowing need to be brought together. I 'knew' this for a long time but never 'felt' it so keenly before.

## **2. PART TWO PREPARING FOR THE ACTION**

### 2.1 Building on Earlier Approaches

*‘The great power of naturalistic observation is that we can see what the child herself is interested in or curious about, and can examine her abilities in situations that are of emotional significance, interest or importance to her’ (Dunn, 1991, p.11).*

#### **Introduction**

In this section I focus on ‘how’ I carried out an observational study by drawing on the literature related to qualitative, naturalistic studies early in the twentieth century and the more recent literature on carrying out child studies.

#### **Observational Studies**

The kind of research I had been drawn to in my reading was qualitative (Isaacs, 1930; 1933; Johnson, 1928/72; Piaget, 1951; Navarra, 1955; Athey, 1990; Matthews, 2003). When I was given the opportunity to carry out a study about children’s emotions, I immediately thought about the work of Susan Isaacs (1930; 1933) and Piaget’s early work already referred to (Piaget, 1951). Susan Isaacs ran the Malting House School in Cambridge for three years and documented the children’s development and learning in two volumes, that are considered seminal texts in the areas of observation and child development. Looking back on my journey, gathering naturalistic observations was a slow way of learning about children’s emotions, but, for me, I think, gathering the observations

and spending time with each child and their parents, was part of the attraction. I enjoy being with young children. There is something very fresh and authentic in their interactions that I rarely find in my interactions with adults.

Susan Isaacs (1933, p.4) stated her rationale for gathering qualitative and naturalistic data, rather than carrying out experiments:

Experimental methods have in fact proved enormously fruitful in the study of intellectual growth, of learning and of language. But in the field of social development they are almost inapplicable. To study the moral development of children by asking for their judgements at different ages on a series of fables or of moral situations, for example, is to consider only one very limited aspect of the problem...We can only study their effective morality in its spontaneous action in *real situations*.

Isaacs and her team attempted to capture ‘something approximating to the total behaviour’ of the children (Isaacs, 1933, p.5). The observations and analysis were presented separately, so that the reader could bring his/her own experiences to bear on the interpretation before reading Isaacs’ interpretations of each child’s intellectual growth or social development (1930; 1933).

In a paper published in 1952, Isaacs explained the methodological principles she was using in relation to research, which she described as closely aligned to ‘clinical studies’ and ‘analytic technique’. They were ‘(a) attention to details; (b) observation of context; (c) study of genetic continuity’ (Isaacs, 1952, p.70). Just as Piaget brought his training as a naturalist to bear on his observations of his children, Isaacs brought her experiences in analysis and as an analyst to bear on her observational technique in the school. She referred to the work of others, including Winnicott, on ‘the researches into infant behaviour’, that

also took into account the same three principles. Isaacs emphasised the value of noting 'the context of the observed data...the whole immediate setting of the behaviour being studied in its social and emotional situation' (ibid, p.71).

Isaacs was quite critical of some of Piaget's research. Like Donaldson (1978), Isaacs demonstrated through her observations of the children in the Malting House School, that many children were functioning at a higher level than Piaget's ages and stages suggested. This was demonstrated to Professor Piaget, himself, when he visited the school and a boy of 5 years 9 months described to him the mechanical causality of the bicycle, which, according to Piaget, 'does not occur until 8 or 9 years' (Isaacs, 1930, p.44).

Another criticism Isaacs made of Piaget's research, was that

He offers us a highly articulated and elaborated picture of the development of *the child*, rather than a series of studies of particular children under particular conditions (Isaacs, 1930, p.73).

Piaget's early observations of his own children did offer detailed information, including context and he arranged the observations in chronological order, so that the reader could see the continuity. Later on, he seemed more concerned with posing questions to children in order to understand thinking at different ages and stages. It was doubtful whether each child would ever have posed such questions themselves.

Another study of young children made early in the twentieth century in New York, was carried out and documented by Harriett Johnson. Johnson stated that

The records of the nursery staff are for the most part qualitative in character. The attempt is made to observe and record the behaviour of the children in such a way that it will be possible to trace the development of patterned responses and to discover their significance in age-level differences or in individual personality differences (Johnson, 1928/72, p.153).

The children were aged eighteen months to three years. Again the study was qualitative and naturalistic and still relevant over seventy years later. In an introductory essay written in 1972, Biber commented that

...Miss Johnson's approach to studying children through observations of spontaneous behaviour represents one of the tools of the still young discipline of child development that we cannot afford to discard. It is not the method suitable to an "experiment" in its orthodox connotation: there was no matched control group, no hypothesis to be tested and no measures of the reliability of the data (Biber, 1972, p.xxi).

Isaacs and Johnson were both trying to present a picture of the processes of development and learning, in action in young children. The analysis and connections or patterns followed in both of their accounts. Biber continued by informing the reader that

The reader is in direct contact with a thinking observer, with the process of inferring and generalizing, tentatively, from the vivid, concrete imagery and reportage about children in action (ibid, p.xxii).

Not only did the reader benefit from hearing about children 'in action', but also from listening to the observer 'in action'. Biber (ibid, p.xxiii) also noted that 'There is a loss, both to research and education, in the extent to which the recording technique in its various forms has become the specialized tool of researchers, not directly involved in the teaching functions'. She suggested that the '...developmental principles, drawn as they are from a natural learning setting, are more immediately usable' than those 'framed in the context of

experimental situations' (ibid, p.xxv). This view brings us right back to the idea and value of practitioner research and research-in-practice as promoted by Lewin (1952), Elliott (1991) and Schon (1983).

By the time I embarked on my study, I was no longer a full time member of the nursery staff. I was mindful that the method needed to fit the kind of study I wanted to carry out. So it was not enough that I enjoyed being with the children. I needed to be sure that a qualitative, naturalistic study would elicit the kind of information I was seeking. Also, in using this method, I was sticking closely to what I knew. Was I doing that to avoid tackling something new? Was the focus on emotions enough of something new for me at this time? Would I be able to gather enough information if I was not in the setting all of the time? Would the children allow me to observe them in the same way as I had before? I decided that I was still close enough, both physically and psychologically, to carry out a study of a small number of children, based on the principles suggested by Susan Isaacs.

### **Child Study**

Many books have been written on the subject of Child Study (Webb, 1975; Bartholomew and Bruce, 1993; Fawcett, 1996; Miller et al, 1989). Writing in 1975 for students, Webb advised that 'personal' reasons for choosing a child or children to study 'should be ruled out' and that a 'random choice' should be made (Webb, 1975, p.13). However, Stake (1995, p.4) recommended that 'we need to pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry', which seemed sensible in my case. Webb outlined various techniques for studying children, such as 'time-sampling' and 'event-sampling' (1975, p.69)



Bartholomew and Bruce wrote a book on recordkeeping in 1993. They drew on the Child Study Movement and several famous baby biographies to recommend 'recording what a child does in a natural setting' (1993, p.14). They emphasised the role of the parent in sharing observations made in the setting and at home. The purpose was to support the children's development and learning and to identify next steps for each child. Involving the parents was critical to my study. It was the parents who could supply the all important contextual information that helped us to interpret the data.

Mary Fawcett wrote a best seller in 1996. Its focus was 'Learning Through Child Observation'. She, too, outlined the history of child observation and raised questions about bias, gender, cultural perspectives and other issues (Fawcett, 1996). Like Webb, Fawcett recommended that 'If a child has to be selected for observation, it is therefore best to find some way of randomising the choice' (p.25). Fawcett described different observation methods, including Naturalistic Observation (p.48). Fawcett also introduced 'a distinctive model of infant observation' practised 'as part of the training of child psychotherapists at the Tavistock Clinic in London (p.88).

Miller, Rustin, Rustin and Shuttleworth (1989, p.2) described the Tavistock method,

This method of infant observation attempts to take emotion into account. A new concept of the observer is being employed...here the truths which interest us are themselves emotional truths.

The purpose of this kind of observation of babies and young children is to 'stir' up the emotions in observer and reader. Miller et al (ibid, p.3) continued by saying that 'Correctly grasped, the emotional factor is an indispensable tool to be used in the service of greater

understanding'. Peter Elfer has recently extended this work to include nursery workers working with the youngest children (Elfer, 1996; Elfer, 2003). Elfer (2003, p.5) reported on the method

It is more that the observer learns to make her or himself emotionally open to what can be *felt* as well as *seen and heard* during the observation. All of this information, the tiny details of what has been noticed, the hunches and feelings that have been evoked, has then to be carefully 'unpicked' by a wider group of experienced observers who can begin to form first ideas about what meaning it might reveal about how the baby is thinking or feeling.

Perhaps I needed to be emotionally open to what was happening for the children I was studying.

### **My Background in Relation to Observation**

I have been trained over a number of years in carrying out the kind of observations recommended by Isaacs and Johnson in those early studies. However I have also become interested in the work of Judy Dunn, who has studied 'children's development, particularly social and emotional development' since the early 1970's (Dunn, 1993b, p.336). Dunn began by being interested in differences in her own three children who were very close in age. Dunn (1993b, p.336) reported that

First , if we wish to understand the significance of children's social experiences in daily life, it is these experiences that we must try to describe and measure. We should attempt to capture what *actually* happens to children...Secondly, if we want to understand children's emotional and social development and their experiences...then it is crucial to study them in situations of emotional significance to them, that is, with their family and friends.

Dunn has gone on to study young children and their siblings over many years. In a chapter written in 1991, Dunn compared naturalistic strategies with 'experimental approaches' (Dunn, 1991, p.61). Dunn found that 'Naturalistic observations were the *only* source of information about teasing, joking and social manipulation' (ibid). She found that it was impossible to set up situations in which these events occurred. Dunn also reported that 'naturalistic observations enable us to examine the context in which children begin to express understanding of others' psychological states' (ibid). She also pointed out 'the limitations' of gathering naturalistic observations,

First, the problems of making inferences about children's understanding from naturalistic observations of their behaviour, and second, the difficulty of ensuring that behaviour that properly represents their abilities has been sampled (ibid).

Often, Dunn's studies have been qualitative and naturalistic but she has also developed the use of experimental methods and interviews. Dunn (1993b, p.338) reasoned that 'Any one method of observing children or interviewing parents can give us only part of the picture...So when I began to work with Carol Kendrick we decided to use both observations and interviews...' Dunn continued

We also decided to look systematically at the relation between the information from these different sources of information, to assess the extent of agreement between them and to help clarify which kinds of questions are most usefully answered by observations and which by interview (ibid).

One decision they found useful was 'the choice to record family conversations with sound recorders' (ibid, p.339) as the conversations could then be transcribed and coded. Dunn has gone on to be involved in many bigger studies that use quasi experimental methods to

gather information about children. Although I have found these studies interesting, I have found that I cannot enter the lives of the children and researchers in the way that a study like Isaacs' allowed.

Isaacs, as well as being a teacher, was also trained as a psychoanalyst, and, therefore, had a greater awareness of the function of 'the unconscious' and of the role of imaginative play in young children's lives. In her second volume on the 'Social Development of Young Children', Isaacs reported that

Psychoanalytic studies of little children, moreover, have also shown that in their free dramatic play, children work out their inner conflicts in an external field, thus lessening the pressure of the conflict, and diminishing guilt and anxiety (Isaacs, 1933, p.210)

She acknowledged that her 'task in this present volume is to study and interpret those actual conflicts and the deepest sources of the child's intellectual impulses and emotional development, for their own sake' (ibid). Isaacs was very clear that interpretations of the cognitive and the affective meanings were both valid and always present in the children's play and explorations.

I realise now that, in searching for emotions as well as cognition, I have opened my mind to a more balanced view of the children and myself. However, I am wary of polarising or seeing as less adequate, all experimental studies. I wonder whether Ainsworth's studies of the Strange Situation would have involved me emotionally in quite the same way as this study has? Perhaps it was merely that the time was right for me to extend my earlier skills and knowledge to include the emotional as well as the cognitive.

## **Key Ideas from Observational Studies**

As a part time researcher, who had access to the nursery on site, I knew that I was not in a position to gather the wealth of data gathered by Isaacs or Johnson. My role was more like Dunn's, a visitor, trying not to intrude but trying to 'capture a representative slice of behaviour and interaction' (Dunn, 1993b, p.338). Remembering Stern (2004) saying that "You can see the world in a grain of sand", I decided that I needed to select the children to study and talk to their parents first. I reasoned that whoever I studied, I would have to spend time getting to know the children and their families in order to build up trust.

In earlier studies, as a full time member of the nursery staff, I had engaged parents in keeping diaries about what their children became involved in at home (Arnold, 1990; 1997). I was much more tentative about studying affect and more comfortable with cognition. Although I thought the diary work was valuable, I was too unsure about how to 'handle' or 'deal with' what the parents might have contributed in diaries. Also I was not sure about what to ask them to look out for, in relation to affect. I decided that I would carry out the observations in the nursery and have discussions with parents and workers as part of the meaning making of what I had observed.

I began in my pilot study of two children, to sample their separation and reunion. This was a rich source of data, with regard to attachment, but I was also curious about what the children became engaged in after their parents left. Ideally, I was looking for deep involvement in play (Laevers, 1997).

For the main study, which involved six more children over a period of almost three years, after tracking each child for a half day, I decided to gather observational data at different times of the day. My aim was to focus on a small number of individual children and to observe each one for between fifteen and thirty minutes on each occasion. If the children were agreeable, after the initial tracking, I introduced a video camera. Each family was given the video data to keep. In addition to the planned observations, I had lunch with those children, who stayed for lunch each day and this proved to be a rich source of ‘extraneous material’ that helped to put the observations into context (Dexter, 1961).

Summary of Data Gathered (see Appendices for more detail)

Name	Observed from	Amount of data gathered
Evan	Jan 2001 until June 2002	1hr 4 mins on video plus incidental information gathered at lunchtimes and a meeting with each of his parents
Jordan	Dec 2002 until August 2004	7 hrs on video, 24 written observation (approx 14 hrs) plus discussions with each parent separately, his worker and both parents together
Chloe	Jan 2003 until July 2004	6 hrs on video, 8 written observations (approx 5 hrs) plus discussions with her mother, with Chloe and with a Family Worker
Steffi	September 2003 until July 2004	4 hrs on video, 2 hrs 30 mins written observation, discussions with her mother and Family Worker
Susan	October 2003 until September 2004	4 hrs, 18 mins on video, 2 hrs written observation, discussions with her mother and Family Worker
Courtney	Nov 2003 until 3 weeks later	Less than 1 hr on video, plus discussions with grandparent and workers and communication with parents by letter and via the grandparent

## 2.2 Using Video and Interaction Analysis

### **Introduction**

In this section I introduce the use of video as a research tool, considering how I and my colleagues have used video for the last twenty years and also how other researchers have developed the use of video for different purposes.

### **My Experience of Using Video**

I had used video in research projects, as part of the documentation of children's development and learning and for professional development purposes since the late 1980s. I had found it both fascinating and frustrating. In terms of sharing data with children, parents and colleagues, the filmed material was extremely valuable as a record and to discuss. Jordan and Henderson (1995, p.51) pointed out that '...video taping...produces data much closer to the event itself than other kinds of re-presentation'. We had often watched sequences again and again as 'A key characteristic of such data is the permanence of the primary record in all its richness' (ibid, p.52). Jordan and Henderson described 'interaction analysis' as 'an interdisciplinary method for the empirical investigation of the interaction of human beings with each other and with objects in their environment' (ibid, p.39).

It was frustrating when the technology broke down, in some way, and this happened frequently in the early days (Arnold, 1990). Also, to begin with, cameras were quite large and unwieldy and introduced something of a barrier to interacting with people. In terms of

using a positivist paradigm, in which researchers were aiming to be objective and removed from the situation they were observing, holding the camera did offer some distance (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). However, I was not working within a positivist paradigm. I was aiming to be a ‘participant’, a part time member of the community I was studying (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.568). Holding a camera also introduced ‘camera effects’ but Jordan and Henderson assured us that

Where people are intensely involved in what they are doing, the presence of a camera is likely to fade out of awareness quite rapidly (Jordan and Henderson, 1995, p.55).

We have found this to be the case with most children. However, a small number of children became so interested in the mechanics and working of the camera, that it was impossible to film their involvement, without the aid of a second camera.

As far as the professional development of staff was concerned, filming each other interacting with children prompted some major accommodations or ‘aha’ moments during the 1990s (Whalley and Arnold, 1997). Following a study of parents’ and workers’ interactions with children, we identified ‘Eight Effective Pedagogic Strategies’ to inform our practice (Whalley and Arnold, 1997) and we began to use video to share with parents on a much more regular basis. As part of a study on ‘Involving Parents in Their Children’s Learning’ we set up weekly study groups for the parents of nursery children. During each meeting of the group, workers and parents viewed five minute video clips of their children engaged in play in the nursery or at home or both (Whalley, 2001). During these sessions, and building on the work of Athey (1990) and Easen et al (1992), we shared the following key child development concepts with the parents:



- Schemas or repeated patterns of action used by young children when exploring their environment (Athey, 1990)
- Involvement or the extent to which young children become absorbed when exploring their environment (Laevers, 1997)
- Well-being or how young children are expressing and in touch with their emotions (Laevers, 1997)
- Effective Pedagogic Strategies or strategies used by adults when providing for and interacting with young children (Whalley and Arnold, 1997)

We used the theory to analyse the observations together.

Filming workers with children was always a tricky decision, which took careful negotiation at the start of any new study. Tobin and Davidson (1990, p.273) made the point that 'Teachers participating in research are vulnerable'. They demonstrated that teachers and pupils can be misrepresented when researchers edit and textualise research data. They also raised the issue of power, in that they wondered whether a class teacher could decline to be involved when the head had agreed to the school's involvement. In our study with the parents on 'Pedagogic Strategies', we had set up a 'Buddy System' so that workers paired up and filmed each other and that worked well. The parents involved were very happy to be filmed by staff as long as they were fully involved in the analysis of the video data. We used Jordan and Henderson's work as a guide for how to conduct those analysis sessions (Jordan and Henderson, 1995).

Through carrying out my study, I found that I needed to treat workers as individuals and could not make assumptions about their involvement. At the beginning of the study period, I sent out 'Letters of Co-operation' to the families and staff, who might be involved (fourteen in all). Only three out of fourteen responded immediately. My former colleagues had not replied so I interviewed one member of staff (who I thought would be honest with me about her reasons for not replying immediately). I also interviewed one parent, who had responded right away to my request. I found that it was a matter of trust, that even though workers knew from experience that it 'would be worthwhile', they still felt 'criticised'. The parent, on the other hand, had a great deal of trust in me and in the other staff. She had seen the benefits of being involved, particularly for her children. She talked about the fact that her child watched his nursery video at home. I realised that the fact that I was once removed from the nursery (as a researcher and trainer) was significant for other staff. I had neglected to gather their individual views prior to seeking their co-operation. We agreed on a protocol for carrying out my study:

- That I would seek the co-operation of individual members of staff
- That workers would know in advance when and who I would be filming
- That we would have a prompt one to one discussion afterwards about what had happened
- That I would check out my case studies with the staff involved
- That anyone could withdraw at any time
- That they could choose whether to have their real first names used

The worker I interviewed wanted to see the video material before I showed it to the parents. This presented something of a dilemma for me because I thought that the parents

had the right to see their child on film first. Obviously, if something happened during filming, with which the worker was uncomfortable, the worker could say immediately “Stop filming” or “I don’t want you to use that material”. I was filming only in the setting (the workers’ domain or territory) so they were, in effect, the first censors of the material. In the end, we came to a compromise. We set up a diary in which I wrote a brief account of what had happened after each sequence was filmed. The workers could also write in the diary. I also agreed to make a copy of each filmed sequence for the worker to view, so that the parent and worker had access to the material more or less simultaneously. My first principle in relation to the data, was to protect the participants ‘from harm (physical, emotional or any other kind)’ (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p.662). Fontana and Frey (ibid) pointed out that

...traditionally, ethical concerns have revolved around the topics of *informed consent* (receiving consent by the subject after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject) and *protection from harm*...

In relation to filmed material, this raised another issue for consideration. I had to make the participants aware that it was difficult to adhere to the ‘right to privacy’ principle if video was being used.

### **Other Research Involving the Use of Video**

An interesting development in the use of video was Tobin’s work on cross cultural studies. He has used video, not as data, but as material to provoke discussions, which were recorded and subsequently became the data (Tobin, 2006). The idea was that filming was done in settings in perhaps three, four or five different countries. A twenty minute

sequence, preferably provocative in some way, was extracted from each video and shown to small discussion groups in the host country and in two other participating countries. The resulting discussion was recorded and was considered to be the data. This method has provided material for rich discussions about practice and underlying values and differences. I took part in a discussion led by Jytte Jensen, from Denmark, during which she showed short films from England, Hungary and Denmark. During our discussions we soon went beyond superficial differences and identified the more subtle uses of body language, spoken language and actions that demonstrated each worker's view of young children and their abilities.

Following on from our earlier work with parents of nursery aged children viewing video in study groups, in 2000 we began to use video in a group for children 0-3 and their parents. We called the group Growing Together. It was significant, at this point, that we had switched to using digital video cameras, the material from which we could run through a computer and slow down to snatch video stills. During the busy session, lasting one and a half hours, one worker focussed on one parent and child. With the parent's permission, the worker filmed a short video sequence (less than five minutes) either of the child deeply engaged in play or of a parent and child interaction. The worker, parent and child immediately viewed the video sequence on a computer set up in the corner of the room. This was an opportunity to discuss the child's development and learning and for the worker to introduce theoretical concepts, if appropriate. The parent and worker chose stills from the filmed sequence and added language to illuminate what was happening. The parent took home a one page mini portfolio about their child on that day. We found that for this group, workers needed to have the underpinning knowledge about the psychoanalytic theories of 'holding', 'containment' and 'attachment', as well as the key child development

theories used with the parents of the older children. We were influenced in the early days of this group by Judith Woodhead, a psychotherapist, who worked in the group for two years.

Video has been used as a tool 'in mental health practice since the 1950s' (Zelenko and Benham, 2000, p.194). Zelenko and Benham (ibid) have reported that

...videotaping has been described as a unique vehicle for discussion that provides a distancing effect, permits detailed observation that is impossible during the session, and sees things a human eye does not.

They also made the point that

The technique allows family members to re-experience their own interactional patterns in a non-threatening manner, enabling them to consider the meanings they attach to their family experience in different and productive ways (ibid).

A slightly different use of video has been promoted in Video Interaction Guidance. Using this technique, 'the therapist draws attention to and reinforces the positive interactions' that have taken place between parent and child (VIG, 2002). The tape is edited and shows only the positive in order to reinforce positive behaviours. The theory underpinning this approach is behaviourist rather than constructivist and focuses on changing behaviour rather than reflecting on earlier experiences.

Zelenko and Benham described a study of one child and parent and reported on the conversation between mother and therapist during video replay. They demonstrated that

The technique potentially provides an accelerated access to early maternal memories and promotes enlightening awareness of the links between maternal past experience and present behaviours with her child that can lead to insight and therapeutic change (ibid, p.201).

Another advantage of using video material in therapy was that it promoted the ‘therapeutic alliance’. Instead of the therapist making interpretations, as an expert, ‘therapist and patient could join in observation and discussion of the interactions that encompass all participants’ (Woodhead et al, 2006, p.141). Parents could ‘look, see and reflect’ alongside the therapist (ibid, p.144). Woodhead et al studied twins and reported that

At the same time both babies experienced themselves being observed, thought about, spoken of, and related with, each of these experiences promoting greater coherence of sense of self (ibid, p.144).

Perhaps the children in my study experienced ‘being observed, thought about, spoken of, and related to’?

Colette Tait (2007) filmed one parent and baby once a week for eight consecutive weeks and then reflected on the filmed interactions alongside the parent. She introduced theory in response to their discussions. She was trying to find out whether it was possible to ‘facilitate reflection’ (Tait, 2007, p.1). Tait chose to work with a parent that she knew already. The parent attended two weekly groups that Tait co-led. She chose this parent because she had observed that ‘Something very positive was evident in her relationship with Mark, and at the same time Tracy was worrying about her relationship with Jenny and was articulating this worry’ (ibid, p.13). I think Tait detected an openness in the parent to think about and to talk about feelings. Like Shaw (1991), Tait was interested in the parent’s learning, in how ‘perspective transformation’ occurred (Mezirow, 1981).

## **Key Ideas About Using Video**

Having used video before over a number of years, I identified the following ways in which video would be an advantage as a research tool in my study:

- Rich, original data that picked up any subtle nuances, for example a particular ‘walk’, or a way that a child ‘held’ themselves
- A way of demonstrating my interest in each child
- Data that could be shared with children, parents and workers and for families to keep
- A ‘way in’ to talk about children and their emotions and to gather further data about family context
- Data on which we could reflect over time and return to in the light of discovering new theory
- A way of being alongside children, parents and workers to encourage an equal relationship
- A way of acknowledging parents as experts on their own children

## 2.3 Designing the Study

### **Introduction**

In this section, I focus on the decisions I made about where, what, who and how I carried out my research study and gathered information. I also report on the ethical issues, the interpretation of the data, presenting the findings and any variations to the plan.

### **Where Did the Action Take Place?**

I have already stated that I made a decision early on that my focus of interest would be a small number of children engaging in play in the nursery. For the major part of each day within the nursery, staff are anchored in particular areas, for example, construction area, café, messy area. Children move freely around the nursery, indoors and out of doors, and are supported in their explorations by adults anchored in the area they are using. Towards the end of the morning and towards the end of the afternoon each day, each worker gathers the small group of children in their Family Group for a story, chat, songs or to go to the soft room or for a walk. This small group activity is based on extending children's interests and on building a group identity and sense of belonging and lasts for about twenty minutes. Most of the observations for my study were made during the period of free choice for children with the intention of capturing information about children's spontaneous behaviours. Pan (2004) has shown that children are more likely to display schematic behaviour when activities are free from adult direction.



I tracked each child for a whole session initially, in order to get to know the children better and to discover the general rhythm of their day at nursery. I used this strategy in an earlier study and found it to be effective (Arnold, 1997). During the initial tracking, I talked to each child about the study and checked that they were comfortable with being observed and filmed. I used pen and paper to note down each child's actions and language on this occasion. Subsequently I made video observations as long as the children were comfortable with being filmed. This sometimes changed.

I arranged to meet with the parents and/or workers wherever was best for them. The options offered to the parents were; in their homes; in the nursery area when they were dropping off or collecting their children; or in the research base where I worked. I met with the workers either in the nursery area or in the research base. We needed to meet somewhere where we could watch video together and talk. Sometimes parents brought their children with them. I sometimes showed the children themselves in action on my laptop while I was in the nursery. I did not gather any significant data from these interactions but I thought it was important to show the children what I had been filming. They also had opportunities to watch the data at home.

I set up a learning journal on the computer at home, which was where I did my reading, transcribed and revisited the video sequences and eventually wrote up the case studies. I often found myself jotting down thoughts on scraps of paper to be written up later.

## **What Kind of Study?**

I have struggled to describe my study, partly because the focus has changed slightly during the process. Drawing on the work of Isaacs (1930; 1933), Johnson (1928/72) and Dunn (1993b), I can now say that it was a qualitative and naturalistic study of a small number of children. According to Janesick (2000, p.382) 'A critical beginning point' is 'What do I want to know in this study?' I wanted to know more about children's emotions and how emotional content shows up in children's spontaneous behaviour, particularly in repeated patterns of behaviour. I was curious about the meanings of the children's actions. Although throughout most of the study, I strongly resisted the pain of the emotional content, I was also fascinated by the elusive nature of the connection between cognition and affect as demonstrated in some of the actions of the focus children. I was interested in 'the meaning or interpretation' of an aspect of the children's behaviour (ibid).

## **The Methodology Adopted for This Study**

Our research methodologies are (we would argue) rooted in our own personal values which, in some form, inform our ethical and moral responses to problems and challenges (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002, p.68).

Thinking about methodology has once again prompted me to reflect on my own route into research through practice. Firstly my experiences as a child growing up in the area where I now work, secondly my experiences as a parent and grandparent and finally as a Family Worker, working directly day in and day out with children and families. I have learned to value getting to know each child in the context of their family and to value their learning, most of which occurs through the family and at home. All of these experiences have

impacted on my view of how to carry out research with people. As Clough and Nutbrown (2002) have stated, my personal values and philosophy have defined decisions made about this study to a great extent.

### *A Positivist Approach*

The traditional 'positivist' or 'normative' view of research as information to be discovered in the field, regardless of who is researching or what is being studied, is a view I rejected early on in my career I now realise. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.27) described the 'positivist paradigm' as

...striving for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour, and the ascription of causality...

I have found it impossible to be, or to claim to be, objective. When engaging in Child Study in particular, it has been critical to make relationships with the children and families involved. In terms of good early years practice, I would see it as inappropriate for a stranger to begin studying and particularly filming a child or children without getting to know them and their family first. I saw it as advantageous that I knew all but one of the families involved in this study already and still thought that I needed to get to know them as partners in this study. I needed to share information with the families about what I was proposing and I needed to engage with them and build relationships in the context of my study if they were to provide their informed consent.

As far as 'controllability' was concerned, controlling variables is a tricky and complex process when thinking about people as there are so very many. In this study, I was interested in the uniqueness of each child and family and their experiences, so any kind of control just was not relevant.

I understand why, in larger less personal studies, researchers have found it useful to use control groups in order to demonstrate the impact of an intervention on a particular group of the population. However, in the context in which I have been working, it would seem morally wrong to withhold any sort of intervention that would enable a child or family to do better than they are currently doing. Whenever a parent has approached me and shown interest in taking part in any study I have been engaged in, I have encouraged and included them.

I was interested in the frequency with which actions occurred and this could be loosely termed 'measurability' but often that related to one child's behaviour and actions and did not necessarily go across the children. In any case, the number of people I was working with would be seen as insignificant as compared with, for example, the EPPE study (Sylva et al, 2004).

I was also searching for any predictability or links but was not expecting to see simple causal links as I recognised that human behaviour is a lot more complex than other forms of life. In identifying schemas, I was engaged in searching for repeated patterns of action but not necessarily across the children. Schemas did provide some empirical evidence but attachment issues were interpreted by linking each child's behaviour with events in their family and were, therefore, inferred rather than proven.

### *An Interpretive Approach*

Cohen et al (2000, p.27) described the 'interpretive paradigm' as 'striving to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors...meanings and interpretations are paramount'.

I chose to seek interpretations of the children's behaviours from their parents and workers. I was deeply interested in their views and insights. There were, inevitably, many possible interpretations of the meanings behind children's actions, and we were tentative in offering some possible meanings.

Robson (1993, p.19) stated that 'A major difference in the interpretive approach is that theories and concepts tend to arise from the enquiry...often referred to as 'hypothesis generating' as against 'hypothesis testing' research'. I needed to be open to discovering new things about myself and to articulating children's development and learning in new ways. The interpretive approach seemed much closer to the methodology I was choosing to employ and more of a post positivist paradigm.

### *A Critical Approach*

If I had only one principle, it was to treat the participants as equal partners and never to make them the 'objects' of my study. Freire wrote eloquently about the power differential between professionals and the oppressed and between teachers and students (Freire, 1970). He stated that 'Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of

information' (1970, p.60). It was not my intention to tell the parents what their children were learning either in the emotional or cognitive domains, but to 'dialogue' with them and, together, to construct meaning from the data. Cohen et al (2000, p.33) in describing critical theory, drew on Habermas's theory of

'three knowledge-constitutive interests...*technical interest* (in control and predictability)...*hermeneutic interest* (in understanding others' perspectives and views) ...*emancipatory interest* (in promoting social emancipation, equality, democracy, freedoms and individual and collective empowerment)...

Habermas was referring to the curriculum and argued that the curriculum could 'reproduce social inequality' if no regard was given to 'emancipatory interest' (p.34). Similarly, research and development work has the scope to either promote equality or inequality between the participants.

My approach was to try to treat the children, parents and workers with respect, to listen and to take heed of what they had to say and to consider the data gathered as theirs rather than mine. I often put myself in their shoes and imagined how I would feel or have felt when professionals have not taken my view into account when considering my development or my children's progress.

I wanted the children, parents and workers to become the 'subjects' rather than the 'objects' of this research study. Siddique (2005, p.6) further described Freire's ideas,

...the powerless worker is likened to an "object" being acted upon, in contrast to the empowered learner who is a subject who can act upon the world (or at any rate upon that part of it which constitutes his physical, social, intellectual and emotional environment).

I realise that I did not always reach my aim of involving all of the participants in an equal way all of the time. Also I used elements of all three approaches at different times, but what I conceptualised was using an interpretive approach influenced by critical theory. Respect for the participants and their views underpinned every decision I made about the design of the study.

### **From Methodology to Methods**

Some methods clearly fitted the purpose of an intimate, qualitative study like mine. One technique that turned out to be important was keeping a journal of my own thoughts and feelings. Janesick (2000, p.280) pointed out that the 'qualitative researcher is the research instrument'. I wanted to share the children's and adults' experiences in order to make connections for myself and to understand the meaning of the children's actions. I was aware that I was bringing my own experiences and 'biography to the research situation' but I did not realise at the outset, how very significant the learning would be for me, personally (Cohen et al, 2000, p.141).

I wanted the research to be 'participatory' in terms of encouraging the parents and workers to be my equal partners in the study (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000, p.567). I now think I was a little naïve in thinking that eight families and several workers would all share my passion for and interest in children's schemas. I was expecting them to share my agenda. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000, p.578) reported that one 'view of practice understands that it is "political"...It understands that to study practice is to change it...' I now wonder whether I had another hidden agenda in wanting to focus on and stay connected to the

setting I had just left? Like Athey (1990), I had my explicit agenda, which was to look at emotions and cognition, as displayed in the children's repeated patterns of behaviour. To be truly 'participatory' the parents and workers had to be much more heavily involved in deciding on the focus and design of the study.

Lincoln and Guba, (2000, p.164) stated that participatory research is shaped to some degree by the participants. If this research was truly participatory, it could also be 'emancipatory', building on the work of Freire (1970), who believed that through dialogue, people could transform their worlds. In order for participants to be emancipated enough to enter into an equal and active dialogue, I and others in the setting, traditionally invested with power, needed to give up our power, to truly listen and to hear the views of the participants. I hoped that I would be able to 'co-construct' the research findings with the participants. Being willing to give up power and to offer some of that power to the parents and workers was easier to say than to do. Parents and workers needed a great deal of confidence in order to question or challenge anything I said or did. So this was a rare occurrence. I constantly acknowledged the parents' and workers' superior knowledge and greater experience of the children being studied and asked for and took heed of their interpretations of the data. Parents and workers participated in the meaning making to a greater or lesser degree. All were consulted about and agreed to the final versions of the case studies.

Much more telling, in terms of our relationship, was the parent, who turned up for a meeting, with colour photos of her son in his football kit. In exchange for meeting with me to discuss the video sequences of her daughter, she wanted several colour copies of her photos to distribute to her extended family. This reminded me of the 'funds of knowledge'



exchanged by families in poor Mexican communities (Moll and Greenberg, 1990, p.344). Rather than pretending that she was an equal partner in the research study, **she** decided how I could reciprocate and reward her for spending time with me, which I assume she saw as benefiting me more than her family.

### **Who I Chose to Study**

Having previously carried out an eighteen-month observational study of four children, I wanted another opportunity to study a small number of children in depth (Arnold, 1997). However, by selecting two children for a pilot study and two other children for phase 2 of the study and four for the final phase, the sample increased to eight children in total. I also decided to draw on observations of other children made by parents and workers. In the final version, I have only drawn on material of one child, Courtney, who was observed by another worker.

The eight focus children were chosen on the basis of parent and worker interest in either the study or in these children being the focus of the study, a kind of ‘convenience sample’ (Cohen et al, 2000, p.102). The benefits to using a ‘convenience sample’ were that people opted in and were open to working in a collaborative way with me. They were less likely to drop out. However there were limitations in the sense that other children and families might have raised other issues, which I might have missed, given that the sample consisted of only interested people. Another limitation was that, people interested in working collaboratively, were less likely to challenge me, as a person in a position of authority. I question why I chose to work with so many families I already knew well. Did I find it less threatening, more comfortable or was it a sensible decision given the sensitive nature of

some of the data? It was crucial that I built up trusting relationships with families and workers, if I was expecting them to talk about their families and emotional issues and events. Seven of the eight families knew me, as a nursery worker, prior to becoming involved in this piece of research. All except one of the nursery workers already knew me, as a colleague and trainer. Occasionally a parent requested a particular worker for their child when they were starting nursery. I asked one of the parents why she had chosen a worker, as her child's Family Worker. She explained that the worker was about her age and that the worker knew the family history, so she did not have to start explaining things to her. This was also the case with me and several of the families I studied.

It was a 'non-probability sample' and 'a quota sample' in the sense that the children were chosen and represented certain features of the whole nursery population (Cohen et al, 2000, p.103). The issue of representation, other than including children of both genders, was unimportant and irrelevant to me. The eight children consisted of four boys and four girls. Family circumstances ranged from a single parent not working to two working parents. Three of the children selected, struggled to separate from their parents when they came into nursery most days.

## **How I Gathered the Data**

I used two ways of gathering data, direct observation of each child in action and interviews with parents and workers. The interviews helped me to gather contextual information, which in turn, along with the theory, helped me and the other participants to interpret the observations. I also kept a journal of my thoughts and reflections.

### *Observations*

After initially tracking each child for half a day, my plan was to gather video observations of the focus children on a regular basis. Just as the 'sample' was one of 'convenience', the gathering of data also had to happen when it was convenient both for me and for the children and staff in the nursery. At the outset, I used film of the two pilot children, gathered at separation from and reunion with their parents, to discuss with their parents and workers. At the time, I decided that I was not really capturing times when the children were deeply involved in play. Given my raised awareness of my avoidance of painful emotions, I now question my motivation for that decision. Was the separation too emotionally charged for me to cope with? Was I identifying too closely with my own experiences of parenting and being parented at those times? For whatever reason, I decided to film each child during their nursery session or day. I varied the times and mostly filmed each child about once a month for 15-30 minutes. This was a huge amount of data to gather and to handle. (Details of the dates and length of observations is included in Appendices 1-4).

### *Interviews with Parents and Workers*

The main purpose of the interviews was to enter into a dialogue about the children (Freire, 1970). When I met with the parents of the two pilot children for the first time, I began with a set of questions. In much the same way that I used to use a flipchart to work with parents in a group, I used the questions as a kind of 'security blanket' so that I was in control and knew what would be discussed. I did not have a question about bedtime, but each of the parents talked about bedtime and how difficult that separation was sometimes for their child. The information impacted on me but, for some reason, I did not follow this up systematically with the other families. Perhaps, again, it was the painful nature of the conversation about another separation that was just too troubling for me to face at that time.

As a researcher interested in children's emotions, gathering the views of the people who knew the children best, their parents and workers, was important to me (Whalley, 1997). It was critical to know about each child's context and family. Robson (1993, p.228) described an interview as 'a conversation with a purpose'. Cohen et al (2000, p.267) cited Kitwood's three conceptions of the interview. Kitwood (1977) suggested that interviewing may consist of firstly 'information transfer and collection'; secondly 'a transaction which has a bias to be controlled'; or thirdly 'an encounter necessarily sharing many of the features of everyday life' (Cohen et al, 2000, p.267). Cohen et al (2000, p.267) further suggested that 'knowledge should be seen as constructed between participants' during an interview. The purpose of the interviews I was carrying out, was not merely 'information transfer and collection', nor a situation during which variables were controlled, but more of an authentic conversation with a particular focus during which data was generated. By

engaging in a dialogue, we could become more aware of and gain insights into the focus children and their emotional lives.

I decided not to structure the interviews but to take a risk and allow the parents or workers or my own curiosity about the data to lead me (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p.645) The uniqueness of each child and family was of interest, but also were any generalisations that could be made across the children in relation to the behaviours they displayed.

I found that what I embarked on was different with each parent and family. Some parents talked a lot about themselves. Perhaps I should have recognised that this was helpful in terms of them reflecting on their own experiences (Tait, 2007; Zelenko and Benham, 2000). However, I was strongly focussed on the children. Some talked very little and expected me to tell them what was happening with their child. With one parent, a great deal was left unsaid, the odd word or look conveyed deep pain and depression. I could not bring myself to probe. Luckily I knew enough of her background and family context, to make sense of what she was communicating. I was, however, quite anxious about the final interview, when I shared the full case study with her. I had articulated some of the events that she had indicated by a nod or slight tip of the head. I was not sure how she would react to my interpretation of her daughter's actions. I was so nervous that we went through the case study line by line. I frequently checked out with her that I had conveyed our shared meaning or interpretation. Although it was a painful process for both of us, she acknowledged the authenticity of the account.

I found that the parents were able to be more generous generally with time and information, than most workers were able to be. Two of the workers gave up their own

time to meet with me. One seemed to learn a lot from the study. She was a part time worker. One of the full time workers spent a long time reading the case studies and giving me detailed feedback. She came in early to meet me although she then had to stay on for a long shift.

### *Keeping a Journal*

I kept a journal of anything that occurred to me, after observing the children directly, or after discussions with workers or parents or when revisiting video observations. Sometimes I woke up in the morning with a new thought and went straight to my journal. The real learning was so elusive that I struggled to grasp it and was afraid of losing my grasp on any aspect of it. A lot of the time, I could not work out where my thoughts or ideas had come from. When I got stuck, I often went to the theory and reading often stimulated something in me. I enjoyed recording my thoughts. It felt like an unfolding story, getting something off my chest, a relief almost. Janesick (2000, p.392) described 'The act of journal writing' as 'a rigorous documentary tool'. The act of writing gave form to my thoughts and feelings. This was where most of my new learning was situated during my study.

Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.741) explained that there was a shift in the 1970s 'from an emphasis on participant observation to the "observation of participation" and to an emphasis on the process of writing'. They described 'reflexive ethnography' and used Tedlock's work (1991)

which distinguishes between ethnographic memoir...in which the ethnographer, who is the focus of the story, tells a personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research, and narrative ethnography, where the ethnographer's experiences are incorporated into the ethnographic description and analysis of others and the

emphasis is on the “ethnographic dialogue or encounter” between the narrator and members of the group being studied (ibid).

Ellis and Bochner also pointed out that some researchers ‘wrote under pen names to avoid losing academic credibility’ (ibid). Again, this idea of what we value as knowledge and research, has raised its ugly head again. On reflection, I do not see myself as the central character in this tale of action. What I have attempted, is to tell the ‘inside story’ (or it could be a backstage tale) alongside and of equal value to each child’s story I have presented.

### **Ethical Issues**

The Pen Green code of ethics for carrying out research was adopted, shared with participants and adhered to in this study (Whalley, 2001, p.13). The Pen Green code states that ‘Research at Pen Green should always:

- be positive for all the participants;
- provide data that are open to, accountable to and interpreted by all the participants;
- focus on questions that the participants themselves (parents, children and staff) are asking;
- be based on a relationship of trust where people’s answers are believed, and
- produce results which are about improving practice at home and at nursery, or at least sustaining it’

In an earlier research study carried out with children, parents and workers at the Pen Green Nursery (Whalley, 2001), I found it easy to pursue particular lines of enquiry, that were

related to children's cognitive development. Researchers, parents and workers all focused on improving opportunities for the children. However, in the current study, the data we were focusing on, was more sensitive, concerned with emotions rather than cognition. We had already introduced the Leuven Well-being Scale to parents and this helped us to initiate a dialogue about emotions with parents (Laevers, 1997). Parents were usually comfortable discussing their child's emotional well-being, particularly in relation to settling in to nursery. However, when there were issues about insecure attachment, deaths or sudden separations in the family, I and the parents were less comfortable discussing or acknowledging the impact on their children's behaviour. Over time, parents were more able to reflect on and to acknowledge the behaviours being displayed by their children that related to these changes in the family. So the time scale was long and I did not attempt to engage in these discussions while parents and children still seemed to be processing painful feelings. Again, my motivation for taking this approach was possibly to protect myself from pain.

Morrow and Richards (1996, p.96) made the point that our view of children defines how we feel they can be involved in and informed about research. Do we see children as 'vulnerable' and therefore needing our protection? Do we see children as 'incompetent' and therefore unable to give informed consent? Do we see children as 'powerless' in a world dominated by adults? During the last few years, we have been informed by research from Reggio Emilia on a 'listening curriculum'; by research at the Thomas Coram Centre on the 'Mosaic Approach' in which adults gather the views of children; and by programmes like 'Learning to be Strong' at the Pen Green Centre. Children can be seen as 'competent' and 'capable' learners, who are used to being listened to and who can choose whether to participate or not. Young children have human rights. Research needs to be



‘...respectful to children and their cultural context...’ (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000 p.14). Brostrom and Vilien (1998, p.31) see the child, not ‘as a passive object, but rather as a reflective subject’.

I gave a great deal of thought to the children’s role in agreeing to being filmed. Young children walk away if they are not comfortable with being filmed and this was certainly the case in this study. Children gave clear messages in their actions. Sometimes children were pleased to see me and would chat or tell me where they were going to play next. One child claimed me as ‘her’ researcher and would tell other children that I was there to film ‘her’ and not them. One day, a child avoided me by going inside a tent and closing the cover, clearly showing how she was feeling.

Most books on research include a section on ethics (Robson, 1993; Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996; David (Ed), 1998); Greig and Taylor, 1999; Aubrey, David, Godfrey and Thompson, 2000; Miller, 2000; Christensen and James (Eds), 2000). Common themes are confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, equality and knowledge of individuals in context. Robson (1993, p.31) asked whether ‘confidentiality is always appropriate?’ Was there a question of me getting all of the credit when others have worked hard to contribute to the work? Was the research being treated as belonging to me rather than belonging to the participants? The issue of anonymity seemed to be a tricky one. Most families wanted their child’s first name used. I advised one family against this, as the case study was more sensitive than the others. I asked them to think ahead to when their child might read about themselves. They were adamant that they wanted me to use real first names in my study at least. I also asked about using video material for training purposes. Again, I advised one family that I would not use video alongside their child’s anonymised case study.

## **Interpreting the Data**

When I moved from being a full-time nursery worker to the Research Base in January 2001, we had just completed a three year study of 'Involving Parents in Their Children's Learning' (Whalley, 2001; 2007). I had been involved in the study as Head of Nursery and wrote two chapters of the book that documented the study. During the study, we had become curious about a little boy, who lived in a split family, where there were contentious issues between the parents. His family seemed fairly chaotic and unpredictable and yet he functioned at a high level within the nursery, was optimistic, involved and his emotional well-being was high. We recognised his resilience and wanted to understand what factors were helping him to do so well under difficult circumstances.

Our curiosity led to a new study on Children's Emotional Well-being and Resilience (Pen Green Team, 2000-2004). I was part of a research team engaging in this study. I was offered an opportunity to study for a PhD using some of the children involved in the bigger study.

Having studied cognition, children's schemas and work with parents for many years, I set off on this new venture, that had to connect in some way with the study of Children's Emotional Well-being and Resilience. Typically, for me, at first I thought only about studying children's emotions. I had a hunch that some staff, myself included, did not have a deep understanding of emotions. We had given a lot of attention to cognition. There were, of course, staff, who were very comfortable with emotions and less confident about

cognition (Arnold, 2004). I explored the work of Darwin and Ekman on children's expressions of emotions (Darwin, 1872; Ekman, 1997). I thought about the work of Judy Dunn on relationships and temperamental differences (Dunn, 1993b). I read Damasio on 'The Feeling of What Happens' (1999). I read some brain research (Pally, 2000). I studied Stern (1985) and Trevarthen (1995) and Bowlby (1997; 1998).

Within my pilot study, I tried out different ways of projecting the data onto different conceptual frameworks. I found Dunn's work on close relationships helpful (1993a). I continued to be drawn towards cognition. Whenever I made an observation or attended a research meeting to study the data gathered by other members of the team, I found myself analysing the data in relation to schemas. I was having to fight against my tendency to use a schema lens.

My Director of Studies was very supportive and encouraged me to think about cognition, affect and social relationships in a very balanced way. One day Professor Julia Formosinho happened to be visiting the Research Base. She had not been appointed as my supervisor at that point. We had a ten minute conversation in the library, during which I described my dilemma. She was very measured in her response and said "You must build on solid ground – you need to use your knowledge of schemas and take it forward in some way...in the emotional domain". From that moment on, I decided that I must stick with what I knew and build from there. It was still a long time before I came up with the idea of using schematic theory and attachment theory as two lenses through which to view my data. I used attachment theory rather clumsily at first, like a new necklace that I was finding difficult to fasten.

After a great deal of practice, I found that the process of applying the two lenses to the case study material on each child, began to be fruitful. The process seemed rather mechanistic at first but, gradually, over time, I began to feel more comfortable and to use attachment theory more confidently. I continued to have a tendency to analyse in relation to schemas first...until the very last case study, when I found myself thinking about attachment before schemas. This was a significant moment in my journey and may have been to do with the emotional content of the case.

When I began to realise that some of the processes were about me, rather than the children and families, I was shocked at first. It 'surprised my unconscious' in a way that was unexpected (Hesse, 1999, p.397). I could have ignored or written separately about my own journey but I realised that the analytical frameworks I was employing in my search for meaning, particularly attachment theory, were helping me to understand my own motivations as well as the children's (Bowlby, 1997). This finding offered a unique contribution to the field of Early Education with Care and could be tried out and used to help other workers become more aware.

### **Presenting Findings**

I decided early on in the study to focus on individual cases and to present my findings in the form of a case study or a series of case studies. Stake informed us that 'a case study...draws attention to the question of what specially can be learned from the single case' (2000, p.435). I wanted the voice of each child to be heard in my account as well as

the voices of the adults involved, parents, workers and researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.163).

Stake (2000, p.437) differentiated between three types of case study. Firstly, an '*instrumental case study*' which 'is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization'. In this instance 'the case facilitates our understanding of something else'. I studied eight children in order to see whether their spontaneous repeated behaviours were associated with their representations of attachment. I was looking for some generalizable findings but was also aware that eight is too small a number from which to generalize to a whole population.

A second type of case study identified by Stake was 'the *intrinsic case study*' which was 'undertaken because the researcher wants a better understanding of this particular case' (ibid). I was interested in each case I studied as far as differences were concerned but my main concern was with similarities.

Stake described a third way of presenting findings as part of a '*collective case study*' (ibid). 'It is instrumental study extended to several cases' (ibid). I did consider presenting my findings as a collective case study, taking what was common across the children's actions as the focus. For example, Steffi, Susan and Courtney all seemed to use 'enveloping' to explore ideas of 'here and gone' . I decided that the evidence across the cases was not substantial enough to present in that way and that the reader would not have been able to hold each story in mind in the way that is possible with stories of individual children. The stories were worth telling in all of their complexity so that 'readers...' could

‘experience these happenings and draw conclusions (which may differ from those of researchers)’ (Stake, 2000, p.439).

Although each story could be understood in its own right, Stake added that ‘Even intrinsic case study can be seen as a small step toward grand generalization’. My hope was that each story would be rigorous enough and vivid enough for the reader to understand my representation or reconstruction of what happened and also to connect in some way with their experience in order to confirm or refute aspects of my interpretation.

I had to reduce the data. I could not possibly use all that I had gathered. I did this by unearthing the strong themes for each child connected to separation, loss and relationships. After transcribing all of the video material, viewing it alongside parents and workers and then revisiting the data several times, I finally decided that I would start with ‘major changes and link with representations made or working through of events’ (Journal Notes, 240704). When rewatching sequences of video material, I tried to ‘be there in the moment’ or ‘capture the process issues’. Jordan and Henderson advised identifying ‘interactional hot spots’ as a focus for filming and analysis (1995, p.43). I trawled through the material many times in order to decide what was significant for each child. I have also decided, because of the length of each case study, to include only one child from the pilot study, four full case studies and a short case study gathered by a colleague. That has left me with two unused case studies (to which I can return) and data on one child that was insufficient to use, mainly because he was very interested in the camera.

The other decision, made fairly late in the process, was to write my account in the 'first person' (Brady, 2000, p.954). When I studied for my Master's Degree, I was required to write in the third person. I found this a real struggle at first but then accepted that that was what academia required. I have now discovered that there are many different ways of approaching and representing research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.733). I have come to believe that 'objectivity' is almost impossible, particularly when observing and interacting with people. The best I could aim for was some sort of rigorous subjectivity, acknowledging; my position in relation to the setting and the field of Early Education with Care; my relationships with the children and families and workers with whom I collaborated; and my personal biography that continued to affect my view of the world.

### **Variations to the Plan**

The plan was simple and flexible enough to stick to most of the time. It went slightly awry around Christmas when the various celebrations during December, followed by a holiday when the nursery closed for a few days, made it impossible for me to gather data of the children's spontaneous actions in the nursery. During February, I went on an extended holiday and so I ended up with longer gaps between filming than I had intended.

I found that I did not leave enough time in my schedule for transcribing and discussing the filmed observations with workers and parents and so sometimes this was rushed or I ended up sending filmed observations home without watching them alongside the parent first. In Steffi's case this provoked a response from her mum, about something she was not happy with, ie, Steffi in a noisy environment.

I had to adapt to the parents' and workers' schedules, as there was no time allotted in their timetables for our meetings. I think that we could have reached an agreement to devote regular time to a much shorter project. In this instance, observations were made over one to two years, and so many other things changed during that time, that planning the meetings in advance was almost impossible.

The result was that I snatched moments with the parents whenever I could, but this was not as easily managed as when I worked full-time in the nursery. However I did become quite adept at knowing the different family routines and catching people for a quick word or to arrange a meeting that suited them. I held quite a lot of information in my head, which would have been more difficult, had I not known the families so well.

The overall result was that I spent a lot more time on making the observations, transcribing and analysing them and revisiting them than I did meeting with parents and workers. My intention was always to use the observations as the main data. I needed the insights of parents and workers to help me interpret the observations. I was not confident enough to share attachment theory with the parents at that stage but that would be a step forward in any future study. The parents were entering into a dialogue in the light of knowing about their child's family context and schema theory. I was analysing in the light of making associations between family context, attachment theory and schema theory.



## **Key Ideas About the Design of My Study**

I decided to keep the design very simple,

- Observations of each focus child in the nursery once a month
- Discussions with each child's parents and workers
- Reflective journaling over time
- Analysis of observations in relation to schemas and attachment

In the next section, I have presented each child's story followed by my story. I have retained something of my process by not completely standardising the structure in the light of my growing awareness of the importance of emotions and attachment. The structure of the stories evolved over time and this is apparent to the reader.

### **3. PART THREE THE ACTION**

#### 3.1 The Pilot Story – Evan

##### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the research study I was clear that I wanted to explore the connection between affect, cognition and social relationships in young children. I had also decided that I would gather video observations and interview and dialogue with the children and their parents and workers in order to understand those connections. I wanted to make naturalistic observations as I was interested in the ways in which the children themselves develop their own ways of coping with emotions and emotional issues. I was less clear about the data I would need to gather and how I would analyse the data. So I began by using the data being gathered at separation and reunion times on two of the children, one of whom was Evan. I already knew his family and his parents trusted me to have their child and family's best interests at heart. During his second year at nursery, I also had lunch most days with a small group of children, including Evan. I was able to gather some incidental information at this time. I also observed him during the nursery session and at group time with his peers and Family Worker.

## **Evan's Story**

I used the following data to try to make sense of how Evan was dealing with emotional issues during his time at nursery:

Evan	Date of Birth: 24-2-98
(1) 16-01-01	26 minutes video of separation, middle of session and reunion
(2) 13-03-01	20 minutes video of separation, middle of session and reunion
(3) 22-11-01	6 minutes video of separation and reunion
Sept 01-July 02	Incidental information gathered at lunchtimes
23-04-02	Taped interview with Evan's mother, Jennie
08-05-02	Taped interview with Evan's father, Gary
(4) 14-06-02	12 minutes video of middle of session into group time

## **Separations**

Evan had learned to deal with separations from his parents by carrying out some sort of ritual at separation times. In observation (1) Evan (2:10:23) came into the nursery with Jennie, his mum, and his older brother, Bryn. He 'settled' at the marble run with his Family Worker, Annette. Evan knelt on the floor facing Annette. The marble run was between them. Evan seemed very engaged with putting marbles in the top of the run and watching them run through to the base of the run. His mother came from behind and rubbed/patted his back and kissed him. She seemed a little unsure but walked slowly towards the door. Seconds passed before he turned around and shouted "Mum". He got up quickly and took Annette's hand and walked to the door, where his mother was waiting. She crouched down

facing him and held him and kissed him and then said “Bye bye”. He turned back and walked back to the space he had left looking satisfied.

When we discussed this observation, both Jennie and Annette said that it was important for Evan to carry out his ‘goodbye ritual’, which included going to the door and seeing his mother or father go. He also developed, over time, a bedtime ritual, which included his mother saying “Night, night, sweet dreams – see you in the morning”. His mother had to say these words in the same order each night or he would get up or shout down to her to repeat the words correctly (Interview 23-04-02).

In observation (2) again Evan (3:1:7) came into the nursery with his mother and brother. As before, they spent time settling him in, this time at the computer, using a ‘Bob the Builder’ game that he chose to use. When it was time to leave, each of them kissed him and left. Shortly afterwards, Annette left Evan to go and greet another family. He followed Annette and sat on the rocking horse briefly watching a baby crying in his pram.

When we discussed this we were unsure about why Evan did not carry out his ritual on this day. It may have been because other children were waiting to go on the computer and Evan wanted to finish his turn. However, it seemed that he needed Annette’s support to sustain his ‘involvement’ at the computer after his mother left (Laevers, 1997).

In observation (3) the final separation sequence filmed, Evan (3:8:29) asked Annette to go outside to the perimeter fence with him. He kissed Jennie through the railings at one end, then raced to the middle for another kiss through the railings and, finally, ran again to the

end of the railings for a final kiss and goodbye. He then walked back towards nursery holding Annette's hand.

Evan enjoyed playing outside and, as outdoor play was usually available to the children right through the session, this extension of his ritual/goodbye routine may have developed out of his wish to say a 'goodbye' at the final boundary(?) Again, he seemed to have a sense of satisfaction when he had completed the ritual.

Although other separations involving Evan were not filmed, I continued to discuss the issue with his parents and workers. Evan seemed to need an 'advocate' to help him complete the daily ritual to his own satisfaction (Pen Green Team, 2000-2004). It was important for other workers to know about and support Evan when Annette was not there.

During the autumn of 2001, there was extensive building work in the nursery and the nursery population (children and adults) had to move into the gym for three months. Evan found this frustrating, firstly in terms of understanding what was happening. Evan was a late talker and his parents became quite anxious when he was not talking much at two years old. This was very different to his older brother, who had been an articulate talker at two. Naturally, everyone wanted to help Evan to express his thoughts and feelings verbally. When Evan did begin talking, he was quite precise and critical of others who were less precise. By autumn 2001, Evan was talking but not understanding how 'nursery', as he knew it, could be in the gym. Everything was different, the acoustics, the entrance after walking along a corridor, the garden. Evan got quite cross when adults referred to the gym as though it was nursery. It was impossible for children to move freely indoors and out. Adults had to accompany them. Instead of children settling out of doors first thing in

the morning, the adults and children had to adapt and say their goodbyes in the gym, before being accompanied to the garden in small groups.

As far as his goodbye ritual was concerned, Evan had to adapt it. He could say his goodbye at the door to the gym, but then he would dash over to the opposite wall, stack a pile of heavy hollow blocks against the wall and climb up so that he could see his mum or dad through the high window, disappearing. He would give them a final wave.

It seemed that seeing his parents go enabled him then to focus on becoming involved with peers and in other activities. He seemed secure to explore once he knew his parents had gone. Evan's parents told me that he carried out similar actions at home. If his dad was going to work, he would say goodbye at the back door but then dash to the front window to wave and see him disappear down the road.

Although we talked about 'Evan's need' for a ritualistic separation at the time, it is important to acknowledge that it was a ritual negotiated between two or more people. In observation (1) Jennie was waiting. She knew how important it was for Evan to say that final goodbye at the door to outside and to see her go. Annette, too, was prepared to rush to the door with Evan. In good nursery practice, we emphasise 'knowing each child and family' (Whalley, 1997, 2001; Carr, 2001) and "Do you know how I like to settle in?" is an important part of that knowing.

## **Reunions**

Evan was pleased to see whichever parent picked him up on each of the three occasions that he was filmed. On the first occasion, he ran to his dad. In observation (2) his dad arrived late after Evan had fallen down and had had a cuddle from Annette. Annette told his dad about the fall and he comforted Evan. In observation (3) his mum arrived while the group were still singing. Evan's eyes lit up when he saw his mum but then he looked a little unsure when she asked about his sleeves being up. Jennie told me that in the early days of nursery, when Evan was talking very little, she was very keen for him to benefit from and join in the songs and rhymes at group time. By the time we were observing, she usually stayed out of the way until group time was finished. On this occasion, he spotted her in the cloakroom so she came to the group a bit early, which was different to what she usually did.

## **Other Explorations**

In Observation (1) mid session, Evan was filmed completing a perfectly symmetrical building. He went on to place seven large cylindrical blocks in a line closely connected to each other on top of the building.

In observation (2) Evan was filmed participating in action rhymes during group time. He seemed happy and engaged when standing on top of a chair. He particularly enjoyed the phrase 'knocked at the door with a rat tat tat'. He became concerned when playing

‘Sleeping Bunnies’ and two of the children stayed lying down and did not follow the sequence of actions. When this happened a second time, he removed himself from the game and sat on a computer chair nearby.

In observation (3) Evan was filmed at group time and enjoyed singing ‘Wind the Bobbin Up’ which Jennie told me was a favourite song of his at the time. It is interesting to think about the words:

‘Point to the ceiling

Point to the door

Point to the window

Point to the floor...’

In terms of Evan’s wish to say goodbye at the furthest boundary, these words might have been significant or resonated with him.

Observation (4) was filmed late morning. Louise (Family Worker) was comforting Evan. Another child had accidentally hit Evan with a spade. Louise is a personal friend of Evan’s parents as well as being a worker. While she comforted him, she made connections with what had happened at home a couple of evenings ago. Evan looked comfortable with Louise and, although she interacted with other children as well, she stayed sitting down with her arm around Evan until **he** decided to move away to the sandpit. She affirmed his choice by saying “It’s nice and soft in there”.



Once Evan reached the sandpit, he took off his wellies and lay down on his back looking up briefly. He stood up and made grooves in the sand by moving his foot forward and back. He lay down again but got up when another child approached. He kicked the sand and then went to see what his friend, Robert was doing. Robert had filled a rubber glove with water. Evan also joined another child and ran around the Discovery Area and stepped into the water run. Annette asked them not to do this as it was slippery and dangerous.

When I looked at this sequence with Evan's family, his mum pointed out that they had just been on a seaside holiday, so his actions in the sand may have reflected the recent freedom experienced by him at the seaside.

The nursery routine involved clearing up and going into small Family Groups for chat, songs and stories at the end of the morning. I stopped filming and helped clear up and then resumed filming when the small group gathered. By then, Evan was extremely articulate and enjoyed playing with words. He really enjoyed 'The Owl and the Pussycat' and Annette read part of each line which Evan completed. He particularly liked saying 'quince'. He also joked with his friend, Owen, saying 'willy' instead of 'willing'.

In this last filmed sequence, Evan looked very confident to the point of breaking boundaries both in his actions and words. This was a few weeks before he would leave nursery to start Primary School.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Having decided to focus on attachment and schemas as analytical frameworks, I began to think about what was significant in Evan's behaviour that revealed his own ways of expressing and representing emotions and ideas about attachment in his spontaneous behaviours.

In observation (1) he used the marble run, which could be symbolic of his mother disappearing or leaving and reappearing or coming back. The marbles 'go through a boundary' and run in lines and circles to the base. Evan seemed to give some attention to what the marbles looked like when they formed a complete circle at the base of the run. While he was engaged with the run, he almost forgot (?) to carry out the sequence of actions he, himself, had developed in order to have some control over the separation. The sequence of actions somehow marked Evan's transition from home or from being with his parents to being at nursery with other people and engaging in different activities. The marbles 'going through' the run could alternatively be a representation of Evan himself, going from one place to another through a series of twists and turns.

The complete circle formed by the marbles at the base of the run may somehow have represented completion or wholeness. Completing a perfect circle was understandably satisfying to the eye and understanding that his mum would leave; go to work; and return, was satisfying to Evan in emotional terms.

During the morning, Evan was observed 'completing' a building and then placing seven cylinders on a line on the building. Could this line have represented time as well as space?

Evan was at the stage of understanding that he stayed at the nursery for the morning. During that space of time, there were some markers. He engaged in different activities with different people. He helped himself to snacks and a drink when he chose to. Annette gathered his group for stories and songs and then his mother or father would come to pick him up and take him home. Time is a difficult concept for young children to understand and closely linked to separation from important people (Shaw, 1991; 2005). As adults, we represent time spatially so it may be reasonable to suppose that an interest in closely connected lines helps children with the abstract concept of time as well as helping to work through and understand the concept of separation. In attachment terms, the close connection of the blocks might represent the continuity or smoothness of the transition. Bower's research (1977, p.41) showed that young babies are pre-disposed to apply certain rules to what they see,

...learning what goes with what is equally important in simplifying the world of the child...One rule is often referred to as the 'proximate organizing rule'. Stated as simply as possible, this rule says that contours close to one another, or closer than the average in a scene, are probably contours of a single object and so can be treated as one rather than two units.

When studying young babies Bower (1977, p.43) said

One rule, called 'good continuation' is used to organise contours that are broken by intervening objects: if the contours on each side of the break have the same direction, they should be treated as the same contour.

Evan may have been working through or using the 'line' at an abstract thought level to understand the continuity of his separation and morning at nursery.

Evan's strategy to see his parents go during separation when nursery was in the gym, was to build a tower of blocks that he could stand on in order to see out of the window. The tower of blocks was a vertical 'line' that enabled Evan to complete his chosen ritual.

In observation (2) at group time, Evan enjoyed participating in action rhymes but moved away when 2 children did not complete the sequence of actions. There was a kind of 'form' to the sequence of actions, like the 'line' of cylinders or the sequence of actions that made up Evan's ritualistic separation. He seemed to be showing some dissatisfaction with the children stopping part of the way through.

On the other hand, during observation (3) Annette offered him opportunities to complete 'lines' of words and he found this enjoyable and satisfying.

Another way of considering the 'line' is as closely connected units of events, time or people. Perfect connections make smoother transitions. In terms of the relationship between Evan's family and his nursery Family Worker, the closer and more intimate their relationship was, the better Evan was supported at nursery (Whalley, 2001; Elfer, 1996). Both parents commented on the very good relationship they and Evan had with Annette, and also with two other nursery workers (Interview Transcripts, 230402 and 080502). Lining the blocks and connecting them may have enabled Evan to express his wish for 'connectedness' with others. Winnicott (1975, p.124) talked about a child he had been treating, who returned to the clinic and constructed 'a very long road with toy houses'. His interpretation, in this instance, was that she 'was joining up the past with the present, joining my house with her own, integrating past experience with present'.

## **Reflective Thoughts – The Inside Story**

Throughout this process of data gathering, reflecting with participants, reading, journaling and going back to the data, I have been constantly surprised by how deeply I have been affected by the focus on attachment and separation issues.

Even writing this account today, I became aware that I was much more comfortable thinking about and articulating the link between space and time, in terms of Evan's understanding, than in articulating the nature of his relationship with other people. I connected with Evan and his family in several ways during the study. I believe that Evan saw me as some sort of 'advocate', someone who was interested in him. He never objected to being filmed but sometimes played a little to the camera, particularly when he was preparing to leave nursery and to start Primary School.

I was able to follow Evan into school for a few weeks as part of the main research project (Pen Green, 2000-2004). School was a place where Evan felt fairly comfortable, with his older brother there and his mother working as a classroom assistant in the school. Like Sally in Pollard's study, Evan knew most of the people and the place quite well (Pollard, 1996). On one occasion, I was filming Evan when his teacher was off. He became very involved in making marks with felt pen on the whiteboard the teacher used each morning. When the teacher and I viewed the video sequence together, she laughed and said, "He knows very well that he's not allowed to use that board". I guessed that Evan felt so confident and knew the rules so well that he also knew when and with whom he could break a boundary and get away with it.

## Summary

From these observations, I could already see some patterns in Evan's behaviour, that link with separating from his parents and feeling valued in the setting. Evan seemed to want to carry out a sequence of actions in order to gain and retain his control of the situation. This linked with his trajectory and connecting schemas and was about 'doing'. The other child I studied in the pilot, Hattie, seemed to want to carry objects from home. Having her 'things' with her and kept safely somewhere at nursery while she was there, seemed to make her more settled. This linked with her transporting and containing schemas and was about 'having'.

Some of my early thinking in this study was about children's behaviour being to do with 'having; doing; being; knowing' and of course 'relating' (which I omitted at first). Applying this to Evan, Evan is 'doing' or carrying out a set of actions. He may be saying 'Do I matter enough for adults here and at home to adapt to my ways of coping with separating from my family?' 'Am I valued?' 'Are people around me bothered enough to find out what I want to do and how I want to separate?'

## 3.2 Jordan's Story

### **Introduction**

Jordan was 2 years 8 months and 29 days when I first observed him for this study. He was in his first year at nursery and was attending four mornings a week and stayed for lunch. During his second year at nursery, he attended four full days a week.

Jordan is one of five children within a reconstituted family. He has an older half-brother, William and an older half-sister, Hattie, who both live with their biological father but spend time once or twice a week in Jordan's family home with their mother. Hattie was part of the pilot study of this project. Jordan also has an older half-sister, Sara, who lives with her biological mother and spends time each week in Jordan's family home with her father. Jordan also has a younger sister, Sihaya. Jordan has a very close relationship with his father.

I was concerned when I first observed Jordan, that he was fairly unfocussed for some of the time, in the nursery environment. He lay down drinking from a bottle and twiddling his hair, not making eye contact with me or with others. Within three months of those initial observations, Jordan was assigned a one to one support worker, Tracey, in order to support him in becoming more involved with other people at nursery.

During the course of this study, Jordan was formally diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum. We were a little concerned about his responses to other people, as a young infant

and by the time of this study, his parents and workers were showing grave concern about Jordan's lack of interactions and communication. Rodier (2000, p.42) defines autism,

A diagnosis of autism requires that the patient exhibit abnormal behaviours in 3 categories: Impairment of Social Interaction; Impairment of Communication; Restricted and Repetitive Interests and Behaviours.

As I am not a specialist in this area, I want to emphasise that I was approaching the study of Jordan, as I would any other child. I was interested in what was unique to him but also searching for generalisable findings, that would be applicable to other children. However, I also needed to take into account, the research of specialists in autistic behaviour.

Rodier (2000, p.45) states that tests on children with autism 'show a tendency to focus on one stimulus and a failure to disengage from that first stimulus'. This was particularly contentious in terms of observing 'schemas' or repeated patterns of action in Jordan's explorations. Not only were these repeated actions sometimes considered by Special Educational Needs workers to be an abnormal feature, but they were often discouraged by workers, concerned with helping children to move on or progress. However, there was some guidance from specialists that

Obsessions should not be 'stamped out' but extended creatively, where possible, and others replaced with behaviour that serves the same purpose for the child. (Jordan and Powell, 1995, p.49)

So I was prepared to be open to observing Jordan's actions and to using information from his parents and workers to understand those actions. I also had an ongoing dialogue with Dr. Jean-Marc Michel, our local paediatrician, who has a particular interest in autism (Michel and Arnold, 2005). During our discussions, we agreed that identifying schemas



seemed to give us some insights into Jordan's intentions. This helped us to understand some of what he was trying to learn about. The most difficult aspect was that Jordan was using very little expressive language and often seemed not to respond to other people. We had to become much better at identifying subtle changes in his behaviour or body language to understand what Jordan was feeling or expressing.

I sat next to Jordan at lunch for two years and, therefore, gathered a great deal of extra information about his interests and progress.

The observations and discussions listed in Appendix 1 were used to inform our thinking about Jordan and his expressions and representations of emotion and attachment. Within this case study, I have drawn on the observations to illustrate two themes that emerged from the data on Jordan:

1. An interest in lines and connecting.
2. An interest in here and gone and Hello/Goodbye

Each theme is put into context, relevant observations presented, with analysis and reflections after each observation

1. An interest in lines and connecting

## **Context**

When Jordan was first observed, he used to bring his bottle containing milk to nursery from home and use it as an 'object of transition' (Bruce, 2001, p.77). He would carry it about, sometimes using it in his play and sometimes drinking from it. With regard to Winnicott's work on 'Transitional Phenomena', we have always acknowledged the emotional significance of objects brought from home to nursery and taken from nursery to home (Pen Green, 2004) . These objects do not necessarily serve the same function as the 'transitional object' that according to Winnicott (1975, p.236) 'stands for the breast, or the object of the first relationship'. We knew that Jordan used his bottle as an 'object of transition', connecting home and nursery. The bottle may also have been a 'transitional object', Jordan's first 'Not-me' possession as described by Winnicott, that was enabling him to exert his power over an object (1975, p.230).

Jordan's parents were advised by medical specialists to wean him from his bottle as he was using it to 'dumb' his frustration when he could not communicate his needs. They had the idea of placing beads in his bottle instead of milk. This change meant that Jordan could continue to 'transport' his bottle to nursery with him and he continued to do this for a few weeks.

At home, Jordan began playing with an old computer lead. The lead gradually seemed to replace Jordan's need to carry his bottle and he began taking it to bed with him and

'transporting' the lead to nursery each day. He would play with the lead, sometimes using it like a washing line and connecting pegs to it. Jordan seemed to be combining 'transporting' and 'connecting'. Jordan began playing with string at nursery.

At this time, Jordan rarely initiated interactions with other children or adults.

### **Using String with Colette**

*At 3:00:14 (3 yrs and 14 days) Jordan was filmed taking a small ball of string out of a drawer, unravelling it and offering one end to a researcher, Colette. Colette stayed where she was standing up and holding the string, while Jordan backed away from her and held the string above his head and taut. He dropped the string several times but, each time, came forward and, giggling, retrieved it and again held it high above his head. He looked up at the line he and Colette were creating. When Colette dropped her end, he giggled and jumped up and down. He picked up the other end and gave it to Colette again.*

*At one point, Jordan dropped his end and another child, Ben, picked it up. Jordan looked at him, clasped his hands together, turned and walked away. Then turned back towards Ben and squealed with what may have been frustration (?)*

*Colette intervened, asking Ben to let Jordan have his string back. Jordan resumed his game of extending the string, holding it high above his head and looking up at the line he was creating.*

*Then suddenly Jordan ran towards Ben and threw both arms around him. Ben looked distressed and said “You are all wet Jordan”. Colette said twice “Jordan, I don’t think Ben wants you to do that”. Jordan moved away and again resumed holding the line of string above his head.*

*The game continued in this way, with one variation introduced by Annette (adult), who threaded a large coloured bead onto the string. Jordan tried to thread another bead on, but could not do it alone. However, he seemed quite interested in looking at the line with 2 beads on. At one point, he moved them next to each other.*

*Towards the end of the 20 minute observation, Jordan held both ends of the string, one in each hand, and stretched his arms, bridging the gap across an archway, before resuming his earlier game.*

## **Analysis**

In schema theory terms, Jordan’s concerns could be described as ‘proximity’ and ‘separation’, ‘connecting’ and ‘lines’, important for mathematical understanding of length, distance, connecting points in space and mapping.

In attachment theory terms, connecting and disconnecting with string could represent Jordan’s attachment to and separation from other people. Taking account of Jordan’s socio-cultural context, he lived in a household where there was a lot of, sometimes unpredictable, coming and going each week. His older half-siblings were there sometimes

but not always. He sometimes played with Hattie, but always wanted to be with his dad, Andrew. Jordan may have had mixed feelings about the other children.

Jordan was unsure about how to interact with the other children at nursery. He demonstrated his uncertainty when Ben picked up the string he was using. Jordan seemed not to know what to do. His initial reaction was to turn away. He was attempting interactions that were not successful and could not verbalise his needs.

There was a delay between Ben giving Jordan his string back, at Colette's request, and Jordan 'throwing his arms around Ben' although one action may have led to the other. Soale (2004) reported a delay in her son's reactions to others, showing that this was an aspect of autism as shown in her child, John's, behaviour. Was Jordan out of synergy with the world?

It may not have been a coincidence that he chose to 'connect' with another person through using string, which may have been less of a risk for him. Perhaps Jordan could only express his wish to be connected to other people through using available objects, such as string.

He chose Colette, an adult and a researcher, who knew his family well and had known him from birth. In terms of what he was trying to do with the string, an adult, whom he knew well and trusted, was more likely to follow his lead than another child. Keeping the string taut between them seemed most important to Jordan.

## **Reflections**

I felt that this was something of a breakthrough with Jordan. He was showing that he wanted to be connected to another person and he chose that person. Without eye contact, it was hard to pick up signals from Jordan, to know what he wanted or how he was feeling.

I was unsure about whether he knew that, as a researcher, Colette could dedicate her time to him and would not get called away to see to other children. Maybe he had picked up that Colette could be there for only him. It was satisfying to see Jordan interacting in such a good-natured way through most of this observation.

## **Using the Computer Lead to Connect with Cath**

*At 3:4:29, Jordan was filmed at lunchtime. He carried his computer lead from home, with about thirty pegs attached, into lunch and kept it on the table near him. After lunch and some songs, Jordan placed one end of the lead into my hand and walked towards the door. I allowed him to 'lead' me part of the way, but when he went towards the Beach Area, I said "No Jordan, we are going out to the bikes". He took the lead again and, as always, stopped just before the threshold for a few seconds, before stepping through the doorway to the covered area and outside...he led me to a small trike and wound his end of the lead around the handlebar and scooted along leading me behind him.*

*He stopped at one point, picked up a trowel and got off the trike. He noticed one of the pegs, on its own, away from the other pegs on his line, and moved it along next*

*to the others. He then walked purposefully and placed the trowel on the ground near the fence, before running back and getting on the trike.*

*Jordan continued scooting around the playground, leading me. I said “Jordan, can I let go of this now? Can I put it on the ground and let it trail?” (as I placed my end of the lead on the ground). I explained “Cos I need to go in a minute. I need to go back to my work in a minute”. He stopped and then rode forward a few yards before stopping and turning around and looking at the lead on the ground. He got off the trike, picked up the end of the lead and placed it into my hand, saying “Te Ta”. I said “You want me to hold it?” as he got on the trike and scooted away.*

*He rode quite quickly and I dropped my end saying “I dropped it! Sorry Jordan I dropped it – shall I pick it up?” He stopped and looked down at the lead. I picked it up and he carried on, more slowly this time.*

*Jordan stopped and I asked “Do you want me to ask someone else to hold this as I have to go back to my work now. Who would you like to hold it?”*

*As Jordan reached the bottom of the ramp, his end of the lead unravelled from the handle of the trike and fell to the ground. I picked it up and gave it to him. He began winding it around the middle of the handle bar, singing “Ma ma mu” to the tune of “Frere Jacques” as he did it.*

*He rode away again leading me. I asked “Shall I ask Michelle (adult) to hold it?” One of the other children, Courtney, offered, so I gave my end to her. Jordan said*

*“Bye bye” and made an awkward looking side to side movement with his hand. He walked alongside his trike leading Courtney by wheeling the trike but not getting onto it.*

## **Analysis**

In this observation Jordan demonstrated his strong urge to ‘connect’ his lead to the trike by ‘rotating’ the lead several times around the handle bars to ‘enclose’ and secure it. Keeping the lead securely connected to the handle bars was ‘functionally dependent’ on wrapping it around several times (Athey, 1990, p.69). These sorts of actions are precursors to tying knots and frequently observed in children of this age (Arnold, 2003, p.117).

Jordan’s other concern was that I should be ‘connected’ to him through holding the lead. Bowlby (1997, p.181) described attachment as ‘proximity-seeking behaviour’ and the function was protection from predators. There was no way that Jordan needed physical protection on this occasion but he did, for ten minutes or more, engage in behaviour designed to prolong my presence and avoid separating from me. In a chapter on ‘Attachment in Children with Autism’ Yirmiya and Sigman (2001, p.57) state that although ‘Children with autism looked less frequently at their mother, smiled less and showed her objects less often...there were no significant differences in approaching the mother...’ and, therefore, these children are just as likely to be securely attached as the general population. They argued that ‘their attachment is in the service of the self; it is self-enhancing and does not necessarily take into account the other as a separate self with a separate mind that needs to be related to’ (2001, p.61).



A small but significant act, was pushing a peg nearer to the rest of the pegs, showing that he wanted to place it in close proximity to the other pegs. This small act could have signified an interest in sets, parts of a whole or his own proximity to other people.

When his end of the lead unravelled, Jordan became very 'involved' in securing it again (Laevers, 1997). He hummed the tune to "Frere Jacques", a tune his father, Andrew, frequently sang to him. He seemed content and at peace with himself as he engaged in securing the lead to his trike. Maybe this was something he had done several times before and knew he could achieve and, therefore, was satisfying.

When I finally handed over my end of the lead to Courtney, Jordan showed he understood I was leaving by saying "Bye bye" and waving. Unlike most young children, Jordan rarely waved or acknowledged that people were leaving. He was more inclined to seem to ignore or not notice them leaving.

Another small difference I noticed was that Jordan led the trike by holding the handle bars and walking alongside, when Courtney had the other end of the lead. Was he distancing himself further from her or less able to trust her to stay connected?

Bowlby (1997, p.82) said that children build up 'internal working models' based on their early interactions with other people. Did Jordan have some kind of a model of other children arriving and leaving rather unpredictably and, therefore, not to be relied on? Yirmiya and Sigman (2001 p.60) suggested that 'children with autism show the most difficulty with behaviours that necessitate a working model of the self and the other and their interdependence'.

## **Reflections**

When thinking about this observation, at first I experienced some tension between following Jordan's lead and my own constraints eg separating from him when I needed to. He could not just say "Please stay" and I could not tell him "OK I'll stay for 5 minutes more and I'll see you tomorrow" as I would with any other child. I felt rather guilty that I could not stay indefinitely. I felt frustrated in not knowing how much he was understanding of what I said. However, on further reflection, I realised that Jordan did understand I was going and, unusually, he acknowledged my imminent departure on this occasion by waving and saying "Bye bye". I also began to think that it might be helpful to Jordan to practise the ritual involved in separating from other people. He seemed not to notice when his mum or dad left. Perhaps I needed to talk to them about the importance of that ritual for Jordan? Maybe we had to help Jordan to express his feelings about separating?

## **Other Relevant Observations**

Jordan continued to notice and follow lines and to connect string or rope in various different ways during the next year. Another significant observation was filmed when Jordan was 3:08:22 and he showed he had a plan in mind:

## Connecting String to a Branch

*It was lunchtime and Jordan (3:08:22) had a helium balloon, left by another child. At first he let it go in the main nursery room, which has a very high ceiling. Maureen (our cleaner) managed to retrieve it with her long grabber (a tool for reaching and grabbing objects from behind radiators etc). Then he let it go outside and it drifted high into the sky. Jordan climbed up on top of a climbing cube and looked towards the sky. A second balloon had got caught in the high branches of a tree.*

*Jordan got down, went into the Discovery Area and started looking inside the storage boxes. After rifling through several, he found some rope...*

*At that point Angela (adult) came along and started explaining about the balloon and where it had gone. She lifted him up and tried to show him. He laughed and began hitting her on the head and face. Angela put him down saying "I'm not going to hold you if you're smacking. No smacking"...*

*Jordan took his jacket off and went into the Discovery Area and fetched a crate. He carried the crate and rope outside to the nearest tree. He placed the crate on the ground, upside down, and climbed onto it and began looping the rope over a branch...*

*Margaret offered him help. He seemed interested in trying to secure the rope to the branch but also in undoing the knot Margaret had made. He also manipulated the rope when it was looped over, making one end shorter and the other longer...*

## **Analysis**

It is difficult to know whether Jordan's actions, fetching the rope and crate, were connected to wanting to retrieve the balloon from the sky or from a tree. What we could deduce from his actions, was that he had a plan in mind, something he intended to do. Tracey said that another adult had offered Jordan an upside down crate to reach a tree at nursery a day or two before this.

We knew from Jordan's parents, that he was very fond of his swing in the garden at home. Apparently, he had used low branches before, at nursery, to try to suspend rope and sometimes he connected more than one together, which looked a bit like a swing suspended. This was complex, in schema terms. Even to connect the rope to the branch, which he did with Margaret's help on this occasion, he needed to co-ordinate:

- Trajectory – the upward action and loop over the branch
- Enclosure – bringing the rope together around the branch, and
- Going through a boundary – putting one end of the rope through the enclosure made by the rope

Jordan seemed more focussed on undoing the knot, which was something he could almost achieve alone at this stage. Undoing the knot would help him understand its structure.

Jordan also had the potential to begin to understand length and symmetry when he made one end of the rope longer, thereby making the other end shorter when it was looped over a branch.

Considering this observation through the lens of attachment theory, Jordan was practising ‘tightening’ and ‘loosening’ a knot, making its security within his control. Margaret tuned in very well and offered help which he sometimes accepted. Angela, on the other hand, thought she was tuning into his concern about the balloon. It was interesting that Jordan laughed and smacked her at the same time. This seemed incongruous. Perhaps she had cut across his thought process and he just wanted to get on with what he had planned. Trevarthen (Personal Communication, 2005) has told us that babies feel shame when adults do not understand them. Jordan seemed amused rather than ashamed. Jordan’s father told me that “understanding him is a big part of making him happy”. Maybe Jordan was communicating that Angela was not understanding his intentions on that occasion? He may have been, through his actions, holding the two ideas in mind, ie “I like you” and “I don’t want to engage with your interest in the balloon”.

## **Reflections**

It was satisfying to watch Margaret tune into Jordan’s intentions so effectively but also humbling to see Angela try and yet end up misattuning (Stern, 2003, p.148). I wondered how often that happened to Jordan. I am left wondering how we could help him tune into or understand other people or help other people to know Jordan and tune into his intentions more effectively.

## **Pushing a Trolley to Katey**

*I was filming Jordan (4:01:02), who was pushing an empty shopping trolley through the door to the Discovery Area. He stopped at the top of the ramp. Katey offered “Shall I catch it?” She was standing at the bottom of the ramp. At first Jordan pushed the trolley down the ramp and back up but, subsequently, he let go of the trolley so that it ran down to Katey, then he followed it and pushed it back up. I remained at the top of the ramp .*

*At one point he fell down and waited until Katey came and rubbed his knee better. The game went on for a few minutes and Jordan became quite excited. When Katey stopped to attend to another child, Jordan waited and shouted to her. He experimented with pushing the trolley up and down, forwards and backwards between us.*

## **Analysis**

When I watched this sequence with Tracey, she said “He’s really happy and engaged and comfortable in the space between two adults”.

Using a schema lens, Jordan was repeatedly pushing the trolley in a ‘line’ between Katey and me. He was learning about speed, distance and momentum. He needed to use very little force for the trolley to roll down the ramp and a much greater force for it to run up the ramp.

He seemed to be focussed mainly on his actions with the trolley, but the fact that he stopped when Katey gave attention to another child, indicated that he was also motivated by the relational aspect of the game. He wanted to 'connect' with Katey each time he let go of the trolley. At first he seemed not to trust that she would catch it, but he gradually built up confidence that she would be there and catch the trolley each time.

Could this game have mirrored his relationship to his parents, on the rare occasions when he had them all to himself? Jordan is very close to his father, who engages him in very physical play. Jordan did not like sharing his father with any of the other children and would push them away. During this sequence he seemed to want Katey all to himself.

## **Reflections**

I have become aware that I have selected observations that show Jordan's behaviour in a very positive light. One difficulty was Jordan's unpredictability. He would become very frustrated at times and scream at the top of his voice. He would suddenly climb onto the table at lunch or empty his water into the vegetables. I worked very hard to get to know Jordan and to understand him but I would not want to minimise his more difficult behaviours. One difficulty for the adults was that Jordan offered very little verbal feedback and we struggled to understand his thinking. The observations I have selected provide a window into Jordan's thinking through identifying his schematic explorations.

## **Securing Rope to the fence**

This final observation in this section was the last made before Jordan (4:03:15) left nursery to go to Primary School.

*Jordan was near to the fence, made up of small squares of metal, and had a strong piece of rope. He was trying to push the rope through one hole and pull it back through the next. He pulled it out, squealed, jumped about and looked distressed. I asked Connor, another child, if he could help Jordan to do what he was trying to do. Jordan let go and allowed Connor to push the rope through. The rope divided as Connor pulled it back through. Jordan began squealing. Connor managed to pull the whole rope back through and then left Jordan holding onto it.*

*The other end of the rope was tied to the large climbing cube. Jordan pulled his end to make it taut. He then wrapped the end of the rope around the rope line and put the end through the enclosure he had created (1<sup>st</sup> stage of making a knot). He repeated this action but the line of rope loosened. He looked back and squealed and moaned. He undid his knot and pulled the end to tighten it again before repeating the knot tying process again. Again the line loosened and again, he undid his knot. This time he pulled*



*the rope out of the fence and pulled the line to make it taut.*

*I asked if he needed help again.*

*Kearnu accidentally rode his bike on the rope and Jordan squealed and moaned. I asked Kearnu to move. I explained to the other children "Jordan is trying to make it really tight I think". Liam said "I know how to do it". Me "Can you help him Liam? See if he wants you to help him. That would be really good". Liam to Jordan "Do you want me to help you, Jordan?" Jordan laughed. Liam leaned forward explaining how to do it. Jordan put the rope up higher. I said "Jordan might need you to show him". Jordan dropped the rope but then picked it up and kept it away from Liam.*

*Louise (adult) came along and said "Do you want me to do it?" She took the end of the rope and started pushing it through the fence. Jordan squealed and indicated higher with his hand. Louise "Up there?" Louise pushed it through and brought the rope over the top of the fence to tie. Jordan squealed. Louise tightened it by pulling the rope through and saying to Jordan "You hold that" while she secured it and made the rope higher. Jordan looked at it, looked quite pleased and then ran right across the garden...*

*Jordan continued to be concerned with keeping his line taut. When Tracey rejoined him after lunch, she knew exactly what was bothering him. She involved him in tightening the rope at the climbing cube end. He climbed on top of the cube and tried to step onto the rope. Tracey was there to stop him from falling and to keep him safe. He also tested the security of the rope with his foot. He went on to*

*practise climbing across the monkey bars.* (Jordan squealed several times during this sequence. Mostly he seemed to squeal with frustration).

## **Analysis**

Jordan had almost mastered tying a knot although the materials he was using were not the most effective. He was certainly able to co-ordinate the trajectory movement, this time horizontally, with going through the boundary in the fence twice, bringing the rope together in an enclosure and going through the enclosure to tie.

Jordan was frustrated but not completely averse to accepting help from the other children. He often played near Connor, Liam and Kearnu, who were good friends to each other. Jordan often sneaked glances at them and may have been curious about their activities or friendships.

It was interesting that he accepted Louise's more authoritative approach and was unsure how to react when Connor and then Liam tried to help.

Tracey told me that "he was not happy that the rope was not straight. Jordan's play is all about straight lines and boundaries. He goes into the Discovery Area over the line and then reverses. He often stops at the line. He's gone from making a straight line, to trying to walk on rope, to going across the monkey bars"

For me, there seemed to be a theme around wholeness or perfection or, maybe integration. He would only be happy when the line was perfectly taut and that was difficult to achieve, even for the adults.

## **Reflections**

I found the tiny bits of progress in accepting help from others, encouraging. Although I did recall, at the end of Jordan's first year at nursery, some film of him playing alongside another boy, who then left nursery and went to school. Jordan was, once again, just getting to the stage of trusting some other children and, again, this seemed to have taken a long time. Because of Jordan's additional needs, he was going to attend a school in another part of the town, so those tentative links would probably be severed again.

## **Concluding Summary**

So what does Jordan's interest in lines and connecting signify? Like any child Jordan was 'trying to discover order in apparent disorder' (Bruce,1991). My understanding is that children with autism live in a very confusing world and, like any human being, are striving to make sense of that confusion. If lines are recognisable and predictable, then finding lines and constructing lines might provide some sort of satisfaction and control within that confusion. The function of a line could be to go from one person to another and indeed has a human history for every foetus connected to its mother by the umbilical cord. The story of Ariadne's thread is a metaphor for finding one's way or solving a complex puzzle and Jordan's puzzle seemed to be how to be connected to and get on with other people.

Jordan wanted to make the perfect line, tight and secure. In practising, he was learning to tie knots, a common activity for many children of his age. He may also have been expressing a wish to be connected to other people, although he showed he was not quite sure how to interact with them. He needed to learn the subtleties, like accepting help and acknowledging arrivals and departures. Adults were more able than children to adapt to Jordan's needs at that time, but hopefully, what he tried out with adults, would be useful in time with other children.

## 2. An interest in here and gone/Hello and Goodbye

### **Context**

Another frequently repeated action was Jordan's interest in opening and closing doors and gates. He rarely acknowledged the arrivals or departures of important people at nursery, but we did notice a subtle change in his behaviour when Jordan's younger sister, Sihaya, started attending nursery. Sihaya started attending for two mornings with lunch September 03 when Jordan was 3:06:09. This was just a few weeks after Jordan increased his attendance from four mornings with lunch to four full days. So, for the first time, his younger sister was spending time in the nursery while he was there and also being collected and leaving with one of his parents earlier than he was.

### **Sihaya Starts Attending Nursery**

*(Research Diary)*

*Today was Sihaya's first day at nursery (nurture group). Jordan had been out on the minibus all morning. When he and the other children returned, we were already at lunch. His mum and Sihaya were at the next table. Jordan did not acknowledge them at all, though he did seem to 'sneak' little glances at them (I thought so and so did Angela, who was sitting opposite Jordan).*

*Soon after his mum and Sihaya left the lunch room, Jordan wanted to go out. I followed (as I often do). Angela explained that the usual arrangement for Sihaya will be for Margaret to take her from lunch to reception and that Maria will pick her up from there, so as not to disrupt Jordan's day.*

*When we went out Maria and Sihaya had gone. Jordan closed the beach door and went towards the Discovery Area. He stood at the Discovery Area door. I explained we could not go out there (asbestos removal this week). Then Jordan went to the door to reception. I said "Are you looking for Mummy? Mummy and Sihaya have gone home – they'll be back for you later." Then Jordan went to the gate of the tower. Finally, he allowed me to take his hand and we went out to the Beach. He behaved differently there, walking all around the decking, lowering his head and standing still, looking through the glass. (I think he was searching/looking for mum?)*

## **Analysis**

Although Jordan did not openly acknowledge his mum's or Sihaya's presence at lunch, he was clearly disturbed by their presence and even more disturbed by their absence when we

left the lunchroom. His behaviour, though fairly subtle, showed clear signs of ‘searching for mother’ as described by Bowlby (1998, p.61).

The only repeated pattern was to approach each doorway, the means to ‘go through’ to another area and continue or extend his search. He was clearly puzzled and also behaved quite out of character.

### **Reflections**

I felt I needed to find out why the decision had been made for Maria and Sihaya to be reunited away from Jordan. I could understand that both children’s needs should be considered but I thought it misguided to not allow Jordan the experience of saying “Goodbye” and building trust that he would be collected later on in the afternoon. He was still experiencing the loss of his mother and sister, but without explanation or ritual.

Maybe I was influenced by my own experience with my son, who found it very difficult to separate from me to go to playgroup over 30 years ago. I had found it easier to ask a friend to take Paul, so that he (and I) did not suffer the raw pain of separation. I had recently lost my sister in a car accident and I thought I could protect my children from the pain of separation and loss that I was enduring.

I needed to be careful not to muddle my pain with Jordan’s but I felt that I needed to be grounded in the learning I had gained from my own losses and to talk to workers about what was happening with Jordan. So the next day I spoke to the workers about Jordan’s experience.

## **Seeing His mum and Sihaya Leave**

I spoke to Michele, then Angela and Margaret about Jordan. I felt we should be helping him to say Goodbye rather than whisking Maria and Sihaya away. Margaret, as Sihaya's Family Worker, was advocating for Sihaya to have as good an experience as possible and felt that the arrangement would benefit her.

*(Research Diary)*

*Two days later, Maria and Sihaya were in lunch again today. Again Jordan sneaked looks at them... He ran around the room and to the door several times. I said "I'll go out with Jordan, I've had enough sitting now". When I opened the door, Jordan ran back in. I went back to the table with him and said clearly "You need to sit down at the table or go outside". He chose to go outside.*

*We went to the beach. He spent the first couple of minutes trying to run in. I closed the doors and took his hand. We went to the edge of the sand and I said "Look at all the lovely things to play with." And "Shall we jump in?" I counted "1,2,3, jump" and jumped. Jordan copied me. We went to the digger. Jordan got on and tried to operate it but it was too high and too difficult.*

*We watched for his mum and Sihaya. When they came I emphasised that they would be going home and said Goodbye. Maria said Bye and Jordan saw them go through*

*the door. I said they would be back later for Jordan. He came back through to the beach. (This may also link with his routine from last year when he always went home after lunch, so part of his confusion was that he was staying for a longer time).*

## **Analysis**

Again, Jordan was unfocussed and quite disturbed, possibly by his mum and sister being at lunch. He would not sit down but when we went outside, he tried to go back indoors. There seemed to be a sort of ambivalence or uncertainty about what would happen. He did not focus on any identifiable repeated action although I tried to engage him in play in the Beach Area.

Maybe it was unreasonable to expect him to settle to anything before he had seen his mum and sister leave. Going back to the Pilot Study, Evan always needed to see his mum or dad 'go through' the final boundary so that he knew they had left before he could settle to become involved in an activity of his choice. There was a kind of certainty about knowing someone had gone and would return at a particular time. Maybe Jordan needed to know his mum and sister had gone?

## **Reflections**

I can remember being quite stressed by Jordan's behaviour on days like this but I did feel strongly that I needed to help Jordan to experience the pain of separation and survive. I



was trying to be a 'container' for his pain and someone who could reassure him that he would survive the pain until his mum came back later in the day (Bion, 1962).

### **Jordan Plays Hello and Goodbye**

*5 days later, Jordan (3:06:17) was really difficult at lunchtime. He was not interested or did not like the dinner. He got off his chair, went behind the blind, opened the door to outside and ran outside. Neither Sue, Angela or I could engage him.*

*He squealed when I tried to hold him on my knee. He ran to the door and into the kitchen. He sat for dessert.*

*I took him outside as soon as he began getting restless after dessert. Outside he got a buggy with a baby in, and kept stopping to sit the baby up. He walked all around in the Discovery Area, looking very serious and pushing the buggy.*

*Then he went to the gate. He seemed frustrated that he could not open it. I tried to show him "Turn it" but he would not look. He went through the gate and shut it and pushed the buggy around outside. Then he came back and opened the gate (he could do it from the outside by rattling the handle). He came through with the buggy and walked around the inside area again. I heard Jordan singing "Hello, how are you". I joined in. Then he approached the gate again, rattled the handle but it would not open. Again, I turned the handle and said "You need to turn it*

*Jordan". He pushed his buggy through and said "Bye bye". He repeated the whole process again. (Playing "Hello" and "Goodbye"?)*

## **Analysis**

Again, Jordan was fairly agitated throughout lunch and found it difficult to settle. It seemed as though he needed an opportunity to play out what he was feeling and thinking about. Maybe the Hello and Goodbye game was his way of beginning to understand the new arrangements with Sihaya attending nursery some days. In attachment theory terms, he may have been rehearsing his separation from and reunion with his main attachment figures. He may even have been pretending to be his mum or dad, pushing the younger child in a buggy.

In schema theory terms, Jordan was interested in 'going through a boundary' from one area to another (Athey, 1990, p.156). We know from our studies of other young children that the 'subdivision' of space is often of interest to children of this age. Understanding how space is divided can lead to having an internalised map of where places are in relation to each other and also to seeing the world from other perspectives.

## **Reflections**

I constantly ask myself whether I am assuming too much in my interpretations of Jordan's behaviour. The difficulty was in the subtlety of some of his most significant behaviours. His little voice could so easily have not been heard within the busy nursery environment.

His version of “Hello, how are you?” was sung very quietly and consisted of a “La la” tongue movement. He said “Bye bye” softly and never seemed to repeat it as other children would.

### **Jordan Pushing a Trolley**

*A few days later, Jordan (3:06:23) was filmed in the morning, half an hour after arriving. He was walking back through the gate pushing a play shopping trolley from outside to the Discovery Area. He shut the gate behind him. He left the trolley and went to the other gate and closed that too. Tracy opened it and pointed out that another child wanted to go through. Then she shut it again. Jordan went back towards the trolley and pushed it around the seat. He stopped and flattened an apron inside the trolley, making sure that the apron string was inside the trolley.*

*Jordan went back to the gate pushing the trolley. He touched the handle. Margaret (from the other side) said “Do you want the door open?” Margaret said “Door opening...door opening” as she opened it. Jordan went through, left the trolley a couple of metres away and stood with his back against the wall and both hands behind his back. Then he came and pushed the trolley saying “Bye bye” quite clearly. He shut the gate and went and leant against the wall holding the handle of the trolley. He made an “Aha” sound. Then he pushed the trolley up the kerb and closed the other gate, then went back down the kerb.*

*The basket almost fell off but Jordan managed to keep it on. He opened the gate and went through shutting it behind him. He walked around the seat and around*

*the sandpit and out of the other gate. He went back in, shutting the gate behind him.*

## **Analysis**

In schema terms, Jordan was co-ordinating a cluster of schemas:

- Transporting the trolley and an apron inside it
- Trajectory – walking in lines and giving attention to the up and down of the kerb, as well as opening and shutting the gates
- Going through the boundary of the gateway from one area to another and back
- Contained/Inside – being in one area as distinct from another area
- Enclosure – walking around in a full circle and getting back to where he began

He was using a sequence of actions, including pauses, suggesting that he was possibly representing symbolically, an experience he had had (Piaget, 1962, p.162). He walked quite purposefully and with confidence, especially near the beginning, when he closed one gate and went to close the second gate.

The only other clue about what he was thinking was that definite “Bye bye”, clearly linking this play episode to the one a few days before when Jordan used “Hello” and “Bye bye” in the play. Most young children would have engaged at least the adults around in playing a game like this. It seemed that Jordan was doing this purely for himself, to work through or understand some of the interactions he had observed or experienced. So it would seem to connect with his ongoing understanding of his parents leaving him at

nursery, when they picked Sihaya up. (Later on in the film, Sihaya was playing with another child in the Discovery Area, but Jordan showed no obvious sign of recognising her).

## **Reflections**

This was quite a brief episode but did show that Jordan could engage in some sort of symbolic play, maybe when he needed to aid his own understanding of a situation. The big question was whether he was ‘playing’ being himself or being one of his parents. Being himself re-enacting a situation and rehearsing was one thing but he could advance his thinking greatly if he was playing at being someone else.

## **Playing Here and Gone**

*Jordan (3:07:08) rolled a big barrel and then stood it up. He picked the red ladder up and tried to stand it against the barrel. Tracey said “It’s not safe – it doesn’t fit on”. Jordan looked down – “Are you looking at your shadow?”*

*He clapped his hands. He stood holding the barrel. Tracey asked “Do you want to get in?” She lifted him in. He crouched down. Tracey “I know what you want”. (He wanted a red dome/lid to fit over the barrel so that he would be completely covered).*

*Tracey went off to get the lid but came back without it. She explained “Someone’s using it”. Jordan moaned and cried. I suggested a drape. Tracey went off to see*

*whether she could find some material. I began singing "Hello how are you". Jordan stood up moaned and cried becoming even more distressed.*

*Tracey came back. She had not been able to find an alternative. "Do you want to come out while I look?" He said "Na na". We put his coat over the barrel. He stayed still before pushing it off. It was still not what he wanted. He stood up and Tracey rubbed his hands. He laughed and looked pleased. (It was a very cold day).*

*Tracey came with the red dome and placed it over the barrel. Connie (another child) pushed it off. Jordan moaned. Tracey put it back on. Connie pushed it off again. Tracey asked "Shall we see if he can lift it off himself?" Connie and Jordan lifted it off together. Tracey put it back on. Tracy knocked and shouted "Where's Jordan?" "Is he asleep?" Again Connie helped.*

*Jordan pushed it himself and seemed to hold on and then let go.*

*Tracey asked "Do you want it on?" Tracey put it on. Tracey "Where's he gone?" and "Hello Jordan" "Are you in there?" He pushed and held the edge before letting go.*

*Jordan pointed and shouted to indicate he wanted the dome on again. Tracey placed the dome on again. Jordan lifted it up and looked out from under it. He was concentrating with his tongue out. He then allowed it to fall behind him. He tipped the barrel over, got out of the bottom and walked away.*

## **Analysis**

Again Jordan had a very definite idea about what he wanted to use and the game was one he had played with Tracey before. He seemed to like being 'contained' in the barrel and completely 'enveloped' with the red dome over the top. He desperately wanted to be the one pushing the dome off and that was quite a difficult physical feat. Several times Connie got involved and he did not like that. It was as though he had set himself the goal of pushing the dome off and was not satisfied unless he did it alone and unaided.

In attachment theory terms, the game represented Jordan's disappearance and reappearance. Most children would have responded more to the people around when appearing from under the dome. At one point, Connie put both arms out, as though to embrace Jordan, but he seemed to completely miss that cue from her. Trevarthen and Daniel (2005, p.2) described a father's attempts to engage with his twin daughter, who subsequently was diagnosed with autism, as 'confusing his anticipations'. I think Connie's anticipations were confused. In contrast, Tracey tended to greet him quite loudly each time he reappeared regardless of his response.

He became distressed when I sang. That may have been because I cut across the plan he had in mind or because he did not like the sound echoing in the barrel. Some senses are more acute in autistic children and the sound, if amplified, might have been unbearable. Trevarthen and Daniel (2005, p.7) pointed out that an 'autistic child might be pained and frightened by sharp or loud sounds'.

## **Reflections**

Maybe Jordan's main motive was to be in control of what was happening. He very much liked being 'contained', I wondered whether this linked with having his feelings contained?

Another reflection was about how well Tracey had got to know Jordan. He really needed that one to one worker, so that she could reflect and build on their prior shared experiences. Trevarthen and Daniel (2005, p.2) talked about adults 'supporting residual capacities for sympathetic motivation and collaborative learning'. In a busy environment, those little sparks of interest may have been missed without Jordan's advocate.

## **Playing with Andrew at Lunchtime**

Several months later Jordan (3:11:06) was observed after lunch.

*Jordan was quite difficult during lunch. When we went back into the nursery, Andrew (his dad) was waiting for Sihaya. Jordan reacted by saying "Daaa" but then went past Andrew and started using Maureen's Hoover. I asked Andrew if he wanted to come outside. Andrew encouraged Jordan to leave the Hoover and come outside.*

*Outside Jordan rode away on a bike and watched Andrew from a distance. Then Jordan came close, got off the bike and became interested in a large cardboard box which had been bashed in. Andrew indicated another box which was a bit stronger.*



*Jordan got inside and covered himself completely. They developed a game where Jordan climbed inside, Andrew knocked on top saying “Where’s Jordan?” and then Jordan burst out saying “Hello”.*

*After a little while Andrew had to go and get Sihaya. I encouraged Andrew to tell Jordan he was going and to say “Bye”. We continued with the game until I had to go. Andrew told me that Jordan is currently interested in ‘going through’. He says he looks through the sleeve of his coat.*

## **Analysis**

Again, in schema terms, Jordan was repeating the pattern of being completely ‘enveloped’ or ‘contained’ by the cardboard box, and then revealing himself by bursting through the lid. This interest fitted with the information Andrew offered that he was interested in ‘going through’ and looking through his sleeve. He was enjoying using Maureen’s Hoover because he could see bits of paper ‘going through’ the tube. These actions also link with his knot tying, when he made an enclosure and put the string or rope through to form a knot.

In terms of attachment theory, this was interesting. Jordan obviously recognised his dad, but did not immediately approach him. In fact, he kept a distance until his dad invited him to play. I think this was different to what happened at home, when Jordan usually wanted to play with Andrew as soon as he came in (Interview 20-10-03).

This time the game that developed was definitely about being 'here and gone'. As this was several months later, perhaps Jordan was much happier to play with the idea of being here and gone.

## **Reflections**

It was good for me to see the way Andrew played with Jordan. I was puzzled that Jordan did not approach his dad more readily but I think that's where his inflexibility came in. Jordan was not used to seeing Andrew at nursery. He was usually at work till 2pm. Jordan's uncertainty was around what to do and say during interactions and beginning an interaction is the most difficult part, because of timing and monitoring or anticipating what the other person will do.

## **Understanding That Cath's Going on Holiday**

*(Research Diary)*

*200204*

*After lunch we went to the beach. I told Jordan this was my last day for a long time as I was going on a big holiday. He knelt down despite the fact that it was very cold. I filled containers with damp sand and turned them upside down. At first Jordan placed the bucket back on top of the sand. When I filled a smaller container with sand and upturned it, Jordan bashed it down. When it was time for me to leave he moaned a bit (as though he understood?)*

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*First day I was back at lunch after being away for nearly four weeks on holiday. Jordan looked right at me several times. During lunch he got up and went over to Robert (adult), put his arms around Robert's neck, listened to his voice by putting his mouth on Robert's throat. He repeated this three more times at intervals and looked to see if I was watching.*

*My interpretation – Jordan letting me know that Robert was here when I was not?*

*Outside afterwards Jordan got a shopping trolley and ran around the decking. He looked at me first as though trying to elicit a response. Did he want a chasing game? I waved rather than ran. He came back around and gave me a cuddle shortly before I left.*

## **Analysis**

On this occasion, I am not sure whether Jordan chose to fill containers with sand, or whether I did that because we had done it before. I was not sure what he understood of what I was telling him would happen. Covering the sand pie with the bucket could have represented the disappearance of the sand pie but that seemed too tenuous a link with my imminent departure. Bashing the sand pie also made it disappear.

What was certain was his interest in me when I came back. He looked right at me several times, which was something he did not do normally. He also looked when he was with Robert and when he ran around the decking. He was definitely recognising me and, by the

time we went outside, wanting to engage with me in some way. I think he was expressing that he had some sort of attachment to me and that he was pleased to see me.

## **Reflections**

It was difficult to go away and try to explain to a child like Jordan, that I would be back. Angela took photos of me and my car and said she would show them to him while I was away. It was difficult to show Jordan anything he was not focussed on. I felt guilty, but, again, on reflection, it was an opportunity to see whether he remembered me and how he would react. Later on when Jordan left to go to school, I was getting into my car and saw him one day after several months. He came over to the car and looked right at me for a few seconds.

## **Concluding Summary**

So, do the observations provide evidence that Jordan was using repeated patterns or schemas to investigate and understand the 'here and gone' of his parents? It was clear in the first two observations in this section, that Jordan was completely 'preoccupied' with searching for his mum and sister and could not focus. By the third observation, he was beginning to play out, in some way, his understanding of the arriving and leaving of his parents. He continued doing that over a period of a month after Sihaya started nursery. He used a cluster of schemas, but it was important for him to 'go through a boundary' from one area to another and to be able to be 'contained' in each area by closing the gates.

It was four months later when he and Andrew were playing a 'here and gone' game symbolically and using a cardboard box to represent a space in which he could hide and not be seen, or perhaps, for Jordan, a place he could hide and not see his dad.

### 3.3 Chloe's Story

#### **Introduction**

Chloe was 2 years 5 months and 20 days when I first observed her for this study. She was in her first year at nursery and was attending four afternoons a week. During her second year at nursery, she attended four full days a week.

Chloe has an older brother Ryan, who has Noonan's Syndrome. Noonan's is 'an inherited disorder that may affect almost every system of the body' ([www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/noonan1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/noonan1), 3-3-06). The common symptoms include mild learning difficulties, visual problems and heart problems. He displays some fairly difficult behaviours, such as putting himself in danger by going onto the road when cars are coming. At the beginning of the study period, they lived with their mother and Ryan's biological father, who was Chloe's stepfather.

Although one of the younger children in the nursery, Chloe was, at this time, bright and sparky and already fiercely independent.

She was able to be autonomous in exploring the workshop environment. She was also open to making relationships with other children and adults.

The observations and discussions listed in Appendix 2 were used to inform our thinking about Chloe and her expressions and representations of emotion and attachment. Within

this case study, I have drawn on the observations to illustrate two themes that emerged from the data on Chloe:

1. An enduring interest in exploring a cluster of schemas: trajectory, transporting, containing and enveloping
2. Chloe's reactions to changes, fears and loss

Each theme is put into context, relevant observations presented with analysis and reflections after each observation.

1. An enduring interest in trajectory, transporting, containing and enveloping

## **Context**

I noticed right from the start that Chloe had developed strategies for getting whatever she wanted. She asked directly, usually by saying "I want..." but if this did not work or if she was not heard, she was capable of taking what she wanted from another child. This was not usually done with any aggression. Chloe also defended her right to hang onto whatever she had, usually by positioning it away from other children.

Chloe watched carefully what other children were doing and would freeze slightly if there was any sudden loud noise near her. Certain items seemed to carry power or status within the nursery population and Chloe was particularly skilled at acquiring and using those items, for example, the phone, the most sought after high heels and the hose.

For a great deal of her time, Chloe co-operated with a friend, either Connor or Megan. She usually shared whatever she was playing with willingly with either friend. There was a period of time when she and Connor liked to dress up in the only two ballet tutus among the dressing up clothes. Chloe would come into the nursery early, find the tutus and keep them ready for when Connor arrived.

Although Chloe seemed interested in ‘having’ those status symbols, it was never just about having them, she was also interested in using them in her play and explorations.

At the start of the study, Chloe used a dummy at bedtimes, although I never observed her using her dummy at nursery. Just before her 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, she lost her dummy and Arlene (her mother) told her she was getting too big for a dummy. She managed without it, but stayed up later and seemed more fearful of going to bed for a while (Discussion with Chloe’s mother, 21-8-03).

### **Chloe and Connor Enveloping with Paint and Water**

*Chloe (2:06:28) and Connor were alongside each other at the easel. Each child had a paintbrush and was painting their own hand before holding them up to show each other. Chloe asked Colette, the adult filming, “I want my sleeves up”. She held both hands up and Colette said “Your hands are covered in paint...And yours, Connor”. Chloe rubbed her hands against each other and held them up again. Colette said “Purple and blue hands!” Chloe rubbed them again. Colette “What does it feel like? Does it feel nice?”*



*Chloe stepped off the block she was standing on and went towards the bathroom. Colette “You’re washing your hands?” Connor followed a second later. Colette “You’re washing yours as well mate”.*

*In the bathroom, Chloe grinned as she put each of her hands under a tap. She stopped and pushed her sleeves up and laughed at Connor, washing his hands at the adjacent sink.*

*Colette “You’re making the water all purple, Connor” and to Chloe “And you’re making it all blue”.*

*Chloe stopped and used the soap dispenser to put some soap on one hand before washing them again. She picked up a wet paper towel from the back of the sink and wiped the soap dispenser, then she held the paper towel under the dispenser and put soap onto the wet towel. She then wiped the outside of the soap dispenser with the wet, soapy towel and Connor joined in, wiping the dispenser with a wet paper towel too.*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema lens to interpret Chloe’s actions showed that Chloe was ‘covering’ or ‘enveloping’ her hands with paint (Athey, 1990, p.149). She transformed them from skin colour to blue. Athey (1990, p.152) stated that ‘Almost all the children represented ‘darkness’ as well as envelopment by scribbling over or covering over, their drawings’. Chloe gave no indication of what she was representing by covering her hands with paint.

She was also discovering the properties of the paint. When spread thinly on a surface, it quickly dried. She was rubbing her hands together and very soon feeling the dryness. Arnold (1999, p.107) studied Georgia who systematically explored ‘whether liquids dry when sprinkled or spread thinly’.

Chloe was also interested in enveloping her hands with water and soap. She discovered that removing the paint from her hands was ‘functionally dependent’ on wetting her hands and rubbing soap on (Athey, 1990, p.69). Chloe may also have been interested in the transformation of the water from transparent to translucent blue. Her subsequent ‘washing’ of the soap dispenser indicated that she was repeating her enveloping pattern with different materials and on different surfaces.

Using an emotional lens, Chloe was probably just enjoying the feel of covering her hands with paint. Both covering with thick liquid (eg paint) and washing with water, was probably soothing. Although Chloe did not respond to Colette’s question “How does it feel?” she was obviously enjoying the feel of painting her hands and rubbing them together while the paint was wet. As soon as the paint dried she went to the bathroom to wash her hands and to, once again, experience the feel of the liquid on her hands. Chloe also seemed to be identifying with Connor and enjoyed carrying out the same actions as him.

## **Reflections**

I have observed many children covering their hands with paint and washing it off, over the years. I have tended not to focus on the therapeutic aspect of this activity, although I know that massage is beneficial. Chloe and Connor both seemed to enjoy the sensory experience

of painting their hands, rubbing them against each other and, subsequently, washing them with soap and water.

### **Chloe Filled Containers with Water and Placed Them in a Line**

Almost every time Chloe was observed, she placed materials in containers (buttons in a box, water in bottles, sand in bowls). The following observation was typical of Chloe's explorations at this time.

*At 2:09:22 Chloe was at the sink filling jugs with water. She walked to the water tray nearby and picked up a small plant pot, looked down at the adult sized pink shoes she was wearing and at the adult's shoes. Chloe "I got some...shoes". Colette (adult) "You've got lovely pink shoes". Chloe "And you've got..." (pointing down at Colette's shoes). Colette "I've got brown shoes on today".*

*Chloe went to the sink and tried to fill the plant pot with water from the tap but it ran through the holes in the base. She picked up a large spoon and tried to put it into a bottle but found it did not fit. Chloe bent down and selected some bottles from a basket saying "I got three". She picked up several more bottles and filled each of them with water before placing them at the back of the sink. She needed help to lift the largest bottle, when it was full of water. She filled the space available.*

*Then Chloe took a jug from her 'line' of containers to the bathroom and filled it with water. After emptying the water out, she put soap in the bottom of the jug from*

*the soap dispenser. She added water from the tap which created bubbles on the surface of the water. She repeated this and talked about making 'coffee'. (\*Does she talk about dad and shampoo?\*)*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens indicates that Chloe was assimilating new materials into her containing pattern. She showed an interest in the shoes that were containers for her feet. When she tried to contain water in a plant pot, she had to accommodate to the idea that the water ran through the holes in the base of her container. She rejected the plant pot and therefore it could be said that she was not ready to accommodate to the new 'going through a boundary' pattern or to use it in her play at this time.

Chloe also discovered that she could not put a large spoon into a narrow necked container as it did not fit. After trying to contain water in a plant pot and a spoon in a bottle, she selected several containers (bottles and jugs) and filled each of them with water. She placed the containers full of water in close proximity to each other, at the back of the sink. Chloe not only filled the containers with water, but also filled the available space with a line of full containers. The line had end points and, as Athey (1990, p.155) has pointed out, the containers sub-divided the space, heralding later understanding of measuring and counting.

When we use attachment theory as a lens to understand Chloe's actions, we can draw on the spatial aspect of placing the full containers 'in close proximity' to each other. Although this seems a tenuous link, Chloe seemed satisfied that the containers were close and

touching each other so may have been representing closeness or connection with the containers.

Chloe seemed to derive some satisfaction from filling the containers, as well as placing them next to each other. 'Having' lots of containers, as well filling them with lots of water seemed important to Chloe.

Her conversation was about what she had 'got', for example pink shoes, three bottles. When she went into the bathroom and put soap into a jug and then filled it with water, Chloe told us she was representing "coffee". Her mum drank coffee at home so the representation of coffee may also have represented 'having' what her mum had and, therefore, made her feel more powerful and also connect her to her mum.

Chloe's enduring motive seemed to be possession. Containing materials or objects enabled Chloe to carry them about, keep them together and exert and display her power over them. This is a common motive in young children. Susan Isaacs (1933, p.221) pointed out 'the common wish of little children to have exclusive possession or at least the biggest share or main use of whatever properties are the centre of interest at the moment'.

## **Reflections**

I have really struggled to understand Chloe's actions, particularly when viewing those actions through an emotional lens. Her desire to contain and keep together whatever she was using is a behaviour I strongly identify with, even as an adult. I think the root, for me,

of those repeated behaviours is sibling rivalry and the desire to have as much or more than my siblings.

Isaacs (1933, p.232) linked rivalry with 'the family situation' in which children are rivals 'for the love of adults, and primarily, of course, the parents'. So the gathering of materials might be linked to personal worth. 'Having' lots might be a symbol of needing lots of love and also of being worth lots of love. In Chloe's case, she derived satisfaction from this gathering, so it did not feel like an unmet need but one which she was able to represent in her play and explorations. Isaacs (op cit) said that little children are so dependent 'on the love and care of adults that they have an absolute need to possess them and their love'. Chloe's brother was very demanding at this time and, although she would blame him for things even when he was not there, her mother said that generally the two children got on well. Chloe may have learned some of her strategies from her experiences with her brother at home.

### **Chloe and Connor Filled Buckets with Water and Fended Off an Attack from Another Child**

In the following observation, an adult supported Chloe (3:01:29) and her friend Connor (3:07:21). They were playing in the large, outdoor beach area and had a hose each, as well as plenty of other resources.

*Chloe and Connor had already spent fifteen minutes, each with a hose, filling two lines of buckets with water. There were fifteen buckets in all, three large household*

*buckets and twelve children's buckets, some of which were perspex. One line was perpendicular to the other.*

*As she filled each bucket, Chloe leant towards the bucket and placed her finger in the flow of water, at the aperture of the hose thus restricting the flow and increasing the pressure of the water, thereby causing the water to become frothy.*

*The two children also added handfuls of sand to some of the buckets and also dipped their arms into several buckets in turn.*

*Suddenly another boy came along and knocked five of the buckets over, one at a time. Almost simultaneously, Connor and Chloe noticed what he was doing. Each of the children pointed and shouted and then ran towards the buckets. Connor stood each of the buckets up while Chloe picked up the hose and refilled each bucket with water.*

*The adult supporting talked to the other child quietly in the background.*

*Chloe noticed the other boy approach again and said "Connor, look, look, now he's doing it!" She approached the other boy and shouted "Hey" then watched for a few seconds. The other boy was playing with the large buckets of water and was singing. Chloe shouted loudly and clearly "Connor don't want you to pour it out!!"*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens, Chloe was co-ordinating several schemas during this sequence of play. Using the hose made the water travel in a trajectory, suitable for filling containers. She deliberately placed her finger in the flow to reduce the size of the aperture through which the water was travelling. This action increased the pressure of the water and made the contents of each bucket rise and swirl. Some of the buckets contained sand and water, so the sand could be seen rising and swirling around.

Using attachment theory as a lens, the buckets were placed in close proximity to each other, but the adult supporting the play had placed them there, under the direction of the children. Analysing the actions of the two children, especially when their game was under threat, could make a much closer link with attachment and emotions. They worked together so well to repair the damage that had been done to their game. I was surprised that neither child showed any anger or aggression towards the other boy. Perhaps they knew that the adult would intervene and talk with him about what he had done. Or maybe, reinstating the buckets was more important to them, than expressing their feelings about what he had done? Within their immediate actions, there was a sense of making something whole again and they worked quickly to achieve this.

Connor was using very little verbal language at this time so Chloe was able to play a strong and powerful role, as his advocate. When she shouted at the other boy, she was clearly articulating Connor's wishes, as well as defending their game. This was also a way of expressing her feelings about what he had done. During our project on 'Emotional Well-being and Resilience' we noticed that sometimes children expressed their feelings more



readily when advocating for a friend, than when sticking up for themselves (Pen Green Research Team, 2004).

Another feature of Chloe and Connor's relationship was the synergy and synchrony displayed during this sequence. When Chloe's mother and I discussed this sequence, she suggested humorously that Chloe liked playing with Connor "because he did not answer back" and she "could tell him what to do". Although there may be a grain of truth in this and Arlene knows Chloe best, what I observed was Chloe's expertise in what has been described by developmental psychologists as 'theory of mind' (Hobson, 2002, p.143). She knew Connor's intentions and she knew how he was feeling and she could articulate this to other people on Connor's behalf.

Perhaps her deep interest was not just putting things inside or containing but what's going on inside other people, their thoughts and feelings? Chloe was a keen observer of others and also skilled in knowing how she, herself, was feeling.

Hobson (2002, p.147) drew a 'tentative conclusion'

that the security of attachment relationships influences a child's later ability to engage with another person on a mental level. Securely attached children seem better able to recognize and act upon the alternative perspectives of another person.

Hobson talked about securely attached children having the 'mental space' to see things from other viewpoints (op cit).

## **Reflections**

This video sequence was seventeen minutes and I stayed on and observed what happened subsequently. I always felt that it was an important sequence and one that showed Chloe at her most confident, powerful and in control of her own learning.

I think she demonstrated her resilience when the other boy knocked down some of the buckets. An important factor was the solidarity of her friendship with Connor. Together, they were very strong and knew they could depend on each other. Trevarthen (2002, p.7) would say they were learning ‘in companionship’ with each other and that ‘children need meaning to share, like plants need the sun’. So their relationship was about more than being there for each other. It was about a shared venture, that held meaning for both children.

## **Concluding Summary**

In this section, I have focussed on Chloe’s repeated patterns of trajectory, transporting, containing and enveloping.

Having access to resources and using them in her own way seemed to be important to Chloe, but possession was not her only motive. She was also engaged in exploring or doing things with the resources. In the first observation, she was ‘enveloping’ or covering her hands with paint and then uncovering by washing. Her exploration might have been connected to “what’s inside?” Her hands looked different but were they still the same when they were ‘inside’ the paint? Washing the paint off enabled her to find out.

In the second observation, her concern was with filling different shaped containers with water and fitting the containers into a defined space. She experienced the weight of each container, empty and then full. Her feet were contained or inside pink high heels. Her feet did not fill the shoes and when she walked, she experienced the weight and extra space. Chloe also experimented with mixing soap and water to make 'coffee'. Again, her explorations seemed to be about what's inside different containers and how she could transform what was inside by, for example, adding soap.

In the third observation, Chloe and her friend, Connor, experimented with filling 15 buckets with water. Some contained sand already and they added sand to some others. Their concern was with what was inside the containers and how they could change or transform those contents by performing different actions on them. Their relationship could be observed at close quarters. There was evidence of their shared goals when another boy knocked over five of the buckets. Chloe and Connor knew each other well and went into action without needing to speak to each other. They each seemed to have a deep understanding of what the other was thinking and feeling. Hobson (2002, p.153) has suggested that 'the secure infant has become a child who seems able to turn to inner resources and to have a kind of mental space to think'. Both Chloe and Connor seemed to have the 'mental space' to think about what the other wanted and felt and to act accordingly.

## 2. How Chloe Responded to Changes, Fears and Death

### **Context**

During her first year at nursery, Chloe's life was fairly stable. She lived with her mum, brother and mum's partner, made a close relationship with her Family Worker at nursery, Denise, and also developed a close friendship with Connor.

However, during Chloe's second year, some things changed for her, both at home and at nursery. In this section, I am presenting observations that link with Chloe's responses to those changes.

The first major change was in October 2003 when Chloe's mum's partner moved out and went to live with her mother's best friend. This caused distress for Chloe's mother and for both children. The following video observation shows Chloe engaging in play that was less characteristic of her. Instead of seeking out her friends, Connor or Megan, she went to the computer.

### **Chloe Played at the Computer, Asked for Cuddles and Traded to Get the Best High Heels**

#### **1. Chloe at the Computer**

*I had just arrived and asked Chloe how her mum was. Chloe "She buyed me a bike".*

*Chloe (3:02:23) then ran and sat at a computer in the corridor, alongside Connie, who*

*was being settled in by her dad. Chloe manipulated the mouse, pressed her computer screen, looked towards nursery and said “Connor” but did not move.*

*Chloe smiled at Connie, leaned across and touched Connie’s screen. Then she pressed her own screen and said “Connie, look!” Both children laughed. Chloe continued to use her computer, then leaned across and turned Connie’s mouse around. Chloe leaned down and got a CD out of a box under the table.*

*Connie’s dad moved away for a couple of minutes. Chloe leaned across and pressed the button to release the CD drawer from Connie’s computer, then took Connie’s CD out and put it into the box under the table. She then leaned across and put another CD into Connie’s CD drawer and pressed the button to make it retract.*

*Connie’s dad came back. Chloe leaned across and said “Connie, you don’t put...” Connie said “I do it”. Then Chloe leaned across and pulled Connie’s keyboard out saying “Connie, do these ones”, then pulled her own keyboard out and pressed some buttons.*

*Connie’s dad ejected her CD and went to get another one. Connie said “Daddy put it away” pointing to the empty drawer. Connie’s dad put another CD in, kissed her “Goodbye” and left. Chloe watched as he left. Chloe got up and went to a nearby table, which was set up with make up and mirrors. She picked up two make up bags and went back and gave one to Connie...*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema lens to understand Chloe's actions, Chloe used a 'dab' or 'trajectory' movement to press the screen, button and also the keyboard. She was very interested in taking the CD out and putting it back into the drawer, thereby containing it. She continued after Connie left and later on in this observation, to repeatedly take CDs out of the drawer and replace them. She had no interest in actually playing them. I think she was interested in the functional dependency aspect, that is, the CD drawer coming out and going in was functionally dependent on pressing the button. She was, therefore, co-ordinating trajectory and containing schemas. Chloe chose two bags from the make up table, again containers.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand Chloe's interactions, here Chloe began by telling me what her mum had bought her, a new bike, and was therefore about 'having' and worth. Chloe had an opportunity to watch Connie's relationship with her dad at close quarters. She watched the actual separation quite closely. However, most of her energy went into trying to connect with Connie. She tried to assist Connie with her computer, but Connie did not really want her assistance and she had her dad there to help anyway. Chloe suggested that they both used their keyboards but Connie did not take this up. Finally Chloe fetched two make up bags so they both had containers. Did Chloe think that Connie might need a container as her dad had left?

Chloe saw Connor arrive but did not go and join him. One possible explanation for why Chloe chose to be at the computer in the corridor and to stay there on that morning, was that it was the area where Denise (her Family Worker) was placed that week. If Chloe was feeling vulnerable, it may have helped to be near Denise.

## **Reflections**

I began by asking how Chloe's mum was because I knew that she was having a difficult time. Chloe responded by telling me her mum had bought her a bike. On reflection, it was inappropriate for me to ask her, as a three year old, to tell me about her mother. This highlighted for me another aspect of seeing Chloe as emotionally capable. There was a danger that too much would be expected of Chloe, in terms of the role that she played with others.

I think Chloe wanted to be the expert to Connie, as a novice. She made several initiations that were rejected by Connie. She clearly wanted Connie as a friend, but Connie had her dad there to help her. Chloe's mother said that Chloe did play with Connie sometimes, as there was a photo of her with Connie, Connor and Megan in her Celebration of Achievement book at nursery.

I wonder whether Chloe wanted to feel more powerful and if her way of feeling powerful was to be able to help other children with 'doing' things. The other way of connecting was to 'have' the same as each other and she tried this strategy with the make up bags.

### **2. Asking Denise for Cuddles**

*...Denise walked past and Chloe left the computer, carrying the make up bag, and put both arms up to Denise. Denise lifted her up and held her and kissed her. Chloe's arms went floppy. Denise said, "Can I set these chairs out?" and put Chloe down while she*

*set some chairs near the make up table. Chloe manipulated a plastic hair clasp, that was on the table.*

*Chloe picked up a brush and comb, moved over to Denise and held her arms up again. Denise crouched down and held Chloe again, while greeting Susan. Chloe said “My mum says where’s her jacket?” Denise replied “Where’s her jacket...she found it though, cos she was wearing a coat” Chloe said “In the cupboard” smiling.*

*Denise said that she needed to go and help Megan, who was on the computer. Chloe went to Susan, who was sitting at the second computer (where Chloe had been previously). Chloe put her head near Susan’s and said something quietly. Susan got off the seat and Chloe got on and began using the computer while Susan watched...*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Chloe ‘transported’ the make up bag when she approached Denise. Then she ‘transported’ a brush and comb from the make up table when she approached Denise for a second time. These could have been ‘objects of transition’ from one area to another, or something to talk about when approaching someone or objects that represented her interests (Bruce,2004).

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand, Chloe expressed her wish to be near Denise and to be held by her. Her arms went floppy when Denise first held her, possibly showing her complete trust in Denise’s ability to ‘contain’ her feelings.



Susan was a younger child, fairly new to nursery at this time and also in Denise's group. Chloe may have seen Susan as a rival for Denise's affection. Although Chloe did not show any hostility towards Susan, she did show that she needed Denise, so she was 'in touch with' her 'wishes, needs, feelings, thoughts' (Laevens, 1997, p.19).

Chloe's comment about her mum's jacket may have been significant too. It showed that she was thinking about her mum and, although she did not mention the greater loss, she mentioned the fact that her mum had lost her jacket but then found it in a cupboard.

### **Reflections**

Denise was a worker, who was emotionally available to children. She was able to 'tune into' the needs of others. I believe that Chloe recognised that Denise could 'contain' her feelings (Bion, 1962) and 'hold' her and allow her to feel as she felt at that moment. This was beneficial to Chloe, as Denise knew about the family situation and was prepared to hold her and reassure her while she felt vulnerable. However, Denise had responsibility for other children and could not dedicate herself to Chloe, alone, on this occasion.

### **3. Trading to Get the Best High Heels**

*...Chloe got up from the computer table. Susan was wheeling a shopping trolley just behind the computer chair. Inside were a pair of pink, high heeled mules. Chloe leaned in and took them out of the trolley. Denise said "You need to ask Susan". Susan shook her head. Chloe pointed at Susan's feet. Denise said "Oh you've got some on Susan". Denise added "You've got some high heels on already". Susan to Chloe "Put them in*

*the trolley". Denise to Susan "Susan, do you know what? Chloe's not got any high heels – you've got some on". Susan took hers off her feet and offered them to Chloe. Denise "She's saying you can have these ones". Chloe let go of the ones she was holding and accepted Susan's offer. Denise said "That's really kind of you Susan".*

*Chloe took her shoes off and put the high heels Susan had given her on. Denise to Chloe "Where do your shoes need to go?" Chloe walked into the main nursery room to put her shoes into her box...*

*Chloe got a pair of purple high heeled mules out of the dressing up rack and took them to the corridor and put them into the shopping trolley. Denise said "That was a really kind thing to do.*

*A couple of minutes later Chloe noticed that Susan had taken off the pink mules and put on the purple ones. Chloe got off her chair and picked up the pink mules, putting one on each hand, and grinned towards me. Me "Are those the ones you really want?" She nodded. She took the others off and put the pink ones on her feet. She looked very pleased.*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens to understand Chloe's actions, she clearly wanted to put her feet 'inside' the high heels. She also had some ideas about which were the best shoes. They had the highest heels and were fairly challenging to walk in. In her thinking, Chloe may have arranged the high heels in an order from the least to the most desirable, as well as the least to the most challenging to wear. We can deduce that Chloe was applying some sort of

'ordination' or 'seriation' to the high heels which Athey (1990, p.205) described as 'higher level thought'.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand Chloe's actions, it was really interesting to observe how skilfully Denise supported each of the 2 girls to negotiate and to end up with a pair of shoes that satisfied their wishes. I cannot be certain that Chloe deliberately introduced the purple shoes, in the hope that she would end up with the ones she really wanted. Her approach was so subtle. Most children would have made the offer directly but she merely placed them in the trolley Susan had been using. Somehow she demonstrated that she was not in desperate need. Perhaps her basic feeling of security that things would turn out OK helped her in this situation?

### **Reflections**

Was Chloe representing her secure attachment in being able to wait or in being satisfied, for the time being, with what she could have? Given her need for cuddles from Denise that morning, I have observed many children whose main motivation would have been to have what Susan wanted. There was certainly a generosity of spirit in Chloe's actions and a basic belief that she would get what she wanted some of the time.

## Playing Mummy and Baby with Connor

### Context

The next time I observed Chloe, it was the day after Bonfire Night and she was playing upstairs in the homecorner with Connor.

*Connor (3:9:1) was already in bed and Chloe (3:3:10) was saying “Connor, take your trousers off” and then persuasively “Because you’ll get nice and warm”. Connor took his trousers off and Chloe got into bed and pulled a cover over both of them. Chloe said “Where’s my bottle?” and got a pretend baby’s bottle to feed him. (It is one of those bottles that has white liquid in a wall like a flask so you cannot really drink it but it looks authentic). The bottle was the main prop in their game. Connor played the role of the baby and Chloe fed him using the bottle. She said “It’s night time, right no more now baby”. Both children lay down. Each time after feeding Connor, she put the bottle, either under the cover or under the bed. Connor became slightly distracted by two other boys in the area pretending to get ready to go to work. One of them tried to take Connor’s wellies as work boots. Connor got agitated and I helped him sort it out.*

*Connor became interested in the boys’ game and started putting his trousers on to join them. Chloe said “No Connor we’re going to bed. It’s my turn now. Why did I put your bottle up there?” (The cover has come off and with it, the bottle). And “Connor, you can have this pillow. It’s nine o’clock...sssh it’s nine o’clock”. Chloe continued trying to dissuade Connor from going off with the other boys saying “No,*

*you're not going – it's going to be night time". Connor said "No". Chloe "It's going to be night time – it's going to be more dark outside".*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens to understand the play, Chloe and Connor were both interested in being contained or enveloped by the blanket and the main prop in their game was a container (the bottle). The bottle was part way between a real baby's bottle and a symbol. So the appearance was of a bottle with real milk inside but it seemed to come as no surprise to the two children that the milk did not come out. They were using the bottle of pretend milk as a 'symbolic representation' of a bottle of real milk.

When Chloe told Connor "Because, you'll get nice and warm", she may have been expressing the idea that the heat generated between their two bodies was 'functionally dependent' on their bodies being in close proximity under the blanket.

After feeding Connor, when Chloe said "It's night time, right no more now baby", she had two concerns, the lateness and the quantity of milk. She was considering the two concepts of time and quantity together and was setting a boundary, that is, it is late and you have had enough.

Chloe used her containment schema at a functional dependency level when she placed the bottle under the cover or under the bed to keep it safe – keeping the bottle safe was functionally dependent on keeping it hidden from the view of other children, who may also have wanted to use it.

Chloe differentiated between night and day, saying “It’s night time” and “It’s nine o’clock”. An interest in containment leads to an understanding of subdivision of space and time (Nursery World, 21-10-04). Carrying out the actions of placing materials in containers helps children to conceptualise the divisions of space and of time, which are more abstract concepts. Chloe, again, was expressing an interest in seriation, when she said “It’s going to be more dark outside”. The use of the comparative word ‘more’ showed that she knew that night falls gradually. Chloe was beginning to show the ‘flexibility of thought’ described by Miller in Lee and Das Gupta (1995, p.29). Miller pointed out that young children often demonstrate a ‘rigidity of thought in the tendency to *focus on states* rather than on the transformations linking states’. We can see from Chloe’s language that she was not rigid in her thinking about day (light) and night (dark) but was beginning to conceptualise the gradual change from day to night.

Although both Chloe and Connor were interested in containing and being contained, he became quite interested in the boys’ play. This was filmed the day after Bonfire Night and two other boys in the homecorner were playing at being firemen. They were wearing hard hats and wellies and were going off to work. Chloe showed no interest in wearing a hat or wellies and was very happy with the ‘content’ she has chosen. Connor, however, became interested in the ‘content’ of the boys’ play and, eventually, went off to join them.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand the play, we can clearly observe the importance of family play in helping young children to understand relationships and feelings. In this scenario, Chloe played the powerful mother, loving and feeding her baby. She was also setting boundaries, keeping him safe and secure and physically close to her.

She held him as she had been held. She was clearly ‘in charge’ and supporting him, in the role of baby. Her role may have helped her to feel strong even if she was feeling more vulnerable than usual.

### **Reflections**

I noticed that through taking on this role in play, Chloe could be very close to and hold and comfort Connor. This may also have provided comfort for her. There were plenty of opportunities to use her containing and enveloping schemas and, in this instance, she may have been deriving comfort from using them rather than working through some aspects that she did not understand. She wanted to feel competent and being the mother in the game provided a competent role for her to perform.

### **Other Changes in Chloe’s World**

#### **Context**

During the next few weeks, Chloe’s Great Granny was very ill and her Granny also became ill. Denise, her Family Worker, was off work because of her pregnancy.

## **Chloe and Connor Sweeping the Surface of Water in the Barrel**

*Chloe (3:04:00) and Connor were sweeping the surface of the water in the barrel in the Discovery Area. Suddenly Chloe said to me “My granny’s birthday now”. I said “Is it?” Chloe said “Again”. Then she said to Connor “Not yours”.*

### **Analysis**

I wonder whether sweeping with a broom brought Chloe’s Granny to mind or whether she was on her mind anyway. Using schema theory as a lens to understand, Chloe may have been beginning to understand that birthdays come around every year for everyone. Perhaps she could remember her Granny’s last birthday? So calendars could be thought about as circular rather than linear (rotating rather than a trajectory).

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand, this short sequence indicated that Chloe was thinking about her Granny and feeling possessive about her Granny’s birthday. Susan Isaacs (1933, p.222) described how two children in her study ‘Harold and Paul felt a keen sense of property in the nursery rhymes and songs they had heard at home’. Chloe’s was a similar kind of claim. Usually she was keen to share but, in this case, she needed to think about ‘her Granny’s birthday’ and could not share that with Connor.

### **Reflections**

When someone is on your mind because they are ill or needy in some way, it can preoccupy you and make it difficult to become involved in the usual way. I would not



judge Chloe to be completely preoccupied with her Granny, but she was thinking about her and was needing to exert her power in claiming her ‘Granny’s birthday’ more strongly than she usually did.

### **Cuddle with Angela**

Three days later, Chloe sought out Angela (Head of Nursery):

*Angela’s first day back after two weeks in America. Denise has been off sick. Chloe came for a cuddle with Angela while we were talking. Chloe talked about ‘fireworks being loud’ and waking her up at night. She also said she saw a car set on fire. She enjoyed sitting with Angela.*

Four days later, Chloe had a conversation with me:

*Chloe said “I’m not frightened of bogeymen”*

*I said “There’s no such thing”*

*Chloe replied “When you put the lights out...”*

Later that day:

*Chloe said “Snake – Lorna’s got a snake – bite you, eat you. Connor’s scared of snakes...”*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema lens indicates that when the world is covered or enveloped by darkness, then every sound is more frightening. The snake conversation revealed a fear of being 'eaten up' or 'engulfed' by another creature.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Chloe was talking about bedtime as a scary time, when the lights were out and her mum was not close to her. Bowlby (1998, pp.132-147) drew on several studies of young children, both in naturalistic and experimental situations, to deduce that certain universal situations provoke fear in children under five. He also noted that 'compound situations', for example, 'being alone, in darkness and hearing a sudden sound' would provoke fear in most people, not just young children (1998, p.147). Leaving aside the fear of separation, Bowlby (1998, p.141) found the universal fear provoking situations, in relation to young children, were 'noise...strange people...animals...and, darkness'.

In my discussions with Chloe's mother, she said that Chloe had started to be more fearful since she had "got her off the dummy". She reported that Chloe would say there was "a monster under the bed". Arlene would check and reassure her there was no monster and would also leave the hall light on.

We also discussed the fact that Chloe's Great Granny had been diagnosed with throat cancer. I asked whether Chloe knew how ill she was and Arlene felt it was not right to "tell a little child", though undoubtedly, Chloe was picking up on her mother's anxieties at this time.

## **Reflections**

This took me right back to my own early belief that, as a parent, I could protect my children from pain. I am aware that I still do not know the best way to face up to a situation like the impending death of a close relative. I imagine that Arlene is quite open with Chloe and her brother usually, but that this was a new situation for her. She had thought about what to say to Chloe and did not feel that it was right to burden (?) her with this knowledge.

Chloe had already experienced the loss of her dummy and of her stepfather. I know that Chloe could ask her mum questions and that she had a good understanding of the family situation, as Arlene had told me that when her stepdad was telling her off she would say to him “You’re not my real dad”. Chloe also asked whether her mum liked him once he had left. She told Chloe that she did not like him any more.

## **More Changes After Christmas**

### **Context**

There was a gap of three months in the observations over Christmas and while I went away on holiday.

*On my first day back to lunch Denise told me that Chloe’s Great Granny had died and that her Granny had been diagnosed with stomach cancer.*

Three days later I filmed Chloe outside in the Beach Area with Louise (adult). Louise said it had been quite difficult to engage Chloe that day as she seemed to be feeling low.

### **1. Chloe and Louise Filling Containers with Sand**

*Chloe (3:07:22) filled several containers (bowls, buckets and bun tins) with sand. She encouraged Louise to join in. Chloe wanted to have the same as Louise had. For example, when Chloe noticed that the crate Louise was sitting on was a slightly different green to hers, she swapped hers for an identical one and said "It's the same green".*

*Louise noticed that Chloe's crate was the right way up whereas Louise's was upside down, so Chloe was sitting inside the crate. Louise asked "Are you all right sitting like that? I've turned my crate round the other way, like that". Chloe stood up and said "You do it to mine". Louise turned it over and Chloe sat down. Louise asked "Does that feel more comfortable?" Chloe said "Yes"...*

*Louise suggested "You've nearly finished?" and asked "What are you making?" Chloe responded "I know, we can cook it in there" (pointing to some hollow blocks). Louise said "Do we need to find a little oven?" Chloe moved around finding more buckets and pans. Louise asked "Are we doing lots of baking then?" Chloe "Yes"...*

## Analysis

Using a schema lens to understand, Chloe seemed very focussed on finding containers and filling them with sand. Towards the end of this sequence, she was thinking about putting her containers of sand inside another container. Like Brenda in Athey's study (1990, p.150) Chloe was using her containing schema at a symbolic representational level when she talked about "cooking it in there".

Another schematic interest seemed to be classification in the sense of wanting to have the same as Louise and do the same as Louise. Athey (1990, p.41) stated that '*classification* has its origins in early actions applied to a wide range of objects and, later, to events'. Chloe needed to be able to recognise similarities and differences in order to apply a classification to objects and actions.

Using an attachment theory lens, Chloe seemed to be using her play to engage with Louise. Both were trying to engender shared interest. Chloe's motive seemed to be to have Louise to herself and to stay in close proximity to Louise. Louise was keen for Chloe to become deeply involved and for her well-being to become higher. We saw in earlier observations that Chloe seemed to gain strength from her solidarity with others. Louise 'tuned in' to Chloe's need to be the same by noticing that Chloe's crate was a different way up and pointing that out to her.

Thinking about the language each of them used, they began by talking about “you” and “me” or “mine”. Chloe introduced “we” and then this was taken up by Louise, who retorted “Do we need...?” Was this the point at which the game became a joint venture?

## **Reflections**

For me, as a practitioner, one of the big questions is whether to comment on a child’s lower well-being to them. Does that help or merely confirm what they are feeling? Is it helpful to have your feelings confirmed by another person? Marrone with Diamond (1998, p.149) drew on Bowlby’s research and concluded that

Disconfirmation of the child’s perception and knowledge often leads to permanent cognitive disturbance and other problems, such as chronic distrust of other people, inhibition of their curiosity, distrust of their own senses and a tendency to find everything unreal.

This raises the question of whether we disconfirm a child’s feelings by ignoring or avoiding how they are feeling? Elfer (1996, p.34) when working with nursery nurses, who had used distraction as a strategy to deal with children’s distress at separation, found that the nursery nurses realised that ‘there were benefits in picking them up and allowing them to have ‘a good cry’’. The staff found that after a good cry, some children ‘settled down to play’.

Thinking about Chloe’s actions of containing sand, Winnicott (1991, p.46) described a child’s play of containing small toys in pockets and other containers, as ‘of a self-healing kind’. It is much easier to recognise children’s projections onto small world figures or soft

toys than it is to make links between their actions with materials such as sand and water. Again, Chloe wanted to 'have' lots, both for herself and her chosen play partner, Louise.

Another way of acknowledging Chloe's feelings was to accept and be open to what she chose to say and do. It was certainly no coincidence that she chose to be near and to interact with Louise that day. We had noticed, in an earlier study, that children were drawn to adults, who could meet their particular emotional or cognitive needs (Arnold, 2004) and that some adults were focussed more strongly on the emotional domain and some were focussed more strongly on the cognitive domain.

## **2. Chloe Misunderstands Louise**

This second part of the same sequence of play highlights how important shared meanings are.

*...Chloe struggled to carry all of the spare buckets. She gave some to Louise, saying "That one's yours...this is yours...You got loads of...haven't you?" She picked up two buckets, one inside the other, and handed them to Louise, saying "Could you do that for me?" Louise managed to separate them. Chloe said "You did that one, didn't you?...you didn't do the ones yesterday, did you not?"...*

*Chloe smoothed the sand on top of the bun tin and said "Look...making cakes".*

*Louise "Baking cakes".*

*Chloe "Do you love cakes with bacon on them?"*

*Louise laughed and said "Do you like bacon and eggs?"*

*Chloe “Yes”.*

*Louise “That isn’t what I meant Chloe”.*

*Louise explained that “baking a cake” is different to the food called “bacon”.*

*Louise “When you make cakes, you call it baking cakes in the oven, nothing to do with the food bacon”...*

*Previously, Courtney had been shaking sand off her coat, near to Louise and Chloe. Courtney came along wearing goggles. Louise said that it was a good idea for keeping sand out of her eyes. Chloe looked puzzled...*

*Louise looked at some photos another worker showed her and said “I know, my little babe...I know, my little baby”. Chloe leaned her head on Louise’s arm and put her arm around Louise’s arm. Louise explained “That was a picture of my little boy” and Chloe sat up...*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Chloe was strongly focussing on transporting buckets and on containing sand in a bun tin as a symbolic representation of making cakes.

Her misunderstanding of the word “baking” was linked to her experience of having had “bacon” and not having heard anyone refer to “making cakes” as “baking”.

Her puzzled look when Louise commented on Courtney wearing goggles to protect her eyes from the sand was interesting. We have seen that Chloe had been exploring



transporting and containing materials, including sand, but not scattering. If her explorations had included scattering different materials, including sand, then it might have been easier for her to make that mental connection between scattered sand, going inside the eye and goggles as a container to protect. Even more relevant, Chloe was not scattering sand, but very focussed on keeping the sand contained.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Chloe was still focussed on including Louise in her game by making sure she had loads of buckets to fill. She also reflected on Louise being able to separate two buckets on this occasion but not on the previous day.

The mismatches in meaning might have caused Chloe to feel shame or embarrassment at not being on the same wavelength, so to speak, as Louise. In the final paragraph, when Louise said “my little baby”, Chloe actually leaned forward to see what the two adults were looking at. Maybe snuggling in to Louise’s arm was more of an expression of her wish to be someone’s “little baby” again, than a sign that she thought Louise was referring to her.

## **Reflections**

Even though Chloe was feeling a bit lower than usual on this occasion, once she became engaged, she displayed ‘energy’ and ‘vitality’ in her play (Laevers, 1997). The idea that she might feel shame or embarrassment was, on reflection, a projection of my feelings in similar situations, as a child and adult.

### 3. Chloe Talks About Home

#### Context

In this final part of this video sequence, Chloe was really much more relaxed and engaged than at the beginning, when she focussed on filling and both she and Louise were trying to engage each other in a shared venture.

*...Chloe began to tell Louise about a cartoon she liked and to re enact it. She laughed, put her head on Louise's arm and waved at me. She talked about her mum being sick. Louise "She wasn't well?" Chloe said "She took tablets...put them in the bin now" (gesticulating taking them out of her mouth and throwing them away)...*

*Louise asked "Do you know what you make real cakes with?" Louise started to explain and then said "We're just pretending though". Chloe agreed. Chloe went into nursery to the workshop and got some sticks and brought them outside. Louise said "Wow! Brilliant – where are you going to keep them then?" Chloe placed them on the sand between the 2 crates they were using as seats...*

*...Chloe said "I'll be sick" then repeated "I'll be sick". Louise asked "Why will you be sick?" Chloe added "I've been sick in my bed". "Had to put it into the washing machine to get it all off". She said "I didn't like pear". Then she began to talk about fruit she liked and to ask about whether Louise liked the same fruit...*

*Chloe then moved on to favourite colours. Chloe “Is that your favourite colour?”*

*Louise “Pink, yes I like pink”.*

*Chloe “But we don’t like blue, do we not?”*

*Louise “My favourite colour’s blue though”. She pointed at Chloe’s T shirt which had blue in it.*

*Chloe “Do you like green?”*

*Louise “I like green”...*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory to understand Chloe’s actions and conversation, in this last sequence, Chloe acted out her mum taking tablets from her mouth and throwing them into the bin (using a trajectory to put something into a container).

Chloe transported sticks from the workshop to outside but did not really demonstrate what was in her mind. Perhaps she was thinking about representing candles on a cake or decorating a cake in some way with sticks? What she did was to place the sticks in the space between her and Louise, so that they were contained and safe from other children.

When she talked about being sick, she seemed to focus on the sick covering or enveloping her bedclothes and the fact that they had to go into the washing machine to get it off. Her interest in fruit and colours seemed to move back to that earlier concern with being ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. She was looking for some consensus about things she and Louise liked.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Chloe was now relaxed enough to talk to Louise about things that concerned her, like her mum being sick. Louise was giving Chloe her undivided attention and listening carefully to what she was saying. The relationship was becoming more than their current endeavour on that day. Chloe still wanted to check out whether they liked the same things and Louise was willing to pick up on Chloe's vibes, for example, when she abandoned explaining what goes into real cakes in favour of staying with Chloe's activity of 'pretend cakes'.

### **Reflections**

Louise really committed herself to Chloe during this sequence and this was of enormous benefit to Chloe. The quality of their interactions improved and Louise seemed to 'tune in to' what Chloe's concerns were after a while.

There could be some tensions though, for a worker who was responsible for a group of children. Louise sustained her involvement with Chloe for more than 30 minutes.

### **How Chloe Copes with her Great Granny's Death**

*Caught Arlene outside Jimmy's for a brief chat. I asked how Chloe was taking her Great Gran's death. Arlene says she accepts it and says "She's in heaven – she's a star". Arlene's mum has had an op, which she thinks is successful, but she's still in hospital.*

Three days later:

*Denise says that Chloe has been feeling low because of recent events. Chloe said to Denise “I know what – I’ll go and get a blanket and you can wrap it around me and hold me like a dolly”. Denise was amazed that Chloe knew that she wanted to be held and contained, that it would help and that she was able to articulate her need.*

Denise had frequent and unpredictable absences at this time, because of her pregnancy.

*Louise reported that Chloe (3:08:18) had become close to her recently. She also said that Katey (Deputy Head) had bought some new animals over the holiday. First day back, Louise had noticed Chloe on a floor cushion in the gallery near the staff room. She asked “Are you all right Chloe?” Chloe said “Yes, I’m waiting for my friend Megan”. Louise noticed she had placed all of the new toys behind the floor cushion and was sitting on it to keep them there. She did not seem to play with them when Megan arrived.*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens to understand Chloe’s actions, her wish to be held and contained by Denise was not surprising. I wondered whether this was something she had experienced her mother doing when she was in distress.

Similarly, when Chloe was waiting for Megan, she contained all of the new toys behind a floor cushion, presumably to keep them safe for when Megan arrived. The surprise was that they did not play with them. However, we have seen Chloe's skill in 'trading' so maybe she recognised the value of new toys and wanted to use them to engage Megan if necessary.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Chloe was able to express her need to be near and to be held by Denise. In Denise's absence, she had become close to Louise, another gentle person, who was open to hearing children's emotional needs. Chloe also wanted to play with Megan, a close friend, and, therefore, prepared for her arrival by 'stashing' the new toys. It was not the toys that were important to her, but her relationship with her friend.

### **Reflections**

Chloe had a great ability to simply say what she wanted. In my experience, this ability is rare, even in adults. She seemed to intuitively know that her strength came from being with other people, being 'we' rather than 'I'. When she was most vulnerable, she drew on the skills of sensitive adults to support her.

### **Concluding Summary**

When Chloe lost her dummy, she responded by becoming more fearful at bedtime. Those fears were real and she needed reassurance. Chloe was extremely skilled at expressing how she was feeling and in seeking out adults who she knew would comfort her.

During this period of change and loss, Chloe explored relationships by watching others, for example, Connie and her dad. She also explored relationships by engaging in pretend play, through which she could explore feelings and ‘the attitudes and perspectives of others’ (Fein, 1984, p.126).

Chloe continued to explore containing and enveloping throughout this period and, if there was a change, it was that ‘having’ sometimes became more important than ‘doing’. During the sequence in the sand with Louise, Chloe surrounded herself with containers, which she filled. They could be seen as a protective layer, between her and the rest of the world. Filling so many containers also kept her very busy and engaged with Louise. Again she gained some satisfaction from having and filling lots, which may come back to being worth lots.

### **Final Reflections**

Although Chloe and her family had a fairly difficult year, in terms of loss and change, Chloe still seemed to come through as emotionally competent. She had resources to draw on, which could be described as ‘emotional capital’(Reay, 2002). Her relationship with her mother was very open. Her mother described her as quite mischievous and a boundary pusher, but with a keen sense of humour. Her mother frequently used humour to cope with adversity and this may be the key. Music (2004, p.31) reported that ‘parents who could be playfully in touch with, but not feel overly threatened by, their infants’ emotions’ helped their infants to recover quickly. When we saw Chloe on video falling over and getting up and carrying on with her game, her mother commented that at home, she would say “Rub it and laugh because you’re going to end up with something much worse when you are

older”. Her mother could offer comfort but also distance in her comments. This is different to pure distraction when adults could be denying or not acknowledging a child’s pain.



### 3.4 Steffi's Story

#### **Introduction**

Steffi was 3 years 10 months and 15 days when I first observed her for this study. She was already in her second year at nursery and was attending four mornings and staying for lunch.

Steffi has two older sisters, who were aged 5 and 18 at the beginning of the study. They lived with their mum and dad locally. Steffi was the only child I studied whose family I did not already know quite well at the start of the study.

Steffi had what Katey (Deputy Head of Centre) described as a sort of 'other world' quality about her. She was quite serious and intense and was often observed acting out stories.

At the beginning of this study, she had developed a close relationship with Dana, who shared her interests (Arnold, 1990). Towards the end of that year, she was playing with other children, mostly boys. Steffi expressed her wish to be a boy and nearly always took on the male role in her stories and role play games.

The observations and discussions listed in Appendix 3 were used to inform our thinking about Steffi and her expressions and representations of emotion and attachment. Within this case study I have drawn on the observations to illustrate two themes that emerged from the data on Steffi:

1. An interest in enveloping and containing to represent sleep, jail and death
2. An interest in exploring and representing power, fears and friction

Each theme is put into context, relevant observations presented with analysis and reflections after each observation.

1. An interest in enveloping and containing to represent sleep, jail and death

### **Context**

I noticed Steffi's 'other world' quality right away. She was often deeply involved in play with her friend, Dana. On some days she seemed faintly amused and quite pleased that I was following her. On other days, she avoided me by moving away and, on one occasion, she got inside a small play tent and closed the zip. Whenever I felt that she was uncomfortable with my interest in her play, I stopped filming and moved away.

Steffi was fairly articulate when I began studying her so she was often revealing her inner world through her actions **and** language. She was close to her Family Worker, Margaret, and also to Katey (Deputy Head of Centre) with whom she sat at lunchtime.

Steffi spent long periods of time exploring with animal figures. She also enjoyed using the train set and puppets. In this first observation, Steffi and Dana developed a storyline while playing at the child height sinks in the bathroom.

## **Steffi and Dana Playing at the Sink**

*Steffi and Dana each stood in front of an individual sink.*

*Each had stuffed the plug with a paper towel and was making water go on and off repeatedly by pushing the lever back and forth.*

*Steffi “ Lets get all the animals”. Both children went into the nursery and came back with an animal each.*

*Steffi used her “billie goat” in different ways, placed it in the water, on the tap, on the side of sink.*

*Steffi “ I got a bigger one than yours”*

*Steffi “ It’s a shower – mine’s a shower – mine’s going really full up”.*

*Dana to adult “ I’m making a little shower”*

*Steffi “Mine’s bigger”*

*She jumped the billie goat up and down, in and out of water.*

*She held the billie goat under the water.*

*Steffi “ Mine’s bigger – mine’s bigger”*

*Dana “ Really big I can’t get in there”*

*Steffi “ Let’s go and get the other animals” (Slightly American Accent)*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens to understand the play, the two girls had co-ordinated several schemas here. Each had stuffed the plughole with a paper towel to create a container for water and to stop the water from going through the boundary of the pipe under the sink. They were using a horizontal trajectory movement to make the water go on and off. Steffi seemed interested in positioning her billie goat in different places suggesting an interest in space. Athey (1990, p.110) suggested that children explore topological space by positioning objects and gradually make the shift to understanding projective space when ‘objects or figures are represented from different points of view’. Steffi introduced comparative size, as a concept, showing an interest in seriation. While holding her billie goat under the water or enveloping it with water, she noticed the effect, magnification.

Using attachment theory, as a lens to understand the play, the friends were being connected, to some extent, through mirroring each other’s actions, but also expressing their wish to have the “bigger one”. This may have been about wishing to feel more powerful. If Steffi’s sink was “really full up” then she had managed to do this more quickly than Dana. So she was ‘doing’ most and ‘having’ most, which may have resulted in her feeling more powerful. Dana offered some rationalisation when she said “I’m making a little shower” inferring that bigger was not necessarily better. Dana did acknowledge the effect of holding the billie goat under water and that there appeared to be no room for her or her animal figure.

## **Reflections**

This was the first time I observed Steffi and I was mindful of not intruding into the play of an established dyad. They seemed to be providing a ‘secure base’ for each other at nursery

from which they could explore issues. Berlin and Cassidy (1999, p.692) pointed out that ‘secure infant-mother attachments go hand in hand with more harmonious sibling interactions and friendship quality and quantity’. So Steffi’s ability to have a close friend to confide in may be linked with her early relationship with her mother. According to Berlin and Cassidy (op cit) surprisingly, there is currently no evidence of infant-father attachments impacting in the same way.

### **Steffi and Dana Develop Their Storyline at the Sink**

*Steffi came back carrying a billie goat.*

*Steffi “Hey baby” Dana “What is it daddy?”*

*Steffi “Look at this big crocodile” Dana “Ask him what his name is”*

*Steffi “Pretend daddy died and she cried for him” Dana “Poor daddy” makes crying noise.*

*Dana “ Pretend daddy died in the water”.*

*Steffi “ Died in the big water”*

*Dana “ Daddy are you ok?” Steffi put the billie goat on top of the paper towel container. She put the billie goat against the mirror.*

*Dana “ Pretend they’re dying in the big water”*

*Steffi put the dinosaur onto the towel container then into the water. Dana “ Baddie died in water” then “he’s behind you” (Steffi lifted the dinosaur out of the water).*

*Steffi “ They said what’s that on the grape tree?”*

*Steffi made the billie- goat jump up and down on the tap.*

*Dana “What’s all that racket daddy?”*

*Steffi “ He’s going alive” Steffi made the dinosaur jump over to Dana’s sink, picked up the paper towel from the plughole and dropped it on the side of the sink. Then she picked up the towel from the plughole in her sink and dropped it on the side of the sink. The water disappeared.*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens, Steffi seemed to link enveloping with water with dying (or maybe drowning, although neither child mentioned drowning). Steffi made the point that it was in “the big water”.

Again Steffi placed the billie goat in different positions and linked movement with “going alive”. Transformation is an aspect of schematic exploration that seems to be prevalent at this age (Arnold, 1997, p.281). Young children are naturally interested in their effect on objects and on people. Steffi may have been hypothesising about how people die and how and whether they “go alive” again. She was using movement to represent symbolically that in their game, the daddy was “going alive”. Athey (1990, p.201) pointed out that sometimes ‘transformations’ are ‘anticipated in the mind with some difficulty’. How can any of us understand the transformation from alive to dead without firsthand experiences? Corsaro (2003, p.103) described how some children he observed played out ‘death-rebirth themes’ in their fantasy play. He pointed out that the children ‘are frequently exposed to information about illness, dying and death by the media’ but that they also use information from ‘fairy tales and Disney movies’ in their play.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Steffi may have been exploring ideas about separation and loss in relation to her daddy or to people in general. Corsaro (2003, p.107) said that the 'production of death-rebirth themes in spontaneous fantasy enables them to share concerns or fears they have about death'. Her mum worked in an old people's home at this time, so death was a common topic of conversation at home.

### **Reflections**

Again, I felt that I was possibly intruding into the world of an established dyad. Steffi and Dana seemed barely aware of my presence. Maybe my discomfort was connected to my own fears about separation, loss and death.

Later on that morning they developed the idea of dinosaurs as "baddies".

### **Steffi and Dana Develop Their Ideas about Dinosaurs as Baddies**

*Steffi and Dana were at either side of the water tray.*

*Dana "Mama, mama – something near me"*

*Steffi "Hey watch this – I think it's a dragon"*

*(She held up a Tyrannosaurus Rex)*

*Steffi "I want this one – I will get this one" ( deep voice)*

*Dana "Darling" Steffi "What?"*

*Dana "Are you crying like a nitty?"*

*Steffi had a dinosaur in each hand and leant across and put them into the water.*

*“I’m never coming near them.”*

*Steffi “Pretend he doesn’t wake up”*

*“Where did you come from?” She was holding an elephant and a billie goat.*

*“I kill dinosaurs”*

*“I kill these ones”*

*“Watch me”.*

*Steffi “Let’s get more water. Come on let’s get more water”. She took a jug to bathroom and then came back to the water tray.*

*“Come on let’s run he’s coming after us”.*

*She took a dinosaur to the garage in the middle area.*

*(Steffi and Dana were each holding a dinosaur and a billie goat)*

*Steffi “Tend that was a baddie as well - his brother” (pointing at the dinosaur she was holding)*

*“It smells like.....poo”*

*“Lets fight em again” She held the dinosaur as though it was eating the billie-goat.*

*“Let’s fight him” There were three billie goats on the floor.*

*Steffi and Dana were each holding a dinosaur who pounced on the billie-goats as though eating them( Steffi licked her lips).*



## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens, again Steffi immersed or enveloped the dinosaurs in water and then suggested “Pretend he doesn’t wake up”. She seemed to be representing a sleeping dinosaur.

The dinosaurs were classified or grouped as “baddies” who even “smelt like poo”. Steffi and Dana used the dinosaur figures to kill the smaller and weaker animals, possibly classified as goodies. Killing them involved eating them. So the weaker or smaller animal would be eaten by and contained inside the stronger or bigger animals.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Steffi represented the temporary absence created by sleeping. When she said “Pretend he doesn’t wake up”, she may have meant at that moment or permanently. She may still have been exploring her concerns about death.

Also a bad smell was projected onto the dinosaurs. So they were “baddies” but they were also strong and could ‘engulf’ weaker creatures. Some of Steffi’s play seemed to involve ‘as if I were stronger’ behaviour.

## **Reflections**

Even before I began to study Steffi, her Family Worker, Margaret, had commented on Steffi often using wild animal figures eg lions and tigers. We were curious about whether having a wild ferocious animal in her hand, made her feel stronger and more powerful. It

certainly seemed to help her to express ideas about being strong but also to express her fear that strong animals (or people) eat up weaker ones.

Later on that morning the two girls played with animal figures in the Beach Area.

### **Steffi and Dana Bury Animal Figures in the Sand**

*Steffi (in a deep voice) “When I go to bed I get sick- really sick”. She buried the T rex by putting handfuls of sand on top and patting and squeezing the sand around the T rex .*

*Steffi “This panda bear’s going in his bed – he’s a good boy”. (She buried the panda)*

*Steffi took the dinosaur out and said in a deep voice*

*“It’s time to go to sleep”*

*“I wanted to talk to you”*

*“Now go to sleep”*

*“And don’t wake me up for no minutes-I’ll tell you” She buried the T rex.*

*Steffi “Rainbow – it’s time to get up”*

*She lifted the T rex out of the sand and crawled, walking two figures/animals to the edge of the sand.*

*She walked them back saying “We’re nearly there”.*

*She stopped in the middle of the beach area and buried the panda.*

*Steffi “ I be sick and I tired”*

*Dana "I be sick".*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Steffi was using the sand to envelop the figures. She was using these actions as a symbolic representation of "going to bed", "getting sick" and "going to sleep". She also reversed her actions by uncovering the figures to represent waking up.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Steffi was experimenting with making the figures disappear by enveloping them with sand. Her conversation with T Rex about not "waking me up for no minutes" sounded very like a parent/child conversation at bedtime. We saw in the Pilot Study that Evan carried out a ritual in order to extend the time his parents spent settling him down for the night. Hattie was afraid to separate from her parents and go upstairs if her brother was not with her. So this fear of separation and wish to stay near sometimes manifests itself at bedtime.

## **Reflections**

I have become aware of the close connections, conceptually, between sleep, sickness and death. Any idea of death as a permanent separation brings with it the fear of not waking up from sleep and how to cope with it if it happens to a loved one.

In the next observation, both girls revisited the idea of dying, this time using a large tray of lentils to cover their animals.

## **Steffi and Dana Explore Ideas While Playing with Animal Figures and Lentils**

*Steffi (3:11:22) and Dana were at opposite sides of a large water tray containing lentils. Steffi was holding a polar bear figure and Dana was holding a panda figure. .*

*Steffi “That’s the mummy bear and that’s the Daddy bear”.*

*Dana “And it was raining”.*

*Steffi “And they goed under there so they didn’t get wet”. (Putting animals under shade)*

*Dana “Pretend that was Daddy rain and Mummy rain”.*

*Steffi “Pretend that was their food and the food was ready – yummy”.*

*They picked up lentils and let them drop on to the tray (like rain). Dana “One for you, one for me” (metal bowls). Both put lentils into the two bowls. Steffi leant over and tipped the lentils from Dana’s bowl into hers. Dana leant over and pulled Steffi’s bowl nearer to her. Steffi put lentils into the empty bowl*

*Dana “Pretend it was raining”.*

*Steffi “I’m going to eat my dinner” (she moved the bear to the bowl of lentils, making loud eating noises and dispersing the lentils with the bear).*

*Dana “Pretend Dad died...pretend Dad died and Mummy didn’t die”.*

*Steffi “Pretend Mummy was having a bath”. (Covering her bear with lentils).*

*Steffi “Pretend Dad was sleeping in his nice warm bed”. “Pretend he was sleeping and Mummy got out of her bed and she waked Dad up”. Dana “Why?” Steffi “Cos she did. She’s beautiful - you have to do it”. Dana “Wake up! Wake up!” Steffi (in*

*a deep voice) “What do you want to say?” Dana (Can’t hear response)... “Why is it night time?”*

*Steffi “Pretend Daddy’s gone. Pretend Daddy’s gone to jail” (as she placed her bear inside a hollow block which was on the floor near her).*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens, Steffi immediately established that she was holding and acting on behalf of the “daddy figure” and that Dana was representing the “mummy figure”. There was little difference in size in this instance, although “daddy” and “mummy” may have inferred some sort of seriation in relation to size, power or strength. Dana’s use of the lentils to create “daddy rain” and “mummy rain” also inferred strength or size.

Steffi was able to articulate the function of a plank, which was across the top of the tray. The figures staying dry were functionally dependent on being covered or enveloped by the plank (like a sort of roof).

Dana introduced the idea of death. As Steffi scooped lentils with her hand and poured them onto the “daddy figure”, she talked about “mummy having a bath”. As Dana was also pouring lentils onto the “mummy figure”, it seems reasonable to deduce that the two girls were symbolically representing having a bath by covering or enveloping their figures with lentils.

Steffi went on to talk about “Dad sleeping in his nice, warm bed”, again represented by enveloping the figure with lentils. Dana talked about “night time” when we know darkness envelops the light.

Finally Steffi removed her figure from the tray and placed it inside a hollow block so that it was hidden from sight (or enveloped). This time she talked about pretending that “Daddy has gone to jail”, symbolically represented by being inside the block.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand Steffi’s actions, she immediately established that she was exploring how it felt to be the “Daddy”. The plank may have represented protection from the “rain” and also a ‘secure base’ from which to explore.

Steffi played with ideas about separation. When “mummy was taking a bath”, this may have involved a brief separation. Similarly, sleep, even together in the same bed, involves separation for a while. Finally Steffi experimented with a longer separation by representing “daddy gone to jail”. Although Dana talked about “daddy dying”, Steffi did not verbalise this on this occasion.

Both Jackie (Steffi’s Mother) and Margaret (her Family Worker) commented on the fact that Steffi wanted to be a boy. Jackie said that Steffi would take on the male role, as she saw males as bigger and stronger. She also liked animals and vampires and tended to choose the scarier roles to play.

However, she was also wanting to keep the whole family together. Steffi told her mum “I’m going to marry all of you – you, daddy, Holly, Brogan and Mousie – but Mousie’s

dead". Jackie thought that by "marrying" Steffi meant 'connected' or 'together'. Steffi may have been thinking about how she could be reunited with her pet mouse, who was dead.

## **Reflections**

I am convinced that most of these explorations were connected to understanding separation and loss, how it feels and when it is reversible. Steffi listened to and created lots of stories at this time. She enjoyed videos and would often re-enact what she had heard or seen in her play.

Winnicott's idea of 'play' involved the creative space between parent and child, 'the transitional space' (1991, p.68). Steffi seemed to be using this space and time to explore her fears about what might happen and how it would feel. Her main concern seemed to be with the 'daddy' figure. She could be one removed from him by using a figure to represent him, rather than by playing the role of the daddy herself.

Later on that morning, she spoke about "losing a load of fireworks". It was the day after Bonfire Night and Steffi spoke about having "left them in a taxi". This small loss may have been experienced by the family the night before and, again, put Steffi in touch with the feeling of loss.

About a month after this observation, I met Jackie. We had arranged a meeting that she could not attend. She apologised for missing our meeting and told me, "*Steffi is completely preoccupied with death*". There had been no recent deaths in the family to spark this interest, although Jackie often mentioned one of the old people she worked with, dying eg

*“Midge died today”*. Recently Steffi was talking about death and then said *“I want to see my dad”*. Jackie said *“He’ll be home soon”*. Steffi said *“I want to see my dad **now**”*.

### **Concluding Summary**

These observations of Steffi demonstrate how she was able to represent and ‘play with’ ideas about temporary and permanent absence. As adults, we can imagine and think about what would happen if we lost a dear friend or a pet or someone very close. We know about dying in the physiological sense. We are still taken by surprise when someone close to us dies. We are not always prepared to deal with our feelings about death.

Steffi seemed to be simultaneously trying to understand what happens in a physical sense when separation and loss occurs and to explore how it feels. She seemed to be holding onto ideas about disappearance through enveloping animal figures in water, sand and lentils so that they disappeared and reappeared. She could imagine the associated feelings by animating the figures and projecting feelings onto the different characters.

Hare et al (1986, p.45) pointed out that ‘children under 5 did not see death as irreversible’. This question of reversibility is explored extensively by children of this age (Athey, 1990, p.41). I would suggest, from this evidence, that Steffi and her friend were working on reversibility and that her experience of losing Mousie contributed to her understanding of the permanence of death. She also seemed to be concerned about losing her dad or perhaps not being able to see him when she wanted to.



## 2. An interest in exploring and representing power, fears and friction

### **Context**

From a very young age, children begin recognising and classifying objects in their world according to similarities and differences. Much research evidence has built on the reactions of even very young babies to seeing something new (Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1999). Most young children explore ideas about seriation and these ideas become increasingly refined at around the age of 3-4. 'Seriation' was defined by Piaget and Inhelder (1973, p.101) as 'arranging elements according to increasing or decreasing size'. The form, as well as size, includes other features.

An early differentiation, typically voiced by young children, is 'mummy, daddy and baby'. These differences in size and other features have been exemplified in traditional stories such as 'Goldilocks and The Three Bears'. What usually follows is the co-ordination of different features and some anomalies eg the Gentle Giant.

When these observations were made, Steffi was very interested in using pretend play to explore the comparative strength and power of this triad of mummy, daddy and baby. As other children have, she also used the terms 'mummy, daddy and baby' to symbolise strength, size or power (Arnold, 1999, p.68).

Within the environment of the nursery, there were some fairly boisterous children. Steffi did not like loud noises and could be intimidated by noisy children. She could, however, seek the help of adults when necessary. So Steffi's exploration of power, fears and friction

may have related both to her personal experiences in the nursery at that time as well as to her inner fears about power and strength.

In this first observation Steffi and Dana were playing with the trains and track. The shed and tunnels were important to them.

### **Steffi and Dana Use the Trains, Track and Shed**

*Steffi (3:11:7) and Dana went to the middle area and knelt down at the trainset. Steffi looked around and seemed to be singing to herself. She placed three carriages in a line on the track, then said "Gonna get this big one". She moved away and picked up a large, blue engine. She placed it at the front of the engines and knocked other carriages in front off the track with her other hand. She ran her train along the track and into the shed. Steffi said "Daddy was sleeping". Steffi "Momma, momma". She looked around, got another train and repeated "Momma, momma" and "I don't know where my daddy is". Dana "Dadda...daddy". Steffi ran her train back along the track. Dana "Daddy, don't go away". Steffi "Mummy watch...daddy back to his bed" as she ran the train back into the shed. (Steffi was talking quietly throughout. I only caught bits of what she said). Dana ran a red engine into the shed and said "Me too".*

*Each of them took an engine from the shed. Steffi "Let's go this way" as she ran an engine down a fork in the track towards two tunnels saying "Chooo.." Reversed and repeated this. Her engine ran through the two tunnels and she retrieved it from the end of the second tunnel. Steffi then ran her engine into the shed.*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand the play, Steffi was co-ordinating several schemas; connecting carriages to make a line ; attributing the role of “daddy” to the biggest engine (seriation); running her train in a trajectory until it was contained inside the shed; and, running her train so that it went through the boundary of the two tunnels.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand the play, Steffi was once again exploring the idea of “daddy sleeping”, a brief separation, symbolised by putting the engine into the shed. She also introduced with her voice, a baby or child searching for her daddy. Dana took on the role of the mummy imploring the daddy not to go away. Steffi also used the two tunnels and may have been representing ‘going through’ ‘darkness’ or ‘a dark time’(?) before coming out of the other side and returning to the safety of the shed.

## **Reflections**

This was filmed in the middle of the busy nursery without any special sound equipment. So, although I could not hear everything that was said, I believe I picked up the essence of the play. The intonation used by the two children conveyed some of the feelings they were portraying.

## **A Boy Takes the Mummy Train**

*A voice in the background said “That was my train”. A boy came over and stood over them before taking the red engine. Steffi turned around to me and said “He nicked that off Dana”. Me “He seems to think it was his before it was yours”. Steffi “That’s the mummy one”. Me “You could go and ask him for it back...or you could have another one to be the mummy...what do you think?” Steffi “We need a big, long one”. Me “You need a big, long one to be the mummy? No other big, long ones...look in there see if there’s any?...Maybe it could be a little mummy this time?” Steffi “Got this one” (holding one up). Me “that’s a nice one isn’t it? So that ones going to be the mummy is it?” Steffi threw a stripey engine towards Dana and said “That’s the mummy”. Both children continued running their engines along the track, through the two tunnels.*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens, the main emphasis here was on the comparative size of a “mummy” train, which needed to be “big and long” (seriation). Having sorted the trains into sizes, Steffi was not easily satisfied that another train could represent the “mummy”. Finally she compromised by selecting “a stripey engine” to represent the mummy. Both children continued to run their trains in a trajectory, through the boundary of the two tunnels.

Using attachment theory as a lens, Steffi looked slightly threatened by the boy taking the “mummy” train away. The mummy going away was not part of their storyline. Steffi knew

I was nearby and immediately turned to me. She may have expected me to intervene to protect the play. I offered ideas about what to do. Neither Steffi nor Dana was prepared to confront the boy so the only alternative was to select another train to be the mummy. Steffi and Dana's goal seemed to be to continue and maintain the game.

### **Reflections**

I became aware, when viewing this clip repeatedly, that I talked a lot during this sequence. I think I was genuinely responding to Steffi. I hoped that Steffi and Dana would feel strong enough to protest and ask for the train back. Steffi's tone suggested that this was a moral issue and that the boy had behaved unfairly. She may have seen the boy as an aggressor whom she was not willing or able to confront.

I could have intervened on their behalf but would I have taken away the power of the two girls to deal with this in their own way? I tried to offer some options and waited to see what happened.

In the next sequence, Steffi and Dana were filmed in the homecorner, being dogs. Other children wielded their power while Steffi and Dana were very passive. The whole sequence lasted 32 minutes and the following dialogue is about seven minutes.

### **Steffi and Dana Play at Being Dogs in the Homecorner**

*Steffi (3:11:29) turned towards the window then crawled back towards stairs.*

*Courtenay "Right, doggies, you've got to stay here".*

*Courtenay clapped her fist to her hand a couple of times and said “Right! Steffi! Dana!”*

*“You’ve got to go sleep at your Granny’s house”. “Right, turn the light off...turn the light off”.*

*Then Courtenay said (indicating the doll in her arms) “Policeman – that baby’s been the bad to this baby – can you take her away please!” Cara “I’m not the policeman”. Steffi crawled to the dressing table and was kneeling with her head towards the table away from Courtenay and Cara. Cara pointed with her index finger and said “No” tapping Steffi on the back. Courtenay “It’s OK”. Cara “No she’s not allowed it”. Then Courtenay said to Steffi “Steffi! Steffi! Come here”. Steffi crawled over and knelt facing Courtenay, who said very slowly and emphatically “ You don’t take other people’s money”. Cara “Did she shout at you?” Steffi (very quietly)“No”. Courtenay “She didn’t shout at you it’s your mummy”.*

*Courtenay and Cara continued talking while Steffi and Dana watched and listened.*

*Cara said “Darling – No!” Courtenay added “Steffi and Dana what did I tell you?”*

*Courtenay went over to the dressing table and began reading a story to Steffi and Dana.*

*Courtenay told them that it was bedtime. Steffi watched while Courtenay made a bed.*

*Courtenay asked “Do you want to sleep with me?” Steffi nodded.*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Steffi was crawling in a trajectory towards the dressing table. The whole scenario involved seriation in relation to the power being exercised by the different characters. Steffi and Dana were the dogs, physically and in terms of power, low down in the pecking order, dominated by the mum and sister. Courtenay exercised her power in relation to turning the light off.

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, the whole scenario was about relationships and how more powerful people relate to less powerful creatures. Steffi and Dana were both willing to be told what to do, to listen to their 'owners/parents' without protest. For the whole 32 minutes, the two girls 'woofed' a couple of times, demonstrating their acquiescence to Courtenay's authority.

Steffi's mother was quite upset when she first watched this video sequence. She knew that Steffi did not like noise, and the play was fairly boisterous, with Steffi playing a very passive role. Steffi covered her ears during some of this play. However, on reflection, Jackie realised that Steffi had deliberately put herself in this position. We wondered whether Steffi (and Dana) wanted to be involved in other children's play and whether this was a way of finding out about other children's concerns. Through this play, Steffi was learning about relationships and about families other than her own. She may have deliberately taken on the role of a dog so that she could observe closely what happened and what was said. Also being a dog was no threat to the authority of the 'mum' and 'sister'.

## Reflections

I regretted not watching this scenario alongside Steffi's parents. Previously I had had a bad experience when I showed a father his daughter being a dog on video in the nursery. In that instance, seeing his child dominated by another child in the nursery upset him.

I am now questioning why I was not more sensitive to how Steffi's parents might feel about a similar video sequence. I wonder whether I was unconsciously avoiding the pain of seeing this sequence alongside them. It turned out to be the noisy environment that upset Jackie rather than the domination by other children. The learning for me is to be more careful about video I send home. We could have watched it and discussed and made sense of it together. I could have drawn on my experiences of other children being dogs in nursery.

## Steffi and Dana Become Four and Face Roaring Boys

*Steffi (4:00:14) jumped into the sand, turned round and said to me "It's my birthday today", I said "Is it your birthday? I'm pleased to hear that. It's a special day." Dana said "I'm four now". Steffi added "I'm that many" (holding up four fingers)*

*Steffi jumped up and down and said, "We're two fours". Dana repeated, "We're two fours". They ran around the decking to the first corner and back. There was a roar in the background. They squealed. They ran indoors. A boy followed and touched Steffi. She came towards me saying, "I don't want nobody to scare me ... or Dana". The boy*



went past and touched her back. She said “Ouch”, I said “Say, don’t do that! – you can say that can’t you?” Steffi “I want you to say it”. Me “I’ll help you”.

They ran around the decking. Two boys ran towards them roaring. Steffi smiled and said to me “**You** have to tell him”. The two girls ran indoors. Steffi went to her communication box. The boys followed and roared at Dana. Steffi took something out of her box and held it.

Steffi “Let’s go outside. But this hasn’t got any batteries in it” (holding up her toy). The two boys roared again. Steffi moved away from them. She went back to her box, took another toy out and gave it to Dana. Me “This looks interesting – are these from home Steffi?” She did not reply.

The two girls went back out to beach area. Annette asked “What have you got there girls?” Steffi said “Power Rangers”. Annette “How does it work?” Steffi “I’ve got loads – lion and white tiger”. Annette asked how they worked. Steffi showed Annette how the different parts moved. Annette asked whether it had batteries inside and Steffi shook her head. Steffi “I’m going in the sand”.

Both girls smoothed an area of sand. Steffi placed her lion on it. The two boys came near roaring. Steffi got up and said, “I’m going inside”. The boys came closer. Annette intervened saying “I’m not sure the girls like that scary noise – you need to ask them...Do you girls?” Steffi shook her head.

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, becoming four was significant to both Steffi and Dana. Steffi had had her birthday two weeks before, but wanted me to know about it on this first time I saw her after her birthday. Becoming four meant becoming bigger and stronger to the two girls and involved seriation. They were both quite excited and slightly scared by the shouting and roaring of the boys. Running inside involved moving in a trajectory. Steffi went to fetch her toy from a container, her communication box. The toys were fierce animals, more aggressive than the girls could be (seriation). Power Rangers suggested power over the boys. Smoothing an area of sand involved a trajectory and enveloping movement. Going inside meant going back to a safe area, where the boys would be discouraged from roaring.

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, the safety of the two girls was under threat when the boys were roaring at them, although there was an element of excitement and challenge. Their play seemed to represent moving away from a 'secure base', in the form of the adults and the indoor area and facing the danger of the unknown. One way of dealing with the threat, was to fetch a figure from home that represented strength and power. This was stored safely in Steffi's communication box, a 'container' for her special things.

Steffi was very clear that she wanted me to be their advocate. Later on, they enlisted Annette's help to tell the boys the noise was scary. Steffi may have been inferring that

“having loads” and the “lion and white tiger” made her more able to defend herself. She seemed to see the lion and white tiger as carriers of power and strength.

Corsaro (2003, p.97) tells us that children’s ‘ability to create danger is almost limitless’. He describes this kind of play as ‘a buildup and release of tension’, similar to story plots. A universal theme in children’s play is ‘danger-rescue’ and a great deal of energy goes into ‘averting danger together’ (p.99). So, the play was developing a kind of ‘form’ or sequence that could be experienced over and over again.

## **Reflections**

Steffi was not too intimidated by the boys on this occasion. She knew that adult help was available but she was enjoying the danger of the threat, to some extent. The intrusion by the boys became the focus. Unlike the observation with the trains, when a boy took one of the trains and Steffi and Dana’s main goal became the return or replacement of the train, in this observation, the play became averting danger. Steffi had become four and felt bigger and stronger. Her toys from home seemed to be symbols of strength and power. She mentioned not having batteries for her Power Ranger. Presumably with batteries inside, her toy would be even more powerful?

This observation highlights for me the importance of allowing children to bring objects from home that help them feel stronger in the setting. Traditionally, many settings had blanket rules about not bringing toys from home, but for some children, those objects are emotionally significant. There can however be tensions for workers if precious toys get lost or broken.

I also reflected on my language during this interaction. Steffi introduced her feelings into the conversation, “I don’t want nobody to scare me...” When a boy touched her back, this was obviously intrusive for her. Rather than checking out how she felt about that, I immediately offered her a strategy for what to say to him. I wonder whether I was minimising her feelings at that point?

### **Talking about a Ghost Train**

*Steffi (4:04:19) ran a two engine train around the track. As the train reached the tunnel Steffi said “Going in a big tunnel”. Margaret said dramatically, “Great big long tunnel. Great big long, dark, scary tunnel” Then, “Oh safely out the other side”. Steffi led the train to the shed. Mgt said, S, “Look”, Mgt “Going into another tunnel. Going into the dark engine shed”.*

*Steffi “There’s another one of them”. Mgt agreed. Steffi ran the train the other way. Steffi “Going in the big tunnel”. Margaret “Dark, slimy, spooky tunnel, full of spiders webs and spiders, spooky things”. Steffi picked up another piece of train. Steffi “There’s horses” Me “There’s who?” Steffi “Margaret they’re carrying the horses”.*

*Mgt told Steffi about when she was in Egypt and saw lorries carrying horses and camels. Steffi continued to run two pieces around the track. Steffi “It’s going through the tunnel”. Margaret “What’s in the tunnel?” Steffi smiled and said “Spiders”.*

*Mgt “Spiders...and bats? What about imaginary things like monsters?” Steffi “There are monsters as well. When I was on the ghost train....” Margaret “Was*

*there dressed up people in there?” Steffi “There was people dressed up as monsters” Margaret “Did you know that or were you scared?” Steffi “My dad was with me”. Margaret “Did he tell you it was just people dressed up?” Steffi “Yes” (She smiled throughout the conversation). Margaret “It’s scary till you know what things are” .*

## **Analysis**

Using schema theory as a lens to understand, Steffi was running her train through the boundary of the tunnel and into the shed (containment). She also talked about transporting horses. Margaret introduced the idea of thinking about what was inside the tunnel.

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand, Margaret’s relationship with and knowledge of Steffi’s fears enabled her to help Steffi explore some of her fears in a safe environment. Steffi’s reaction was to refer to being with her dad, who could protect her and understand her fears as well as reassure her that the monsters were “people dressed up”.

This raises the question of young children’s understanding of what’s real and what’s pretend or false. Within my experience young children, who are generally insecure, seem to be very unsure around people who are dressed up. Steffi indicated that being with her dad meant that she did not feel too threatened by dressed up monsters.

## Reflections

I admired the skill with which Margaret offered Steffi the challenge of thinking about what might be inside the tunnel. She obviously knew Steffi well and understood her possible fears.

Only someone who was really ‘attuned’ to Steffi could have offered her the challenge of thinking about what was inside the dark tunnel (Stern, 2003). Also there was some resolution to Steffi’s fears in the sense that Margaret pursued the subject until Steffi offered the information about her dad’s reassurance that it was only “people dressed up”. So Steffi could feel the fear and also experience some abatement of that fear.

**Re-enacting a Story with Margaret** (Playing a game in which the daddy giraffe has been injured and has “black stuff” on him, ie blood)

*Steffi (4:04:19) was holding a large and a medium giraffe.*

*Steffi placed the large giraffe on the table – it fell over. Mgt said “Earthquake”.*

*Steffi picked up the medium giraffe, put it on the table and shrieked “Earthquake coming, earthquake coming”. Margaret moved the cloth to simulate the earth shaking. Margaret “Earth shake”.*

*Steffi “Mummy needs to take care of her little one”. Margaret took the medium and little giraffes. “Stay close darling – we can’t help daddy now”. “I’ll look after you – you stay close to me”.*

*Steffi stood the daddy up. Steffi “Daddy’s ....” Margaret “Are daddies powerful? Are daddies strong?” Steffi stood the large giraffe near a tree. “Daddy can reach.....”.*

*Margaret “Daddy, daddy I can’t reach”. Steffi put the little giraffe on the daddy’s neck near the top of the tree.*

*Stephen banged an animal on the table. Steffi covered one ear and said, “That hurt my ears”. Margaret pointed to a picture of a giraffe on the wall and said, “Do you remember what it did? Do you remember what noise it made?” Steffi moved her mouth. Margaret made a sound.*

*Steffi was holding the baby giraffe. Steffi placed a fox near the table. Margaret “Do you think a fox could eat a giraffe?” Steffi picked up a dinosaur. Margaret, “Oh something dangerous is coming to the Great Valley”. Steffi placed the dinosaur on the table and opened and closed her mouth as she manipulated the dinosaur’s mouth. Margaret whispered to Stephen “Something scary’s coming into the Great Valley”.*

*Daniel approached (in a skeleton outfit). Steffi said, “Skeleton!” Stephen held up two fierce animals and banged them on the table. Steffi continued to manipulate the dinosaur’s mouth and to make a roaring sound. Margaret encouraged Stephen to run away and hide and went with him. Margaret “Steffisaurus” Steffi moved towards Stephen and Margaret holding the dinosaur figure. Stephen roared.*

## Analysis

Using a schema theory lens to understand the play, Steffi was using the three giraffes to represent daddy, mummy and baby and also their relative sizes and strength (seriation). Margaret moved the cloth in a side-to-side trajectory to represent the earth shaking. Steffi used seriation again, to think about the mummy caring for her little one in the sense that the mother was bigger and stronger and could protect the baby. She also made reference to the daddy's height. He was the tallest and could reach higher than the mummy or baby (seriation). Stephen introduced a very loud sound (louder in terms of seriation than Steffi could tolerate). Margaret reminded Steffi of the noise made by a real giraffe they had seen together at the zoo. Steffi introduced a fox and then a dinosaur. The dinosaur represented something fierce and dangerous, a more powerful creature than the giraffe or fox (seriation). Although Stephen once again made a loud noise, Steffi continued to play the part of the dangerous dinosaur, more powerful than Stephen (seriation). Margaret's suggestion of "Steffisaurus" offered Steffi the chance to see herself as more powerful than the noisy and boisterous boys in nursery.

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, the simulated earthquake offered a context in which weaker creatures were under threat. Steffi talked about the "mummy taking care of her little one" which Bowlby saw as the purpose of attachment. Margaret introduced the idea of "staying close" and not being able to "help daddy now" suggesting that the mummy and baby could be saved but not the daddy. When Steffi suggested that the "daddy could reach", Margaret immediately offered a way that the daddy could help the baby to reach the top of the tree.



When Stephen's banging seemed to threaten Steffi, Margaret did not reassure her but reminded her of the noise made by real giraffes at the zoo. It was as if to say, you have been brave and have experienced the noise of a real giraffe. This is only a child banging a toy on the table.

One of Steffi's favourite stories was 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', so Margaret's reference to the Great Valley tuned into that interest. Somehow Margaret helped Steffi to become the powerful one, the chaser, by referring to her figure as 'Steffisaurus'.

### **Reflections**

Steffi seemed to be playing with ideas about power, strength and survival, particularly in relation to the daddy. He was bigger and stronger than the mummy and baby, although in this storyline, he was injured and may not have survived. There was a sort of paradox here for Steffi. He was the strongest and yet he was injured and this made him weak. Margaret very skilfully enabled Steffi to represent a strong role and to be an aggressor in the real life of the nursery.

A few weeks later Steffi played the part of a fierce creature at nursery.

### **Being a White Lion**

*Just after lunch, Katey (adult) crouched down to see what was inside the green barrel. Steffi (4:05:06) lay very still with her head down. Katey crept around*

*behind the barrel. Steffi slowly emerged on all fours. Katey “He’s coming out of his barrel again. Oh! He looks a bit sleepy”. Steffi came out and stood up chatted to Katey about what game they would play, jumped up and down and then went over the grass and onto a log. Katey “The daddy white lion? OK. You’re a very rare lion”. Katey approached and said “Goodness, that’s an endangered species – he’s very rare” Then “I’ll go around and have a look from the other side...It’s not often you see a white lion in the world”. Katey came back around the back. Steffi stayed quite still.*

*Katey “Oh he’s moving a little bit in his cage. I bet lots of people will come to the zoo just to see that white lion. He’s lying on his log”. After a few seconds, Steffi raised her head and opened her mouth and roared before clambering onto the next log.*

*Katey “He’s waking up. I wonder if I’ll be lucky enough to hear him roar?He has big jaws”. Steffi roared.*

*Katey “Maybe it feels like he’s in the jungle”.*

*Katey “He doesn’t have much room to jump and run in his cage...He looks very sad”.*

*Steffi stayed still again.*

*Katey “I think the sunshine’s making him very sleepy – he doesn’t want to move very fast”.*

*Steffi slowly moved forward, clambering onto another log, then the ground and onto another log.*

*Katey “He looks lonely there all by himself. Maybe he needs a mummy lion to keep him company or another daddy lion...Must be a bit lonely all by himself”.*

*Steffi stopped and then moved.*

*Katey “Lovely mane”.*

*Katey “I’ll have to say bye bye to the lion now. Bye bye, see you another day”.*

*Steffi got down from the log and ran over to another part of the garden (where Margaret was), knelt down with her hands on the ground in front of her, crawled slowly forward and roared loudly.*

## **Analysis**

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Steffi was contained inside the barrel, waiting to be discovered. She slowly emerged from the inside to the outside of the boundary of the barrel. She was briefly out of role while she and Katey discussed what they would play. Steffi jumped up and down in a vertical trajectory possibly conveying energy and excitement at the prospect of the game.

Steffi placed herself on top of a log in her role as the white lion and moved slowly from log to log in a horizontal trajectory, roaring occasionally (projecting her voice in a trajectory).

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand, Katey was one of the adults Steffi was close to and trusted. Katey could have been one in Steffi’s hierarchy of attachment figures (Howes, 1999, p.671). The few minutes after lunch had become a time when Steffi, and sometimes other children, would role play in the garden. Their games often involved chasing. On this occasion Steffi had Katey to herself. Katey offered a running commentary about the white lion and how he might be feeling. Trevarthen (2003) asserts that ‘emotion

is the quality of movement' and what Katey was reflecting back to Steffi was what Steffi's slow, deliberate movements seemed to be communicating to her. This commentary somehow seemed to keep them connected to each other. Steffi played the white lion in an authentic way. She had obviously studied a lion's movements, how its mouth opened to reveal the teeth and how it roared. Steffi even had curly hair that hung around her head like a mane.

Katey suggested that the lion might be lonely and need a companion, another link with attachment. She did not go as far as to suggest that the lion might be lonely and sad because he had lost his companion. Here was another paradox, a creature that was majestic and powerful and yet lonely and sad.

## **Reflections**

It was around the time of this observation that Jackie told Margaret that she and Mark (Steffi's father) were going to separate. When we knew this, Steffi's explorations seemed to make a lot more sense. It was as though Steffi had been preparing for the separation for several months. She had been exploring and dealing with her fears through her play. She had also gradually taken on a stronger and more powerful role in her play.

Margaret had commented that, for a time, Steffi had wanted to play with her, rather than make the effort to play with other children. Margaret was aware of the delicate balance between supporting Steffi and helping her to move away by making new friendships. When Steffi played with either Margaret or Katey, they were 'tuned in' to her world and prepared to listen to and go along with her storyline. Other children may not have been as

adaptable. In Dana, she had found someone with a similar concern to hers, but, over time, they grew apart.

### **Concluding Summary**

Within this set of observations, Steffi seemed to be exploring ideas about strength and weakness, power and powerlessness and strategies for asserting herself within the nursery environment. With hindsight, we can deduce that some of Steffi's concerns were about her dad and how he would survive without the rest of the family. He helped her feel secure, for example, on the ghost train, so if he was her secure base, then who would be there for him?

Perhaps she also experimented with breaking away from Dana and making new friendships? Margaret described "*the parallel process of Steffi's parents separating and negotiating new roles and a new relationship with each other and Steffi parting from Dana and negotiating a new friendship with Cary*" (Journal, 060704). Margaret also commented on the fact that "*Steffi now seems much more comfortable as a girl*" (op cit). I wonder whether Steffi's deep emotional need to understand her dad's feelings had temporarily prompted her to want to experience the world as a boy? Her mum, Jackie, had explained that Steffi saw boys as stronger and more powerful. Did she want to know how that felt?

Margaret certainly helped Steffi to become more assertive and to experience being in a powerful position at nursery. Feeling powerful at nursery in confrontations with boisterous boys may also have helped her feel stronger, in her own right, at home.

## **Final Reflections**

Observations, such as these, with such clear insight into Steffi's interpersonal world, show how valuable long periods of 'free flow play' can be to young children (Bruce, 2004, p.149). At times it was important to Steffi to 'have' the most fierce or strongest animal figure, but as she explored, it became apparent that what she really wanted was to 'be' the strongest or most powerful animal. She really seemed to want to understand about separation and loss, survival and power.

When her parents first separated she was angry with her dad. Her anger abated over time and now she is content with being taken out by both parents together and seeing them both every day.

### 3.5 Susan's Story

#### **Introduction**

Susan was 2 years 11 months and 18 days when I first observed her for this study. She had recently started nursery and was attending four mornings. Susan lived with her mum and brother, Daniel, aged 9. A family friend, Joe, lodged at the house at that time. Susan saw her maternal grandmother ("bestest friend"), Aunt ("special friend") and Uncle ("little friend") every day. Her father, Mark, had left before Susan was born and, although he was referred to, she did not remember him. At nursery, Susan was very reserved and rarely revealed or expressed her feelings at this time.

I had known her mother, Sian, since she was a teenager, attending Youth Club in our building. I was also involved with the family during the two years Daniel attended the nursery. Sian had attended one of the study groups I co-led and we had produced a portfolio about Daniel's special interests.

At first Susan was not well settled at nursery. She was a little unsure and often needed to be near an adult. Her Family Worker, chosen by Sian, was Denise, because she was "about my age and also knows about our family".

The observations and discussions listed in Appendix 4 were used to inform our thinking about Susan and her expressions and representations of emotions and attachment.

Trevarthen (2003) says that 'emotions are the quality of movement'. Susan moved slowly. She spoke so quietly that it was difficult for others to hear her. She rarely allowed herself to express her feelings at nursery. It seemed that most of what I was wanting to discover, was hidden or unexpressed.

Within the case study, I have focussed on three sets of observations:

- Tracking Susan for the First Time
- Changes
- Susan Showing Ambivalent Feelings

One main theme emerged from the data on Susan:

- An interest in enveloping, containing and going through a boundary and how those actions might relate to Susan's understanding of relationships with others

## **Context**

Although I did not know Susan prior to the study, she was aware of my connection to her family. She showed a level of trust in me and in other adults at nursery that must have been rooted in her family's long term relationship with people in the nursery and centre. Although Susan came to nursery reluctantly at first, she showed signs of trusting adults at nursery, for example, if she got her top wet she would ask a Family Worker to help her get changed. She usually looked pleased to see me. She would give a little smile and seemed happy for me to observe her.



Although Susan was not like ‘a fish in water’(Laevers, 1997), when I first observed her, she was able to explore the nursery environment a little and to have moments of deep ‘involvement’ (Laevers, 1997). The first three observations were made on the morning I tracked Susan for the first time.

### **Tracking Susan for the First Time**

#### **Susan Arriving at Nursery**

*Susan (2:11:18) was brought into nursery by Joe. She held onto his leg. He bent down and talked quietly to her. Annette picked Susan up so that Joe could leave, and carried her to the snack area and then put her down...Susan walked around holding Annette's hand, while Annette prepared to set up a mirror and face painting...Susan picked up a brush and put it into the water and then into the face paint and back into the water. She watched Annette painting other children's faces. Susan put red paint on a brush and then painted her own lips...*

#### **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, Susan held onto Joe's leg in an attempt to stay connected. He spoke quietly to her, so quietly that what he said was unheard by the workers. Annette became involved because she was nearest and because Denise had been off and Susan had settled with Annette more than once. So, although Denise was at nursery that day, Joe settled Susan with Annette, who was in the area nearest to the entrance. Sian

told me that Susan was attracted to Annette “because she wears make-up and nail varnish”. Neither Sian nor any of her friends wore make-up so this was a novelty for Susan.

Annette carried Susan at first, thereby ‘holding’ and ‘containing’ her feelings about being separated (Bion, 1962). It seemed significant that once Annette took Susan from Joe, Susan held onto her hand and went with her, wherever she went, suggesting that her goal was to stay near Annette, who she had felt safe with and had protected her at nursery in the absence of Denise (Cassidy, 1999, p.7).

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Susan tried to stay connected to Joe by holding his leg. Susan also showed an interest in covering or enveloping the brush with water and face paint, possibly seeing the colour of the water transform when she put the brush back into the water. She chose to envelop her own mouth with red paint, thereby trying out having red lips like Annette.

## **Reflections**

Joe often brought Susan to nursery. I know from Sian that she and Susan found it painful to separate from each other. I guess that Sian felt that she could protect Susan and herself from some of the pain of that separation by asking Joe to take her. However, I know from my experiences with my own son, that the hidden message might be that the separation is too painful for parent or child to bear, that the pain is too great to be ‘contained’. I also know from our discussions, that Sian has had a series of losses, some of which, were unresolved at this time. So, while she herself was still experiencing the pain of separation

and loss, that pain would be magnified by enduring the pain of separation from Susan each day.

Sian described Susan “sobbing and not wanting to go to nursery” each day. On a Wednesday, there was no nursery, so each day Susan would “want to go to town with her mum and granny like on a Wednesday” (Discussion, 280604).

I also find myself reflecting on the fact that attachment has come to the fore (for me) in this case study. Maybe that is because of Susan and her particular needs. I am also consciously focussing on and trying to understand the relationship between attachment and schemas. The process of writing and reflecting on each case study has heightened my awareness of relational issues.

That same morning, Susan experimented with lentils and approached Denise.

### **Susan Containing Lentils and Approaching Denise**

*Susan walked to the water tray, still carrying the brush. Two other children were playing with lentils and containers. Susan began putting lentils into a container using her hand to scoop them. Callum offered her a container. She did not respond.*

*Susan noticed that some of the lentils had stuck to her hand. She dropped the brush she was carrying onto the floor. She spooned lentils into a six compartment bun tray and became very involved. Then she picked up handfuls of lentils. Again, she looked at her hand and tried to push the lentils off her hand. She put some lentils*

*into Callum's container, then experimented with putting lentils through a funnel.*

*She pushed some lentils through the funnel. Then she went to the snack area.*

*Susan to Denise "I'm going to be a witch".*

*Denise "You're going to be a witch tonight?"*

*Susan "I'm going to a party".*

*Denise "And what's Daniel going to be?"*

*Susan "Staying at his friend's house".*

## **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand Susan's actions, Susan had been in close proximity to Annette for over half an hour. It was as though something else caught her eye and enabled her to leave Annette and to explore in another area of the nursery. What may have been important, was that Annette was now settled and busily face painting with other children. Susan could see that Annette was still there, so Annette could provide a 'secure base' from which Susan could explore (Bowlby, 1998).

Susan immediately began containing lentils. She did not respond to Callum. By chance, some of them stuck to her hand. She pushed them off – could this have represented her own clinginess? Her action of pushing them off physically separated them from her. A few minutes later, she put some lentils into Callum's container, as though acknowledging his earlier offer of a container.

When Susan went to the snack area, Denise, her own Family Worker was there. This was when Susan chose to talk about what was going to be happening at home that evening.

Like her mum, she did not have to do a lot of explaining to Denise. Denise knew about her context and could have a meaningful conversation with her.

Using a schema theory lens to understand Susan's actions, Susan was very interested in containing the lentils. She became most involved when using a bun tray with six containers, so that she could put lentils into each of the containers and see them divided and contained in an ordered way.

She was also curious when some of the lentils covered or enveloped her hand. The lentils were very different to the face paint that she had used to envelop her mouth earlier. Susan experimented with picking up handfuls and looking at her hands enveloped in lentils, and then pushing them off. She was also fascinated with putting lentils into and through the boundary of a funnel, demonstrating what happened when the lentils were not contained.

Drawing on the psychoanalytic literature, Copley and Forryan (1987, p.169) described the

‘... ‘sieve-like’ aspect of non-containment, in which a communication seems to run through, rather than into, a mother or maybe a worker; ‘in one ear and out the other’, a kind of pseudo-listening that does not really take in and pay attention’.

Perhaps Susan's explorations with the lentils were a representation of her search for a container or containers for her feelings and also a representation of not being heard or understood in relation to those feelings?

Susan's reference to that evening may also have had a link, in the sense that she would be dressed up and transformed into a witch for the party. This involved being enveloped in

special clothes and possibly face paints. Daniel, too, would be hidden or enveloped as he would be staying at his friend's house.

## **Reflections**

Although Susan seemed not to become very involved, when I looked closely, everything she did or said, seemed to have significance. She seemed absentminded when she dropped the brush. It was as though she was not looking for engagement but, occasionally, something caught her attention. Susan seemed slightly out of reach to me, as though she was preoccupied somewhere else. I wondered whether this mirrored Sian's preoccupation with loss.

Throughout the rest of the morning, Susan continued to explore, using different materials.

## **Susan Exploring and Using Different Materials**

*Susan manipulated the marble run then walked away saying "Can't fix it". I put it back together and she played with it for a few minutes. She was interested in the 'going through' and talked about whether it had a hole or not...*

*Susan saw another child with dough. Denise took her to the Wet Area and showed her where the dough was. She picked up a garlic press and manipulated it. I showed her how to open it, put some dough inside, close it and see the dough coming through. She did this several times and said "It's coming through". Susan stored the strands of dough in a cup. Susan said "My mum's got a new dog". Susan*

*continued putting dough into the garlic press and pressing the handles to make it come through. Once, she used warm, freshly made dough and it came through quickly and easily. I tried to draw her attention to the difference in malleability but she did not seem interested...*

*Susan experimented with putting lentils through a funnel and sieve, then poured them from lid to pot to bowl and from large spoon to pot to bowl...*

## **Analysis**

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand this sequence of Susan's play, Denise noticed that Susan was curious about the dough. So Denise showed her where the dough was available. This was a 'subtle intervention' that enabled Susan to explore and follow her interest (Whalley and Arnold, 1997; Arnold, 2004). Denise was watching and recognising the subtle signals shown by Susan.

I offered to help twice when I noticed Susan giving up on something, because she did not know how it worked. On both occasions, she sustained her involvement after a little support. Vygotsky would say that I used Susan's 'zone of proximal development' to help her achieve something that day, which she would subsequently be able to achieve alone (Vygotsky, 1978, p.84). As far as the garlic press was concerned, she practised for almost 30 minutes with very little help. What was interesting was that she did not reject the strands coming through, but stored them in a cup. It was at this point that Susan spoke about her mum having a new dog. This showed that she was thinking about her mum and maybe what was helping her mum to come through a difficult time. Maybe Susan

intuitively recognised her new skill with and interest in the garlic press as similar to her mum's interest in her new dog.

In this instance Susan seemed to represent 'going through', a process that transformed the whole lump of dough into strands, followed by the provision of a receptacle that contained the strands and in which they could become whole or 'integrated' again.

Using a schema theory lens to understand Susan's play, Susan seemed to have a strong urge to both contain and to put different materials through a boundary. Her interest in whether the marble run had a hole or not, showed an understanding of the function of a hole in a container. Obviously, the size of the hole and the malleability of materials defined what went through. Her interest in the garlic press probably added to her knowledge of containing and going through. She was also able to see the material transformed into strands. She closely studied the dough coming through the press and then contained it in a cup.

Subsequently, Susan tried out putting lentils into a funnel, which was quite wide and then a sieve, with tiny holes. She possibly had experience of water travelling through both of these.

## **Reflections**

Susan's explorations and involvement with the garlic press indicated that she was interested in 'doing' and in using her new skill competently. Containing the strands of



dough in a cup showed that she was also motivated by 'having' or 'holding' things together.

Susan usually wore pink and often the latest fashion. At nursery, she liked wearing special high heels from the dressing up. However, she was not fanatical about any of these things. It seemed she could take them or leave them. Perhaps she was different at home where she felt more at ease.

### **Changes**

#### **Context**

During the year I studied Susan, several changes occurred both at home and at nursery. Around November 2003, when Susan was about to become three, her dad began to visit. She was unsure of him at first and did not want anything to do with him. Her mum's family had mixed feelings about him being back on the scene.

Around the same time, Denise had become pregnant and was often absent due to ill health caused by her pregnancy. Susan could not rely on Denise being at nursery each day.

In addition to these changes, her mum and family, who Susan saw each day, were still mourning the death of Da, her maternal grandfather, who had died when Susan was 18 months old. Although she could not remember him, his memory was a strong presence within the family.

I have selected the following sequences to try to illuminate how Susan was trying to understand these issues of presence and absence of important people in her family.

In the first observation, Susan was curious about the missing guinea pig.

### **Susan was Curious about the Guinea Pig**

*Susan (2:11:24) had spent several minutes using the drill and saw alongside Annette, when she pointed at a photo of a guinea pig. Annette said “It went on its holidays and never came back” and then added “The girl he went to see got fond of him and she doesn’t want to return him” ...*

*Five minutes later, Susan knelt on the floor looking at a photo book of workers. She smiled and pointed. “There’s Denise”. Katey came by and said “There’s Denise – she’s not here today is she?” ...*

*Susan spent the next 12 minutes dripping cornflour mix onto her hand and washing it off. She added lentils to the cornflour and washed it off her hand and the spoon repeatedly.*

### **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, Susan seemed curious firstly about the guinea pig, whose photo was displayed, but she had never seen. Annette struggled to explain what had happened to the guinea pig. The idea that people go on holiday and never come back, sounded a bit frightening. Annette seemed to realise this and qualified her statement by saying that the guinea pig was with someone who was very fond of him.

Susan possibly sought out photos of Denise in order to think about her worker, who was away that day. Usually, if a worker was going to be away on holiday or for training, they would talk to the children in their Family Group about their impending absence and allow each child to choose a substitute Family Worker. Unfortunately, Denise's absences were unpredictable so she could not prepare the children and no-one could say, with certainty, when she would be back, although they could talk about why she was away.

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Susan seemed concerned with covering and uncovering. She repeatedly enveloped her hand and the spoon with cornflour mix and then washed it off. She combined lentils and cornflour and used that mix to envelop her hand and the spoon before washing it off, thereby revealing her hand.

Susan was a lot younger than Steffi, who in 3.4 articulated her concerns when enveloping. However, given Susan's social context at that time, it seems reasonable to speculate that enveloping and washing off might be connected to understanding people being here and gone.

## **Reflections**

I had a sense that Susan was engaging in these sorts of explorations at the time. I now wonder about how often the children had opportunities to talk about absent people, especially when those absences were unpredictable. The photo book was a way of initiating those discussions. Denise, of all the nursery workers, was open to discussions about loss and death (Arnold, 2004). It may have been helpful for Susan to have photos of

her dad and Da at nursery. Denise could have helped Susan to understand while everything was still too painful for Sian to talk about.

When Susan's older brother, Daniel, was at nursery, he used to carry about a book of photos of his important adults from home. This was a tangible way of helping him to 'hold those people in mind' and to talk about them when they were not with him.

It was several months later when Susan (3:5:06) talked about her friend, who had gone to live in Scotland.

### **Susan Talked about Her Friend in Scotland**

*Susan was standing washing her hands at the sink in the bathroom, when she mentioned that her friend, Leah was on her video. She told me that Leah had gone to live in Scotland.*

*I asked "Will you see her again? Isn't Scotland a long way?"*

*Susan "Sharks are at Scotland. They'll eat you".*

*Me "Eat you up?"*

*Susan "Aunty Betty's up there".*

*Me "Who told you there's sharks in Scotland?"*

*Susan "My granny".*

*Me "Your granny told you?"*

*Susan "Yes" (quietly), then (again very quietly) "Joe told me No"... "Joe told me No" (looked amused).*

*Me "So your friend's not here today?"*

*Susan “She’s at her nursery”.*

*Me “In Scotland?”*

*Susan ( nodding) “She lives up there”.*

*Me “Maybe you could write her a letter or send her a photo or something?”*

*Me “Have you got her address?”*

*Susan gave a little nod as she dried her hands and left the bathroom.*

## **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, Susan was clearly attached to Leah, as a friend. She had memories of being with Leah, that were being kept alive by having Leah on video to remind her of their time together. She also mentioned other important people, Granny, Aunty Betty and Joe. Susan seemed able to understand, at this stage, that granny was teasing her about the sharks in Scotland. She had some evidence, in the sense that she knew some people there and as far as she knew, they had not been eaten by sharks. Anyway Joe had told her there were none. However, there was also a slight tingle of fear and excitement about the fact that there might be “sharks at Scotland”. Susan was quite animated during this sequence and spoke loudly enough for me to hear, which was often not the case.

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Susan knew that there were images of Leah contained in a video at her house. She could watch that often to remind herself of Leah. The video provided a symbol of Leah. The reference to going to live in Scotland could be conceptualised by Susan, because she had made many journeys in trajectories with stopping off points and a destination (Athey, 1990). Scotland was her friend’s destination.

Her reference to sharks indicated that inside Scotland, there might be lots of unknown creatures, things to be feared. I made reference to her friend's absence but Susan could conceptualise her friend at her nursery in Scotland, in a different place but possibly doing similar things to her. Susan had generalised her own knowledge about going to nursery to her friend's situation. She could also think about her absence as temporary. Despite the fear of being eaten up or contained by sharks, Susan seemed confident that Leah's absence was not permanent. I suggested sending something (in a trajectory) in order to stay connected, but Susan either was not interested or did not understand the process fully enough to take this up.

## **Reflections**

I feel so happy to have found some tangible evidence of an increase in Susan's understanding about presence and absence. Sian had obviously talked to Susan at some length about Leah going to live in Scotland. This was probably not possible for Sian when it came to the other losses experienced by her. The loss of Da was possibly too painful still to discuss at length and the losses of her dad and, to some extent, Denise, were too unpredictable to be able to talk about with any certainty.

There was also the issue of Sian sometimes being too preoccupied with her own grief to be able to respond to Susan's needs fully. Bowlby (1998, p.43) stated that 'a mother can be physically present but 'emotionally' absent' and 'may be unresponsive to her child's desire for mothering'.

Drawing on my personal experiences of loss, I can relate to the all consuming preoccupation with the loss of a close relative and the feeling of being lost in a kind of haze with little memory of what's going on in the day to day world and unresponsive to my children.

In the next two observations, Susan seemed to express some 'ambivalent' feelings when her mum was picking her up from nursery (Bowlby, 1998, p.41).

### **Susan Showing Some 'Ambivalent' Feelings**

#### **Reunion with Her Mother at the Water Tray**

*The children had all been having stories in small groups and, those that were staying for lunch were washing their hands in the bathroom. Susan (3:0:25) began playing at the large water tray with a metal bowl, spoons and jugs. There was green water in the tray. She filled the bowl until it overflowed and stirred it with a spoon. Susan looked up and saw Sian, gave a little smile and then looked up almost immediately again, looking a little anxious. She continued adding water to the bowl and stirring and said quietly "I'm making some cakes for you". Sian did not quite hear. Susan repeated "I'm making some cakes" (a bit louder). Susan continued adding water and stirring. She picked up a small ladle and added water with that. Sian said something quietly and repeated "You should take it out of the bowl". Susan used the small ladle to scoop some water from the bowl back into the tray, then emptied the bowl and put it down emphatically.*

## **Analysis**

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand, Susan seemed very much in her own world with the water, 'detached' from other people, although I was close by. She knew that someone would be picking her up but it was not always her mum. She seemed both pleased and a little anxious when her mum came. Maybe she was angry that her mum had left her at nursery and not allowed her to stay at home with her. She may have been a little anxious about whether her mum was all right. She was pleased to see her but continued with her play.

When Susan said "I'm making cakes for you", she seemed to be inviting her mum into her world. She had to repeat the invitation and said "I'm making some cakes". Her mum watched what she was doing and then offered some advice about making cakes. I believe Sian was trying to tune into what Susan was doing and telling her. Both were trying to 'share motives', described by Trevarthen as 'intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001). However, Susan's actions of emptying the bowl and 'putting it down emphatically' suggested to me that she felt a bit angry about her mum's suggestion. She also wanted to please her mum, so the result was a mixed message, which showed some slight 'ambivalence'. Bowlby (1998, p.293) asserted that 'Thus, love, anxiety, and anger, and sometimes hatred, come to be aroused by one and the same person. As a result painful conflicts are inevitable'. The fact that Susan felt some anger at her mum may have increased her anxiety about her mum. Bowlby (1998, p.294) pointed out that Klein's work with young children showed that 'some children who are attached to mother with unusual intensity are, paradoxically, possessed of strong unconscious hostility also directed towards her'. Such close relationships can become 'distorted and tangled' (Bowlby, 1998, p.296).



Using schema theory as a lens to understand Susan's actions, Susan was involved in one of her favourite activities, containing water in a bowl, rotating the water with a spoon and allowing it to overflow. When Sian arrived Susan indicated that she was symbolically representing 'making cakes' through co-ordinating her containing and rotation schemas. Sian's suggestion of taking the mixture out of the bowl, prompted Susan to pour the water back into the large water tray and to put the bowl down using a trajectory movement.

### **Reflections**

I had to watch this sequence many times before I noticed the subtlety of Susan's movement with the bowl. I also have kept asking myself whether there was an alternative interpretation for her actions. I barely noticed the anger and resignation at first and I do not know whether Sian was aware of those feelings. I was aware of both of them feeling a bit anxious. Those feelings were probably magnified by the public nature of the reunion and by being filmed.

In the next observation, several months later Susan was at group time with Kirsty, her new Family Worker, who was covering Denise's maternity leave.

## **Susan Enveloping Play People and Being Reunited with her Mum**

### **Context**

The following observation was made a few days after Sian's birthday and the second anniversary of Da's death. This was a difficult time for Sian. It could also have been a difficult time for Susan. We were aware that several children, with whom Susan was familiar, would be leaving nursery and we wanted to prepare Susan for those changes. Susan would be coming to nursery for four full days. We introduced her to the dining room where she would be having lunch at nursery and she chose where and with whom she would like to sit each day (Angela).

*While the children were waiting to begin their grouptime, Susan (3:7:26) was manipulating a piece of cloth and two play people, a male and female figure. She wrapped the play people in the cloth. When Kirsty was ready to begin the story, she asked Susan to give her the play people. Susan gave Kirsty the play people but continued to manipulate the cloth placing it on her knee, under her feet and generally keeping contact with it...*

*At the end of grouptime while the other children were washing their hands, Kirsty was putting Susan's shoes on her and talking about the fact that some children were going to leave nursery and go to big school soon. Susan and Robert would stay for another year and some new children would start...*

*Susan got up and walked over to the table where the two play people were lying. She wrapped them in the cloth once again and went towards the entrance. As she stepped across the threshold, she noticed her mum waiting for her on the arm of a chair. She quite deliberately tossed the cloth containing the play people a couple of inches into the air and allowed it to drop on the floor. She looked down at the play people and walked to her mum with her arms outstretched. She placed her hands on her mum's arms. Her mum 'danced' Susan's hands up and down, then asked "Where's your jacket?" Susan pointed back to where she had come from. Sian asked her "Do you remember Rosanna" indicating the person sitting on the chair.*

## **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, it seemed significant that Susan was playing with two figures that might represent her mum and dad or her mum and her Da. Sian was feeling low that week. Putting two adult dolls together facing might have represented Susan's wish to have her dad or Da back and for her mum to be happy in a relationship with one or other or even both of them. However, if her dad or Da were back, she might not feel as close to her mum. Susan may have been feeling ambivalent because she wanted her mum to be happy and have the people she wanted with her, but also she wanted to be special to her mum.

She approached her mum with open arms but Sian did not mirror the wide arm movement but kept her arms closed with her hands resting on her legs. Maybe Sian was anxious about how Susan had been that morning, unable to be open to Susan's feelings because she, herself, was feeling sad and overwhelmed? Susan rested her hands on her mum's arms and

then Sian held her hands and ‘danced’ them up and down. Sian also diverted Susan’s attention from their reunion by asking where her jacket was and then asking if Susan remembered Rosanna. I think Sian may have been scared to take on Susan’s feelings.

Kirsty was helping Susan to know about and to understand the imminent loss of some of her friends to school. She did this by explaining who would be leaving, who would be staying and that some new children would be joining their group at nursery. Kirsty was preparing Susan for other small losses and changes she would endure during the next couple of months. This conversation may have disturbed Susan too.

Using a schema theory lens to understand, Susan enveloped or contained the two play people in the cloth, possibly to keep them safe or to keep them together. Separating had caused her mum to feel sad, so her natural action might be to represent people together. Susan also sustained contact with the cloth, which, like her comfort cloths might provide comfort. It was soft and pliable and could be a ‘defence against anxiety’ (Winnicott, 1975, p.232).

Her ‘toss’ of the cloth containing the two play people was an upward trajectory resulting in the play people inside the cloth falling in a downward trajectory. She looked down at them but left them behind once her mum was there. Was she rejecting her phantasy that her mum and dad or Da could be reunited?

## Reflections

I have felt for some time that this sequence was significant. Susan looked so sad and moved so slowly that the whole scenario has always had a sad feel to it. I realise that I was scared of understanding what it might mean. I was keen that Susan was rejecting the play people because she did not need them, because her mum was there to comfort her. However, I was disregarding Sian's feelings, expecting her to be responsive when she was actually feeling very low herself and therefore unable to be open to accepting Susan's feelings or to publicly express her own feelings. What she may have been feeling was a whole mixture of; relief (that Susan was all right), emptiness (about the anniversary of Da's death) and embarrassment (about being filmed at this difficult time). Sian used distraction to divert everyone's attention away from the very pain she was enduring.

Perhaps through our preparation for Susan's friends leaving, we had an opportunity to help her identify her feelings, that is by articulating, "You might feel sad when they go but you will make some new friends..."? Susan needed some experiences of feeling sad about losses and being able to talk about and express her feelings. She needed to have her feelings 'contained' by another person and returned to her in a manageable form so that she could acknowledge those feelings and bear them (Bion, 1962).

During the following year, Susan continued to explore containment using various materials. She also learned to ride a two wheeler bike. She became close to Angela (Head of Nursery), who became something of an advocate for Susan. For Susan's fourth birthday, Susan and Sian went to Disneyland Paris for four days, just the two of them. Susan brought her photos of the trip into nursery. Susan was most excited about Cinderella, who was "in a

carriage, a pumpkin, a pumpkin, a pumpkin”, a container transformed by magic into a carriage for the Princess (Prodger, 2005).

### **Concluding Summary**

I have focussed on a small number of observations to tell one possible story about Susan and her explorations. There was further evidence in the data gathered, that Susan was very interested in containing various materials in different containers. She continued and extended these explorations for another year at nursery, before moving on to primary school.

Steffi (3.4) was described as having an ‘other world’ quality about her. Susan seemed to be in her ‘own world’. It was difficult to get close to her and to try to work out what she was thinking and feeling. In some ways, she seemed self-contained. Angela worked hard at getting close to Susan during her second year at nursery. Susan began to trust Angela and to be more relaxed around her, to tease and joke a little, as she might have done with members of the extended family at home.

The first set of observations presented in this section, were made shortly after Susan started nursery, before she had really built up trust in all of the adults and friendships with other children. She needed to be physically close to someone she trusted and handed over to that person on arrival. She explored enveloping, containing and going through a boundary at this time.

In the second set of observations, she began to express her concerns and fears about changes and losses. She seemed to be exploring the idea of 'here' and 'not here' and also the uncertainty of what happened to people when they were gone. In her conversation about Leah, her friend, who had gone to live in Scotland, Susan seemed to demonstrate some understanding of Leah carrying on with life there. Susan also expressed a fear that people were "eaten by sharks" in Scotland, a different kind of 'containment' that can engulf and destroy. She did not seem to seriously think that "sharks eat you" in Scotland, but was possibly expressing a fear of the unknown, of what happens to people when they go away.

In the third set of observations, Susan showed some ambivalent feelings towards her mother. Susan was very close to her mum. Part of the lifelong development of their relationship with each other involved understanding that her mum was both the person in the world she loved most and also someone who irritated her sometimes and rejected her ideas. Her mum could not always be there for her. There were other members of the family who Susan loved and was close to. At nursery, Angela became her advocate, the person who could hear her pain and help her understand and bear it. At home, she was very close to her mum, Daniel, Joe and also her granny, Aunt and Uncle as well as various friends of her mother.

Early on at nursery, Susan had made an unusual remark about her brother Daniel: "My brother has a sister that's called me". She did not ever refer to him as Daniel. She called him 'brother' and so did Sian. Was this a sign of where Susan was at that time, in her own world, looking in at the relationship her brother had with her?

### 3.6 A Story About Courtney

#### **Introduction**

Courtney was one of the children involved in the wider study of children's emotional well-being and resilience, being undertaken by a team of researchers at the Pen Green Research Base from 2000-2004. Although Courtney and her family were not the focus of this study, I wanted to report on three linked observations of Courtney, made around the time of her Great Uncle's death. I feel that these observations offer some insights into how Courtney was feeling and trying to understand what had happened.

Courtney's extended family are very well known to me as they have been regularly using the Centre since it opened 23 years ago. Courtney's mum, Kim, and her brother and sister all attended the nursery. Her grandmother, Suzanne, runs parent groups and has been a crèche worker. Her granddad, Jim, regularly uses the Family Room and has played Santa to hundreds of nursery children over the years. Courtney is the eldest of three children and the first to attend nursery in her immediate family.

Despite all of our knowledge of the family and their agreement to being part of the study, 'gathering video observations of Courtney was problematic' (Pen Green, 2004, p.111). Courtney would often avoid the camera or look uncomfortable. Twice the researcher asked Courtney if she wanted her to stop filming and she said "Yes". On other occasions, the researcher stopped filming because Courtney looked uncomfortable.



Through discussions with her Key Worker, Michelle, we established that Courtney was 'very interested in envelopment. She usually worked at a sensori-motor level, enjoying the feeling of the materials, and seeming to 'lose' herself in the experience'. Courtney also sought out 'one to one contact with adults' (Pen Green, 2004, p.111)'. In fact, twice she had sought me out to read a book called 'No Worries' to her.

Another significant feature was that during the 3 years of her life, the family had lived in various locations: at their gran and granddad's house, in temporary housing and now in their own flat. So there had been lots of changes and transitions for Courtney to cope with. This also meant that her parents were not able to become very involved in the study.

The first two observations were made on the same day:

### **Context of First Observation**

We had arranged to film Courtney for 30 minutes during the morning. She seemed fairly unfocussed at first, but did become 'involved' in a sort of 'losing' herself way with the cornflour. She stayed at the cornflour for ten minutes.

### **Manipulating Cornflour**

*Courtney (4:0:26) approached the table in the Messy Area where two other children and an adult were playing with a mixture of pink cornflour and water. Courtney dipped her finger in and then seemed to decide to explore further. She pushed her sleeves up and went to the side of the table where no-one else was*

*standing. Courtney got a large spoon from the tray of cornflour and tried to pick up some of the mixture. The adult said “I like to do this Courtney – scoop it up”. The adult held a spatula in the air with cornflour dripping from it. Courtney grasped some of the mix in her hand and watched it drip and stretch from her hand onto the tray below.*

*Adult “Does that feel good? What does it feel like?”*

*Courtney “Pink”.*

*Adult “It is pink”.*

*Courtney continued looking for the pouring property, sometimes squeezing the mix into a ball in her hand before opening her hand and letting it drip. She used a spoon again to scoop some of the mix up and poured it from spoon to hand and back to spoon. She pushed her hands into the mix on the tray and stared. She picked up a lump of mix and let it drip onto her wrist and showed the observer. She put her hand into a container being used by a little boy nearby. He said “Stop it, Courtney!” Then Courtney picked up a paintbrush and made some side to side movements with the brush, ‘sweeping’ the mix that had dripped onto the table.*

*The boy moved away and Courtney immediately moved around to that side of the table, picked up the small container he had been using and poured the mix from that into a larger bowl. Then she poured from the large bowl back into the small container and some of the mix overflowed. The adult was talking about making pudding. When the cornflour overflowed, the adult talked about “picking it up and scooping it back into the large tray”. Courtney continued to attend to the cornflour dripping. She held her small container under the edge of the table to catch the drips. The phone rang and Courtney’s ears pricked. The adult noticed and said*

*“Are you thinking about it?” (Meaning the phone I think). Courtney moved away, washed her hands and went to use the computer.*

## **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand, Courtney seemed not to connect very much with the other children or the adult at the cornflour table. She seemed detached and in her own world, as though she was preoccupied with something and just going through the motions of playing with the cornflour. The play seemed to have a therapeutic feel to it. Laevers’ definition of ‘involvement’ includes exploration and Courtney did not seem to be looking for anything new at this time (Laevers, 1997). However there was a sort of ‘involvement’ in the here and now feel of the cornflour. Perhaps involvement is not the right term to use. She was returning to the ‘known’ or ‘familiar’(Jackson, 2004, p.55) in order to wallow or remain ‘held together’ by doing something very familiar to her (ibid). The phone ringing cut in though and she perked up as though she thought it might be for her.

Using a schema theory lens to understand Courtney’s explorations, she gave most attention to the changing state of the cornflour, its transformation. She obviously understood the properties well, having played with cornflour and water many times before. She was interested in containing the mix in a spoon, in her hand and then in a container and watching the transformation when she released the mix by pouring. This was important because she was bringing about that ‘transformation’ through her actions (Athey, 1990, p.29). What was surprising was that she poured the mix from a large container into a smaller one and it overflowed, but perhaps this mirrored her own feelings on that day.

## **Reflections**

I remember discussing Courtney's lack of involvement with my colleague, who filmed the sequences of Courtney. Courtney was one of those children, who was interested in the camera and in what could be seen through the lens. It was rare for her to forget about the camera and, every now and then, she asked to see herself on the little screen that could be turned towards her.

The way Courtney responded to the phone suggested to me that she was preoccupied with thinking about home, marking or passing time until she could return. She showed no distress but was certainly not like a 'fish in water' on that occasion (Laevers, 1997). I have also reflected on the properties of the cornflour mix, that are fascinating even to an adult. It is a solid when squeezed together and becomes a liquid when released, so, unlike most materials, nothing is added or taken away in order to transform the mix from a solid to a liquid form.

## **Context of Second Observation**

Within the next few minutes, Courtney dabbled with the computer, then did some drawing on the flipchart (two very small enclosures in one corner of a big piece of paper), then did some cutting at the writing table. Eventually she began to listen to Denise, a worker, who was with some other children in the corridor, a quieter area than where Courtney was playing with the cornflour. Denise was a worker, who we had identified as being open to and often in tune with children's emotional needs (Arnold, 2004). It may not have been a

coincidence that Courtney approached Denise on a day when Courtney was feeling confused and unsure. Denise was kneeling on the floor and saying to Susan, “You could take that home and show your granny”.

### **Interacting with Denise**

*Courtney went and knelt down alongside Denise and began looking at photos of Susan that Denise was sticking into Susan’s special book (Celebration of Achievement file).*

*Denise asked “Have you got a special book, Courtney?”*

*Courtney “No”.*

*Denise “Michelle’s got one for you. Why don’t you ask Michelle if you can get yours out? You can look at your photos while I’m doing Susan’s”.*

*Courtney went off down the corridor to the communication boxes and got a photo book down from the top of the boxes entitled ‘Courtney, May 2003’. She took her book to the writing table near Denise, opened it up and held up a picture saying “Look, my granny’s sad...my granny’s sad”.*

*Denise “Is Granny a bit sad?”*

*Courtney “Cause her brother died”.*

*Denise “He did. Is Granny feeling a bit sad?”*

*Courtney “She’s having a day off”.*

*Denise “She’s having a day off, I know. Has Granny been crying?”*

*Susan “Caroline’s brother died”.*

*Denise “Yes, Caroline and Courtney’s Granny are sisters – their brother has died”.*

*Denise (As Courtney holds up a page of her photo book) "There's Granny there and Grandad".*

*Courtney "She's not sad...she's not sad there" (looking at the photo).*

*"There's me".*

*Denise "Oh yeah and your sister and Uncle Jamie".*

*Courtney "How do you know her?" (Her younger sister)*

*Denise "Cause I see her sometimes. She brings you in, Natalie, is that her name?".*

*Courtney "Yeah".*

*Denise "There's your Daddy and Natalie and you".*

*Courtney "I'm doing my nails".*

*Denise "Oh yeah...painting your nails. Look at that! (Laughed). Jamie with a party hat on. Were you there? Were you on holiday or at a club or something?"*

*Courtney "At a party".*

*Denise "At a party"*

*Courtney "I done that picture" .*

*Denise "Did you? That's very good. Your big Aunty Leanne. And you and your sister together. That's a nice one. There you are again. Is that a big sword?".*

*Courtney "Yeah. That's Sammy's mum".*

*Denise "Whose mum?"*

*Courtney's "Sammy's".*

*Denise "I don't know Sammy".*

*Courtney "She's my cousin".*

*Denise "Is she? I don't know Sammy".*

*Courtney "There's Leanne again".*

*Denise "There's Leanne. Did you take that picture again?"*

*Denise "You're very good at taking pictures".*

*Courtney "I took that. Sure that's Caroline?"*

*Denise "I don't know Caroline either. I don't think I've met her before. She's got her party hat on. Is this an Easter Party?"*

*Courtney "Yeah". (Pointed at a picture of the guinea pig).*

*Denise "You like the guinea pig, don't you? We need to get the guinea pig back".*

*Courtney "That's called Ryan".*

*Denise "It says 'Ryan – he's my boy'. He's your little baby brother, isn't he?"*

*Courtney "Will you read it again?"*

*Denise "Do you know what my brother's name is?"*

*Courtney and Denise "Ryan!"*

*Denise "Same as yours. (Beginning the book again) Your Grandad and Granny again having a cuddle".*

*Courtney "I want my Granny to stay here".*

*Denise "What, at nursery?"*

*Courtney "No, stay at home with me".*

*Denise "What, did you want to stay at home with Granny today? But did mum say you had to come to nursery?"*

*Courtney nodded.*

*Denise "Maybe because Granny's feeling really sad?"*

*Courtney "Why? Why?"*

*Denise "Because her brother died, didn't he?"*

*Courtney "Why?"*

*Denise "I don't know why he died, darling".*

*Courtney "Who's that?" (Pointing at Susan's book).*

*Denise “That’s Joe, he lives at Susan’s house, doesn’t he?” (To Susan)” He is your friend”.*

## **Analysis**

Using an attachment theory lens to understand this sequence, Courtney seemed to find a container for her feelings in Denise (Bion, 1962). She was able to tell Denise what was worrying and preoccupying her on this day. Denise was not only receptive, but had enough knowledge of Courtney’s family context to know about what had happened and to be able to help Courtney gain a coherent understanding of why her Granny was sad. Denise was also authentic and honest in that she responded to Courtney’s question “Why?” with “I don’t know”. Courtney’s Grandparents are Scottish and so is Denise, so Denise was able to ‘tune into’ Courtney’s concern with a speech rhythm that may have been familiar as well as a tone that expressed genuine concern. Denise never closed down the conversation. It went two ways and Denise was prepared to listen. The photo book was invaluable, as a way in to talk about what had happened, and, also, as a comfort and to remind Courtney of happier times and of times when she was physically close to members of her immediate family. Somehow, Denise seemed to achieve a perfect balance between allowing for Courtney’s feelings to be expressed and empathising and being distant enough to be able to talk about her Great Uncle’s death. That might have been hard for Courtney’s Granny or mother to do so soon after his death. Hare et al (1986, p.51) reported that

...fear and anxiety about death can prevent teachers from openly talking to children about their loss. Such a “conspiracy of silence” may quickly be translated by bereaved children to mean that whatever feelings they may have in response to the death must be suppressed.



Using a schema theory lens to understand Courtney's actions, she seemed to be moving around the nursery in a trajectory with stopping off points, searching for something to engage with. I imagine she was feeling confused and not fully understanding why she had to come to nursery, while her Granny stayed at home. Several times Denise referred to or asked about the connections between the people in the photos. Courtney was able to explain those connections, for example "She's my cousin". In a way, the narrative constructed through looking at her photo book provided some sort of 'container' for Courtney's confusion. Holmes described a coherent narrative as something which 'creates out of fragmentary experience an unbroken line or thread linking the present with the past and future', a kind of joined up trajectory (Holmes, 1993, p.150).

## **Reflections**

I suppose what was captured on film here, was something that happened quite naturally for Denise and Courtney. No special preparations were made to help Courtney talk about her Great Uncle's death, as far as I know. I cannot help thinking that it was no coincidence that eventually, on that day, Courtney found Denise. Before that, she was searching, unengaged and seemed very unfocussed. Unfortunately, we do not know whether she settled down for the rest of the day after her conversation with Denise. Maybe she stayed near Denise, who understood something of what she was feeling? I am reminded of Juliet Hopkin's work with nursery nurses, who came to the realisation that if they picked up a distressed child and allowed them to have a good cry, they then became much more settled than if they used 'distraction' (Hopkins, 1988, p.104).

### **Context of Third Observation**

Just over three weeks after her Great Uncle's death, I was filming another child, who approached her Family Worker, Margaret, in the corridor. Margaret was working with Courtney, recording a story Courtney was telling her. Margaret sensed that it was important to Courtney to finish her story before responding to the other child. I waited alongside the other child and continued filming.

### **Telling a Story to Margaret**

*Courtney (4:1:19) was drawing and at the same time, telling a story. Margaret repeated her words back to her and asked questions to clarify what Courtney meant. This was the story:*

*“ There was a little mouse and it died...I'm making a gun...the gun that died the mouse...and Courtney with scribbles on me and I've done the fire”. (Courtney showed Margaret the shooting action and fire coming out of the gun towards the mouse which she drew).*

### **Analysis**

Using attachment theory as a lens to understand Courtney's story, it seemed no coincidence that three weeks after experiencing the effects of a death in the family, Courtney was exploring death in a story. Rather than thinking about the proximity of people important to her, Courtney was placing herself as a central character in a story about the death of a mouse. Anthony (1940, p.45) reported that the idea of 'death as the

result of aggression' was one of two typical responses in young children, to death. The other, she described as 'sorrowful separation' (ibid). Death was typically seen by children as 'a fear-bringing thing' (in the case of aggression) and a 'sorrow-bringing thing' (ibid). Within my own experience, one storytime when we were chatting, one child asked about my dad. I said "He died a long time ago". One little boy asked "Who killed him?" Perhaps young children experience 'killing' in stories and on television, alongside dying and therefore treat them as synonymous.

Using a schema theory lens, Courtney clearly articulated by drawing, gesticulating and using language the trajectory of the fire travelling from the gun to the mouse. She used 'died' as a transitive verb, showing that her use of the word 'die' was synonymous with 'kill'. Margaret reflected back to her "You've done the bullet flying from you to the mouse". Margaret made a side to side arm movement as she said this. Courtney's drawing looked like a scribble but what she was trying to represent was the movement from the gun to the mouse, with the idea of 'fire' that makes a kind of central core with radials coming out of it.

## **Reflections**

It was sheer chance that I filmed this brief sequence but I did think that it was significant in terms of Courtney's understanding. To make a connection between dying and her previous experiences, Courtney reached back to her experience of the action of the pulling of a trigger and releasing fire from a gun, something she had seen, probably on television, and that resulted in someone dying. Perhaps in her mind, the mouse dying was 'functionally dependant' on the action of a person. Perhaps this was 'reflective expansion'? Courtney

literally sought a connection and expanded something from her previous experiences to help her begin to explore and to understand the concept of death. I can only wonder what sense she was making of her Great Uncle's death. Even as adults, we talk about people being 'struck down' by an illness as though it was done with intent.

### **Concluding Summary**

I have drawn on three observations of Courtney to demonstrate what happened around the time of a death in her extended family. In the first observation, she seemed to seek comfort in manipulating a mix of cornflour and water. She did not, as I suspected, envelop objects or herself with the cornflour as I had observed other children do, when trying to understand 'here and gone' or loss of some kind. What she was interested in was the transformative properties of the cornflour.

In the second observation, she sought containment for her confusion and sadness about not being able to be near her Granny while her Granny was feeling sad. Maybe seeing her Granny sad was new to Courtney, a transformation of a kind. Denise was able to allow the emotional space for Courtney and to offer her comfort and some understanding of her Granny's sadness.

In the final observation, three weeks later, Courtney expressed some of her ideas about death in her drawing and storytelling. She talked about a little mouse dying. Her ideas about death and dying were transferred to the mouse, which may have felt less threatening to Courtney.

### 3.7 The Inside Story

*'It is one's inner experiences that permit gaining a full grasp of what is involved in the inner experiences of others, a knowledge which can then become the basis for theoretical studies' (Bruno Bettelheim, 1956, p.38)*

#### **Introduction**

It was only partway through this study that I came to the realisation that I was not only studying and learning about the intellectual and emotional lives of a small number of children, but I was also learning about my own intellectual and emotional life as worker, parent and child. Shaw (1991, p.261) shows glimpses of going through a similar process,

...on reflection, I felt that Judy was attempting to describe to me how desperate she felt at Joe's behaviour and the anxiety that this behaviour evoked. I was preoccupied with shifting her perception of Joe's behaviour. Perhaps I was looking for some way to control the situation that I was finding increasingly demanding and disturbing.

As a practitioner researcher, my story is central to the study, so I decided that, alongside the children's stories, this story of my own growing awareness, was worth telling. Other researchers have seen the value of this subjective account of events. Within an action research paradigm working with teachers, Elliott (1991, p.21) saw 'self-reflection' as 'an intrinsic dimension of the pedagogical perspective itself'. In describing 'reflexive ethnography', Grenfell and James and colleagues (1998, p.124) stated that 'It proposes a recognition that we are part of the world we study, and that reactivity, as a fact of

investigatory life, is to be exploited rather than resisted'. So, having discovered this link between child study and my own inner world, I decided to do just that.

The video material, that I had filmed, particularly of children's separations from their parents, evoked a response in me, at times, that was surprising and distressing. Over time, material that I had viewed several times seemed to suddenly 'surprise my unconscious' (Hesse, 1999, p.397) and evoke an unexpected and, I now realise, undefended response in me that could only relate to my own earlier experiences.

Subsequently, while I was writing each child's story, I made a conscious effort to reflect on the material and to be open to and to make links with my experiences as a parent and as a child and with my feelings. I used journaling as a technique for getting in touch with my actions and motivations. I am now convinced that this reflective story has wider pedagogical implications.

Although I have been keeping a private journal for about 15 years, I was aware that I wanted to record separately, what was happening to me in relation to the case study material. I kept a Learning Journal for just over two years on the computer, as opposed to my private journal, which is written by hand. An important activity for leaders is to reflect and journal, described as 'Making notes and jottings can help us to gain insights and understandings by slowing down the learning process...We need to cultivate the process of deliberate and structured reflection...' (NPQICL, 2004, p.17).

I think I was wary of muddling my personal and professional issues. I wanted to set a boundary around the material evoked by the case studies and literature. I realised that most

of my learning, so far, had come from my personal experiences and that this was of great value. I drew on my personal experiences when they seemed relevant but my growth, as a professional and the implications for other professionals, was my main focus. Judi Marshall, writing from a feminist perspective, came up with the notion of 'first-person research' (2004, p.2) but warns against 'self-indulgence'.

The themes that emerged from my Learning Journal were:

- My tendencies to minimise and avoid emotions and emotional issues
- Using language to distance myself from emotions

Although, ostensibly I was studying children's emotions and emotional lives, most of my 'defenses' were employed in avoiding conflict situations and therefore in avoiding intense emotions (Fonagy, 1999, p.601)

### **Minimising and Avoiding Emotions and Emotional Issues**

I had been studying young children's cognition for a number of years (Arnold, 1990; 1997) and only occasionally considering their emotions (Arnold, 1999; 2003), when I took up the opportunity to study children's emotions as a main focus.

Using similar methods to those I had used before, I embarked on the study of a small number of children. I used a tried and tested methodology, using filmed sequences of the children involved in play in the nursery as a basis for discussions with their parents and workers (Jordan and Henderson, 1995; Whalley and Arnold, 1997; Whalley, 2001). Firstly,

I tried to ignore the cognitive aspects of development but found this impossible. I needed to go from what I knew into the less known (Formosinho, 2003). I found myself less comfortable discussing the children's emotional development than I had been previously discussing cognitive development. I was happy to listen but did not want to appear critical or to offer advice to the parents. We had discovered a way of sharing child development theory with parents, that enabled us to have an 'equal and active dialogue' about their children (Whalley, 2001). I knew a little about 'attachment theory' (Bowlby, 1998) but, at the outset, was not able to use language about attachment confidently.

My Learning Journal shows that I frequently felt lost, that some of the ideas I was reading about, seemed slightly out of my grasp at first. Occasionally, something a parent said or did, surprised me and made me think more deeply.

#### **Journal Entry 130604**

*Met with M on Thursday and looked at J at Dance. Realised that M does not really understand why she needs to say Goodbye to her children and go. I talked about J being able to feel the pain of the Goodbye (loss) and survive and the role of the parents in 'containing' those feelings for J. I wonder whether I need to illustrate the concept in some other way?? Would a better explanation help me and the parents to understand better??*



## **Discussion**

This was a parent I had worked with over a number of years and who had had three children attend the nursery. I realised that I could not have been clear or explicit with her about concepts like ‘attachment’ and ‘containment’ if she was still unclear. This parent had particular needs herself, but she had a good understanding of schemas and other key child development concepts we had shared with her.

I felt I had probably avoided saying things that I found difficult to voice about her child and his attachment status to her. I wanted my relationship with her to be positive but, actually, her relationship with her child was much more important than mine with her. My duty, as a practitioner, was to her child.

Also, there was a parallel process here. If I could not bear to say difficult things to her about the theory of attachment and how it related to her and her child, then I was like a parent trying to shelter a child from pain. I was not feeling sufficiently competent to ‘contain’ or ‘hold’ her feelings of distress, just as she may not have been feeling able or seen that it was necessary to do the same for her child. Maybe my feelings about my child or the child in me were not being contained and, therefore, I could not risk containing her feelings (Bion, 1962). Shaw (1991, p.132) found that ‘a critical discussion of the research with a psychologist within a psychoanalytic framework’ helped her to ‘appreciate the meaning perspectives of the research participants’. I was probably realising that I needed another supervisor, who could help me to apply a psychoanalytic framework to the research material. It seemed no coincidence that I had carefully chosen a team of

supervisors, who were highly qualified in considering the cognitive and sociological perspectives of my study but no-one from the field of psychoanalysis.

If I could use the strategy we had developed, of sharing concepts with the parents, then I would be taking on a different role, not criticising, but sharing information which would enable the parent to make sense of what was happening in much the same way as I was doing. If this was not safe for me, how could I make it safe for the parents?

#### **Journal Entry 060704**

*Had a tutorial with Chris. She is trying to get me focussed on collecting the rest of the data and the questions I want to address. I know that I need to reduce the data and I want to involve the parents in deciding which segments we focus on. Her suggestion is to have a kind of 'clip log' so that parents could choose which bits to focus on. I also need prompts. It might be better if I raise the kind of questions I am interested in and share them with the parents.*

#### **Discussion**

At this stage, I was drowning in data and so were the parents. They had seen all of the video material on their own children and, for them, it was a good record to keep of their child at nursery. On reflection, I decided it was my job to select the sequences for deep analysis. I think I was trying to shift the responsibility for which sequences to consider onto the parents. If any painful discussions ensued, then that conflict was not my doing. I

needed someone who would 'contain' my feelings if I was to risk giving my interpretation to the parents (Bion, 1962).

In the end I needed to 'cut to the chase' and be brave about what I selected and the story that the data told (Fletcher, 2006). The parents could offer a different interpretation, but mostly, I made sense of the data through what the parents had told me about their current family situations and contexts.

### **Journal Entry 280704**

*Spent all day yesterday looking at and copying six sequences of C. Began summarising them on a chart as discussed with Chris, so that A (her mother) could choose what to focus on. I get excited and animated when watching but then in the summarising find myself recording the action with objects rather than the relationships. I actually begin to put information about relationships on a separate sheet of paper and place that underneath the information about C's actions with objects. I think I am minimising the importance of what goes on within the relationships as I am fearful? Or cannot understand?? Or am less interested?*

### **Discussion**

This was a very strange experience, as though I was looking in on my actions from the outside and realising that, for me, cognition was 'on top'. [There was also a fear] My fear was that I was not seeing or considering the whole child, with thoughts and feelings but

was ignoring affect by having a strong focus on cognition. Was my longstanding focus on and interest in cognition a ‘defense’ against emotions?

### **Journal Entry 020305**

*I had a very strange experience this morning. A couple of weeks ago I made a short video about E – distressed separation followed by connecting behaviour then more connecting a year later. I gave Annette (worker) and A (his mum) a copy each. I asked permission to use it in training. Annette suggested that we use it on the MA to illustrate our well-being project. I hadn't heard from A, so I nipped across the road at 3pm yesterday to catch her picking the children up from school. I asked her to sign her permission for me to show it to other people. She agreed even though I emphasised that she could say No to any of it. I mentioned how painful it must have been to watch. She remarked to the man she was with that E was crying and causing a fuss (they are my words I cannot remember her exact words). I then minimised the pain by saying I was interested in what he did next ie connecting. When Annette and I discussed E she talked about how she had to get to know how he would be settled. A colleague and I had arranged to have a meeting about my PhD this morning so I took the video of E to show her, thinking it clearly showed schematic behaviour that linked to E's painful separations ie connecting. She began offering her interpretation (or reading of the situation). I said No to her first couple of comments because I was so convinced of what I had seen. She was suggesting that he might be interested in 'going through' rather than 'connecting'. She asked me not to close down the discussion and, all of a sudden I became very distressed and cried. I think I was in denial about E's pain and wanting to see*

*cognition as the soother of his pain. I said I hadn't realised how deeply his distress had affected me but of course I was crying about my own pain of separation and loss from my own children and as a child from my parents rather than E's. The pain and suffering stayed with me all day and when I got home my husband just held me and I cried.*

## **Discussion**

This was the most extreme example of how my 'ghosts in the nursery' emerged causing me to 're-enact a moment or scene from another time' (Fraiberg, Adelson and Shapiro, 1987, p.101). Fraiberg et al (1987, p.102) describe these ghosts as a 'repetition of the past in the present'. I was literally 'haunted' by my own early experiences of being parented and all of my energy was spent on avoiding and minimising the pain as my parents may have done with me. I was not open to any other interpretation of E's behaviour. I began to realise that even my hypothesis that schemas and emotions were connected might be a defense against pain. I began to notice what other workers said to children when children were in pain. Some could tolerate the pain and focus on the feeling, acknowledging it verbally and empathising. Others could only comfort by holding briefly and then distract. Their behaviour, like mine, may not have been within their conscious awareness.

## **Journal Entry 010505**

*Was aware when I spoke with M and A individually about the conference talk, I tried not to minimise the emotional and relational issues as I know I have a tendency to. I did however meet with A in the library and with M on the couch in*

*the nursery, so now I am asking myself whether that was the best place for them to talk frankly to me? Was I unconsciously protecting myself from pain and conflict by meeting in a busy place?*

## **Discussion**

I could not change what I had done but at least I was beginning to question my own motives. This growing awareness was certainly in my mind for the next time I met with individual parents. My awareness was growing of the need to stay with my discomfort and to allow the parents to express their feelings about their relationships with their child. I needed to think the whole scenario through each time, in advance. Next time I met with M I went to their home but that, too, was very hectic in the evening. I need to create an emotional space for the parents to think and feel and reflect if they are to benefit from reflecting as I have been able to do.

## **Journal Entry 060505**

*Have had a very busy week training adults – am questioning my avoidance of emotions. Really difficult today when someone got upset about her father's death and then another person brought up about her husband committing suicide at 32. I ran away literally (I left the building and went towards the nursery) but then saw myself doing it – my excuse was that I wanted to ask Angela or Annette or Katey if the group could visit the nursery.*

## **Discussion**

At this stage my new awareness was affecting all aspects of my life. My usual tendency was still to avoid pain, loss and separation, but, as in this case, to realise that I was avoiding emotions and to catch myself doing it so that I could behave differently.

Another layer of awareness was when I also began to notice the language I was using:

### **Using Language to Distance Myself from Emotions**

#### **Journal Entry 280804**

*Have been writing up the well-being project for last two weeks – a mammoth task but satisfying. (with Margy, Eddie, Robert and Colette). Have never done writing in collaboration with others before. I found it an enlightening process. Keep noticing in my writing that I remove myself once from people and use objects, for example will say ‘as a result of discussion it was decided’ rather than ‘people discussed and decided’. I am also more aware of avoiding contact with people, so will put off tasks that involve talking directly to people. Would much rather email them or even send a text. When I do that, I am not putting demands on them to respond to me and therefore I avoid being rejected.*

## **Discussion**

I had begun to notice my language and to think about academic writing and the traditional notion that academic studies should be written in the third person. In fact, that was the requirement for my Master of Education study (Arnold, 1997). So this whole idea of being objective, impersonal and positivist flies in the face of acknowledging people, as actors with thoughts and feelings that affect data. Conrad (2004, p.43) pointed out that Charles Darwin, when he wrote about his beloved daughter, Annie, who died at the age of 10, wrote very differently to his scientific papers.

He does not use language which distances him from Annie, and does not avoid relevant emotional information about himself or Annie even if it is emotionally arousing.

I deduced that Darwin must have thought it important to include the emotional aspects of his relationship with Annie. In a similar way, I too must include emotions in a study of cognition and affect.

## **Journal Entry 080105**

*Working on Methodology section – this whole issue about first or third person seems really relevant now. Chris has not given me any clear guidance but much of my writing of this section is in third but the bit I wrote on ethics is in first and it sticks out like a sore thumb, so I have been changing it. I think I need a rationale for using first sometimes, especially the section on my own awareness. Writing in the third person is like saying “The cat did it” pretending that the study is not*



*affected by the interests, personality or perspective of the researcher or, at least not acknowledging it. It is as though I am pretending that another person could carry out this study in exactly the same way as I did. Also at times, I find myself using language that does remove me from the equation, when it is about feelings. It's a kind of not owning up to my responsibility and feelings (Marshall, 2004).*

## **Discussion**

Shortly after this, I discarded that version of the Methodology. I decided that writing in the first person is essential if I am writing about what I did and observed and even my interpretation of events. What I find myself doing is slipping back into the third person as I did unconsciously a few paragraphs back. I left the phrase in brackets, just to illustrate my tendency to do this.

## **So What? The Implications for Practice**

So what does all of this mean? What was the process I had been going through? What difference will my newfound knowledge of myself, and my ways of behaving, make in my practice with children and families? How can I help other workers to become more aware?

## **What was the process I had been going through?**

Had I allowed an element of autobiographical writing to enter what I had intended to be an academic study and was this useful? I sought support from the literature. Susan Harter (1999, p.32) states that through language 'toddlers can now conceptualise the self as an

object'. Language enables us to 'construct a "narrative" of our "life story"...' However, 'language can distort experience by creating a different (fantasised) construction of the self or by creating an unauthentic self to 'meet the needs and wishes of others' (Stern)' (Harter, 1999, p.35). Was I trying to discover a more authentic self through reflecting and writing?

Winnicott (1991) pointed out that what's going to happen may change or not but how you feel about it and how you understand it, can change through 'transitional processing'. Was the study a catalyst for change in me?

Tara Hawes (1995, p. 2) writing about the New Zealand author, Janet Frame, describes Frame as 'constructing and deconstructing different selves through writing her life story'. I think where this sort of work resonates with what I have been experiencing, is that the distancing achieved through reflection over time, has enabled me to see myself and my actions as another person might see me. Hawes (op cit) states that

Autobiography as a genre highlights the traditional binary opposition of truth and fiction, with its position of narrating the truth of one's own life, or, essentially, othering oneself in the name of truth.

So, was I 'othering' myself in order to see more clearly? Or was I avoiding the views of others by focussing on reflecting as it is less threatening to make judgements about myself than others?

John Kempe (1996), in his story of Corby Grammar School and his involvement in that journey, entitled 'Memory's Truth' quotes Salmon Rushdie:

I told you the truth, Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent vision of events; and no sane being ever trusts someone else's vision more than his own.  
From 'Midnight Children' by Salman Rushdie

Perhaps what I am discovering is that my reflections are my truth and that that is valid but may be different from another person's interpretation and will change over time as my awareness grows.

### **What does this evidence mean?**

Drawing on Bowlby's research, I think my 'internal working model', built up from my early interactions with others, has so far required me to be either expert or novice (1998, p.82). I noticed on the second page of this section that, at the outset, I was not able to share information with parents about emotions: 'I was happy to listen but did not want to appear critical or to offer advice to the parents'. Although I had previously felt able to conduct a dialogue with parents about cognition, when it came to emotions, I needed to feel more confident. Maybe this was because I had not been thinking about or talking about emotions with my colleagues to the extent that I was thinking and talking about cognition? It seemed risky for me to talk about concepts like 'attachment' with parents. I did not feel sufficiently confident. Perhaps I was stuck in my ways of relating, still trying to process some of the things that had happened to me?

Stern (2003, p.97) describes 'generalized episodes', that 'contain multiple specific memories'. We build up a kind of prototype of what to expect under certain circumstances, drawn from our many experiences. These episodes contribute to the building up of an

'autobiographical memory' (Stern, 2003, p.97). Perhaps in my family, the messages I received from those around me were that strong emotions were dangerous? This was only true of certain emotions. For a number of years I have been aware of my tendency to become excited at Christmas time and to share my bubbling excitement with others. I believe this was rooted in my early experiences within my family too but very much focussed on what was considered positive.

Stern (2003, p. 97) further describes how even preverbal infants have the ability to make 'Representations of Interactions that have been Generalized' (RIGs) and that it is from these many experiences that babies build a 'core self' (Stern, 2003, p.99). So was I seeing myself as either expert or novice and unable or unused to risk new learning, particularly in the emotional domain?

Stern (2003, p.114) points out that RIGs are different to Bowlby's 'internal working model' in the sense that RIGs are less generalized and enable us to 'activate an evoked companion', to 'reactivate an experience of I *with* another'. The raw pain I felt when viewing E's separation felt much more like an experience reactivated, than a mere model that helped me understand my generalised view of self and other.

Renk, Roddenberry and Oliveros (2004, p.381) from a cognitive theory perspective, describe 'schemas' or repeated patterns of relating to others, which they acknowledge as similar to Bowlby's internal working models and Fraiberg's ghosts in the nursery. So, was my repeated action to avoid conflict at all costs?

**What difference will my newfound knowledge and awareness make, in my practice with children and families?**

I think I am already behaving differently, although the changes are subtle. I now question more and reflect on my own actions. This reflection enables me to bring into conscious awareness my motives, which are sometimes hidden from me, for example, when I wanted the parents to decide on the video sequences for deep analysis so that any pain incurred, would not be attributed to me. I was then able to see that my actions could be an avoidance of pain, rather than a promotion of an equal partnership. In this instance, I took the risk of selecting the video sequences on the basis of rich material that illustrated schemas and attachment.

I think the idea of providing ‘an emotional space’ for parents, that includes a quiet and uninterrupted physical space, but also a ‘space in my mind’ to hear what’s being said is important. This applies equally to children, who sense an adult’s openness to receiving painful feelings from them (Pen Green Team, 2000-2004).

Staying with the discomfort of emotional pain and not immediately reassuring or interpreting is also very important. Winnicott (1991, p.86) described early interpretation as taking something away from a patient. It is a bit like the adult who constantly problem solves for a child and never allows them the satisfaction of solving the problem for themselves.

My greatest learning is, I think, to be able to be more aware of and to sometimes work out when I 'transfer' my feelings onto others. Drawing on the psychoanalytic literature, Shaw (1991, p.71) defines 'transference' as

the process whereby feelings associated with past relationships with a significant person, usually a parent, are transferred into the present situation.

I began to experiment with this when constructing the case studies and sometimes found myself making an interpretation, based on my own experience, which was not necessarily like the experience of the child I was observing. For example, I judged Chloe to feel shame and embarrassment when she misunderstood something Louise said, but, on reflection, realised that I was identifying closely with earlier experiences of my own and that I needed to look more carefully to see whether that was what Chloe was experiencing. When I re-examined the video, there was some evidence of slight embarrassment but not to the extent that I thought I had seen initially.

### **How can I help other workers to become more aware?**

I can share my experiences and findings with others but, that, in itself, will not necessarily help them to become more aware. I think it is important to share and to encourage others to study the psychoanalytic concepts that have been useful in helping me to gain greater awareness and to apply those concepts to material they have gathered. In order to deeply understand concepts like 'attachment', 'containment', 'holding' 'internal working models' and RIGs, it is essential to apply them to themselves and to interactions they have observed.

Firsthand observation is essential. I chose to film most of the observations, so that I could reflect on them with others and over time. However, the Tavistock method of Infant Observation involves the observer in visiting a newborn and family weekly for two years. The observation is recorded afterwards and is presented as the material for a work discussion group. The observer is open to the feelings evoked in him/her. Rustin (1989, p.7) describes the method:

The practice of systematic observation of the development of infants provides the observer with an opportunity to encounter primitive emotional states in the infant and his family, and indeed in the observer's own response to this turbulent environment.

Although this intense and time consuming course is intended to be part of the training for child psychotherapy, Rustin (1989, p.8) points out that 'it has also proved very valuable for professional development of other workers in a variety of roles with children'.

Elfer (2004, p.3) has recently pioneered this way of observing for professionals working with under threes in nursery settings. He explains that traditional observation, with the emphasis on objectivity and recording what happens without judgement, often omits the subjective feelings of the observer. However, he does caution us to be aware of whose feelings we are describing,

This has to be done immensely carefully because whilst the feelings that can be evoked in us by a baby may be a very good indication of how the baby is feeling, they may equally be more to do with the observer than the baby (p.3).

Elfer worked with a small number of Master's Degree students, who were also experienced Early Years Educators, to try out his method. An important part of the process was to have regular meetings, when observation material could be shared and alternative interpretations explored.

An important part of my process was reflecting in many different ways and over time, on the material gathered. The discussions with workers and parents formed the first step in that reflective process. Reading and journaling was an iterative process that stimulated my thinking and feeling. I could sometimes understand concepts through my earlier experiences more easily than I could apply them to the observations I had made. Research meetings, preparing papers and constructing the case studies all enabled me to rethink and I now realise to 're-feel' the material.

In order for other workers to learn from my experiences, they would need to be open to learning from their own early experiences, as well as from their experiences of observing young children and their carers. We would need to create a context in which there was emotional space and trust for them to share and to explore the feelings evoked in them by the children they work with. A small group of five or six people could meet on a regular basis and each present material observed by them.

Although Elfer's group each studied up to four children over 4-8 weeks, I think a great deal can be gained from a single child study (Arnold, 1999; 2003). Using video as a focus could enable the observer to share some of the detail with others and to hear what was evoked in each of the participants. Of course, using a video camera could be seen as removing oneself from the direct pain of an observation. Students at the Tavistock and



Elfer's students all placed themselves in the front line, without even a notebook to distract them or to protect them from the feelings in the room.

In order to build on our earlier work, I would want some of the sharing to include parents (Whalley, 1997; 2001). Perhaps, being involved in the close observation of their own child by keeping a diary of their feelings would contribute a great deal to knowledge in the field?

### **Concluding Summary**

In this section, I have presented my emergent findings in relation to an increased awareness of my tendencies to:

- Minimise and avoid emotions and emotional issues
- Use language to distance myself from emotions

Drawing on entries from my learning journal, I have offered examples to illustrate how I am coming to understand both the tendencies and their manifestations in my actions.

I have concluded by thinking about what this data means, in terms of current research, what differences my new awareness will make to my practice with children and families and the wider pedagogical question of how I can help other workers to become more aware.

## **4. PART FOUR REFLECTIONS**

I have divided this final part of my study into four sections, reflecting on my learning from:

- The Action
- The Literature
- Preparing for the Action (Method), and
- Implications for Practice

### **4.1 Reflections on the Action**

Just as I have been struggling throughout my study and, especially in this final section, to get all of my data into a coherent form, the children I studied seemed to give their experiences a 'form' by repeating patterns of action. As Matthews (2003, p.24) stated, when we represent, we also reconstruct, so the action itself contributes to our construction of knowledge and understanding about our experiences and life events, past, present and future.

#### **The Children's Motivation to Act**

At first, I reflected on each child's motivation to act. Quite early on, I saw from my observations, that the children seemed to be engaged in

- Being

- Doing, or
- Having (Journal Entry, 240104)

I subsequently added 'knowing' and 'relating' to this list. I began to think of these motives as basic psychological needs. I discovered that there was a whole body of theory on 'Self-Determination' ([www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT](http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT)). Within that body of theory 'basic psychological needs are assumed to be innate and universal'. According to the theory, all human beings need to feel 'competence, autonomy and relatedness' (Deci and Ryan, 2000). My earlier focus on cognition had identified the need for competence as did the children's actions. In this study, I was beginning to think about the need for relatedness.

The different schema clusters seemed to feed into the psychological needs I had identified from the data. I could see some gender differences in how frequently the individual children explored these different patterns (see Table One). Evan, Edward and Jordan were often more focussed on 'doing' by using 'connecting', and 'trajectory' schemas. These were the predominant patterns each boy used. Their motives seemed to be action focussed. Hattie, Chloe, Steffi and Susan were all interested in 'having' things and 'containing' and 'transporting' their things about the nursery. Sometimes 'having' was associated with 'relating'. Chloe particularly seemed to know the value or status of specific objects and would 'stash' new toys away in order to 'trade' or share with a friend. Steffi liked to 'have' things from home. She particularly enjoyed 'having' fierce animal figures with her. They seemed to help her feel strong and fed her need to feel competent and autonomous.

Susan Harter (1999, p.32), writing about 'The Construction of the Self', differentiated between 'semantic' and 'episodic' memory. Episodic memory related to 'an experience

that happened once', whereas 'semantic memory' was 'generalized information' that related to how we see ourselves. Young children are engaged in constructing ideas about the self, so if they begin to see themselves as autonomous, competent people, who can relate to others, then they are likely to function well. All of their memories and reconstructed experiences, provide the basis for an 'autobiographical memory', which forms their sense of self (ibid, p.33). Harter has reported that the average age for beginning to form 'autobiographical memories' is three and a half years and that children can only learn to 'formulate their own memories as *narratives* by learning from adults'. I find it hard to agree completely with Harter's view, as she seemed to rely totally on verbal accounts, whereas, I think my data has shown that, even in the absence of language, children replay and represent experiences in actions in order to give them some form (Jordan's Story).

One way of giving form is to articulate in words, but, as Stern has pointed out, we can lose something of the original meaning, when we put actions into words (Stern, 2003). Rinaldi (2006) suggested a much richer world of expression and representation, in that she claimed, provocatively, that young children use one hundred languages to represent their ideas. Stern (2003, p.173) viewed language as 'dialogic' and as a 'transitional phenomenon'. I think I can claim that *schemas or repeated patterns of behaviour are used by young children as a 'transitional phenomenon' or, in other words, are used to mediate their experiences*. It would seem that in repeating actions or related actions, children gained some understanding of what was not yet fully understood. Sometimes this was verbal and in dialogue with another, for example, Steffi. Sometimes this was a reflective soliloquy, for example, Jordan.

## **Gender Differences**

I realised that the number of children studied was far too small from which to generalize about gender differences. I mentioned those emerging differences to Colwyn Trevarthen, a biologist. He said that he was not surprised by the differences I had found. He referred me to the work of Hess (1954), described by Trevarthen et al (2006). Hess suggested that 'the animal controls its engagement with the outside world by two kinds of behaviour:

(1) Active ERGOTROPIC or energy expending efforts

(2) TROPHOTROPIC or energy obtaining or conserving states' (Trevarthen et al, 2006, p.17-18).

It seemed that, biologically, males were programmed to expend energy and females to obtain or conserve energy. I placed some data on a chart alongside those definitions and also made links with some management theory, that had impacted on me during an earlier course. I continued to think about those differences, when interpreting the data.

This was my thinking at this time (310705).

<b>Animal's biological engagement with the external world</b> (Trevarthen, 2006, p.17)	<b>Evidence from data gathered</b>	<b>Evidence from data gathered</b>	<b>Two Major Dimensions of Leadership</b> (Mullins, 1989, p.433)
Ergotropic: energy expending efforts	Boys' tendency to use trajectories and to be engaged in 'doing'	Using schema to understand or work through/involvement with objects and/or people	Task function
Trophotropic: energy obtaining or conserving	Girls' tendency to contain, envelop and transport and to be engaged in 'having'	Using schema to comfort, repair, recoup energy/low energy/repetition/sensori motor level-also may have been 'working through'	Maintenance function

I realised that many researchers and writers have claimed that gender is socially and culturally constructed, rather than being defined by biology alone (Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002). We had certainly found, in an earlier study, that some girls explored 'trajectory' behaviour, but that it was less commonly displayed than in the behaviour of most boys (Arnold and Chandler, 1999). Similarly, boys displayed 'containing', 'enveloping' and 'transporting' behaviours, but, again, those behaviours were not predominant in most boys. So, as far as I was concerned, the evidence was interesting but inconclusive.

In relation to this study, I concluded that *there were gender differences in this small sample, that supported the findings of other small studies but that studying a larger number of children in depth, was necessary in order to discover more about gendered behaviour in relation to schemas.*

## **How Schemas Were Used By the Children**

Each child seemed to use schematic behaviour to represent aspects of their experiences and feelings. I thought long and hard about what those behaviours meant; the function of the repeated actions, and; the motivations of the children on different occasions and, over time.

### *The Meaning of Their Actions*

As I have stated earlier, we had to infer the meaning by placing the observed actions alongside information about family context. On some occasions, we were able to infer meaning in relation to a specific event, for example, when Sihaya started nursery, this prompted Jordan to explore going through from one enclosed area to another repeatedly. We could make the link between a change in routine and his actions. In other instances, the meaning of a child's explorations was less obvious and based on their feelings, over a long time. For example, Susan withheld her feelings, possibly to protect her mum, and it was only towards the end of the study period, that we noticed her ambivalence, which she displayed by an emphatic trajectory movement. *'She quite deliberately tossed the cloth containing the play people a couple of inches into the air and allowed it to drop on the floor.'* We were not always able to make a direct causal link but tried to associate the behaviours with events or situations we knew about.

*Their repeated actions seemed to enable each child to 'mentalise' or 'reflect' on earlier or forthcoming events* (Fonagy, 2001, p.176). This was particularly important when a

child felt confused, for example, Courtney, who was upset and confused when her Granny stayed at home because her Great Uncle had died.

### *The Function of Repeated Actions*

In a similar way to that which Segal used to define the development of symbolic play, I noticed that sometimes *the repeated action was used as a comfort*, to return to the 'known' from something unknown or frightening (a stage at which children were possibly in denial or not understanding about a change or transition), for example when Courtney 'lost herself' in playing with cornflour (Alvarez, 1996). A second *function* I thought of at first as *repair*, or beginning to act out something that might indicate that a separation could be rejoined, for example, Edward doing up door hooks or Harry tying together with string. I later thought of this as *giving form to their concern*. A third *function involved exploration in order to begin to understand and to accept a change/transition* (often referred to as 'working through'). Steffi did this to some extent.

### *The Motivation to Act*

There was little doubt that children were motivated by family events and changes to use repeated patterns in order to seek comfort, to give form to and to explore and understand. However, each child was motivated to understand events in their own way, drawing on a repertoire of repeated patterns. I never observed Steffi or Chloe connecting with string, even though there were changes in both families related to separation. String was freely available to both children in the nursery.



## **Reflective Abstraction**

I was interested in making connections with Piaget's concept of 'reflective abstraction' which, he stated, was when 'certain connections are "drawn out" of the sensori-motor schemata and "projected upon" the new plane of thought' (Piaget, 1971, p.64). In relation to Susan's understanding of her friend, Leah, going to live in Scotland, I deduced that Susan had drawn on her experiences of journeying, as a toddler and young child, to imagine or picture her friend going away (a trajectory movement) to a stopping off point (Scotland). Having carried out those actions many times with her whole body, Susan could picture, in her mind, her friend going and stopping there for some time. This demonstrated how Susan, when she was developmentally ready, could draw on her earlier actions and abstract from them movement and configurative aspects, to understand an event she had not experienced at first hand.

Similarly, Seymour Papert described how 'rotating circular objects against one another...carried many otherwise abstract ideas into my head' (Papert, 1980, p.vi). He explained that the action and the pattern of that action, served as a model, when he was faced with something new, such as, 'multiplication tables'. If he could see the tables as gears rotating (and he claimed he could) then he could understand how they worked. So, in effect, he was able to 'assimilate' multiplication tables into his current model of gears rotating against each other. He agreed with Piaget's model of learning but made the point that he 'fell in love with gears' and that 'the gear acts as a transitional object' in his communication with his readers about the turtle he invented (ibid, p.viii). The point Papert was making was that Piaget had not taken into account his personal passion for gears. You

cannot generalise about gears just as you cannot generalise about the use of string.

*Children develop a passion for certain objects or materials.*

Another body of research that has supported the idea of our own actions as the basis of all of our representations and thought, is the work on metaphor. Looking at metaphor from a literary perspective, Turner (1996) reported that all of literature is made up of 'image schemas' and 'action schemas' that are projected onto the stories or events that are written about in the literature. He claimed that 'EVENTS ARE ACTIONS' guides us in projecting a story of action onto any kind of event-story, whether it has actors or not' (Turner, 1996, p.38). Another 'general projection made is that ACTORS ARE MOVERS' (p.39). Whether or not the subject is a person, in literature we project our actions onto subjects and objects of action. Our own early repeated actions form the basis on which we make those projections, for example, 'she *carried* a lot of responsibility' (p.40) infers the 'transporting' or carrying of something that is abstract and cannot be seen or touched.

Modell (1996, p.219) stated that 'the locus of metaphor is now recognised to be in the mind and not in language' and that 'metaphors have their origin in the body'. He has found it unsurprising that 'affects are transformed into metaphors' as 'translating feelings into metaphors provides us with some degree of organisation and control'. Modell defined metaphor as 'the mapping of one conceptual domain onto a dissimilar conceptual domain' (Modell, 1996, p.220). His examples related to adults rather than young children.

Modell drew on Edelman's research (Edelman and Tononi, 2000) on the brain to support his idea that 'Affects, metaphor and memory form a synergistic, unified system'. In my

discussions with Chris Athey, she expressed the view that it was Edelman's research that was likely to link brain activity with schema theory. Modell informed us that,

Edelman suggests that what is stored in the brain is not something that has a precise correspondence with the original experience, but is a potentiality awaiting activation...What is stored in memory is not a replica of the event but the potential to generalize or refine the category or class of which the event is a member (ibid, p.221).

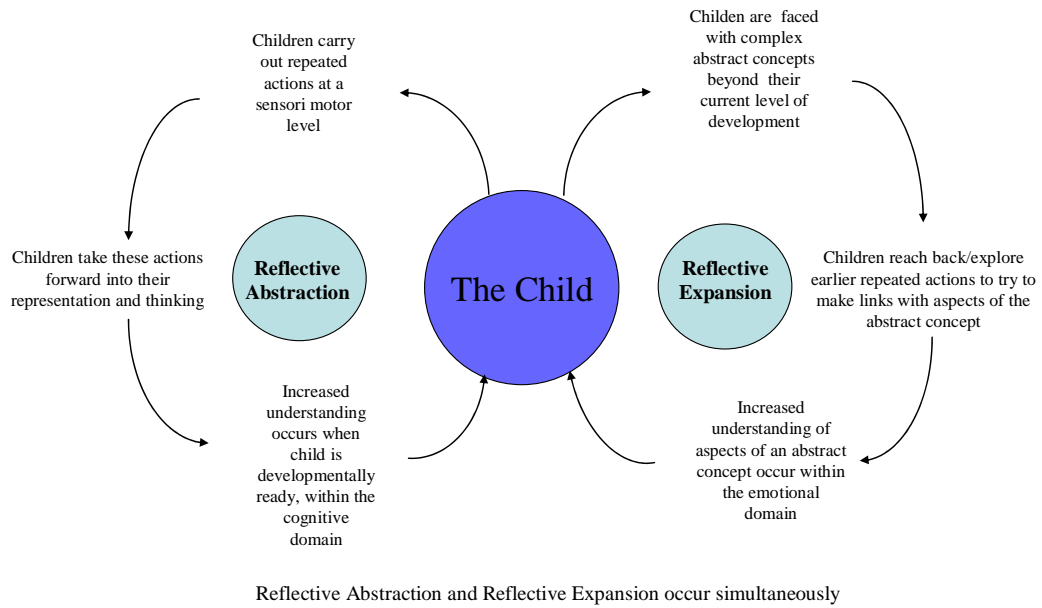
This idea concurs with John Matthews' understanding and description of 'attractors' drawn from the work of Thelen and Smith (Matthews, 2003). Modell claimed that 'metaphor allows us to find the familiar in the unfamiliar' and that 'memory is not only categorical but is also retranscriptive', possibly suggesting that we can come to understand or reconstruct our understanding of our earlier experiences by reflecting on them, with the benefit of increased experience (Modell, 1996, p.221).

Chris Athey thought that the concept of 'reentry' researched by Edelman, was significant. My understanding of the link between schemas and 'reentry' is that through repetition of our actions with various materials, objects and people in different ways and across modalities, we strengthen the potential combinations of neural action.

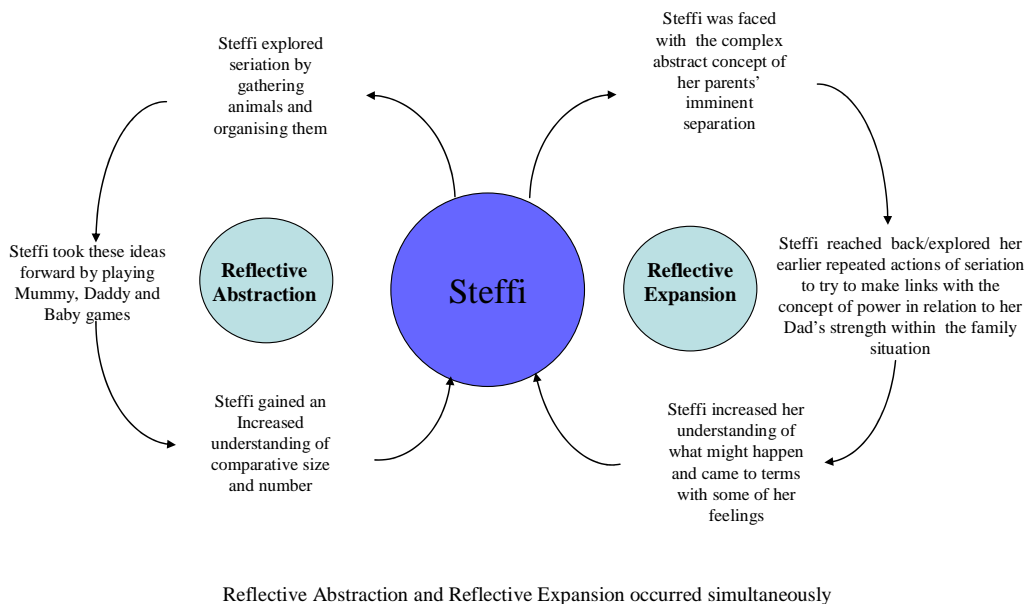
When Piaget proposed the concept of 'reflective abstraction', he did not have the benefit of brain research to support his theory. Like early childhood researchers now, he depended on what he had observed in young children's actions, representations and expressed thoughts. I believe that the concept of *reflective abstraction is viable and that young children carry forward all of their experiences in action and can draw on these to represent and think*. When Chloe lined up several buckets and looked along the line, this heralded her later understanding of counting a line of numbers. This notion of reflective abstraction seemed

to relate to the cognitive domain. The brain research seems likely to be able to explain more fully how that process occurs physiologically. I also want to propose that there is another simultaneous process occurring which I will call *reflective expansion*. *When young children are faced with complex abstract concepts such as death and divorce, they search for connections among their earlier actions to understand and expand their knowledge*. Reflective expansion seemed to be used by children to expand their understanding of emotional events. When Steffi was faced with the prospect of her parents separating, she reached back and tried to make links with the bit of that experience that she could understand and had some experience of, ie here and gone. Steffi explored ‘enveloping and revealing’ in order to give form to and to begin to understand what was going to happen within her family. She also explored seriation in order to understand power differential and to express her worry about whether her father would survive without the rest of the family. Rather than these processes being a kind of developmental stage theory going from less understanding to more, I would see it as more of an iterative process which could be symbolized by a dynamic circular movement going between the actions experienced and new events or experiences, with the person experiencing them at the centre.

## Reflective Abstraction and Reflective Expansion



## Reflective Abstraction and Reflective Expansion



## **Adult Responses**

I had hoped that my research on schemas and representations of attachment and emotions would impact on all of the adults involved. Although there were revelatory moments, or accommodations to use the Piagetian concept, generally speaking, the impact was less than I had hoped. Examples of revelatory moments were when

(1) Tracey (worker) realised from reflecting on the video that Jordan secretly wanted her to notice him but hid his interest in her and only gave brief surreptitious glances.

(2) I talked through the 'goodbye' with Maria (parent) and she said "They need to know you are coming back", an important reflection on her child's perspective (Journal Entry, 101206).

(3) Jackie (parent) said that Steffi wanted to 'marry' the whole family, including Mousie (who was her dead mouse). We discussed this and realised Steffi wanted to be 'connected' to everyone in the family, including Mousie, who was dead.

(4) Sian (parent) saw Susan's ambivalence towards her and said she understood because of her relationship with her own mother.

The workers tended to see the research as my learning and, to be fair to them, that was how it turned out. However, recently I have had an opportunity to share my learning with the nursery staff and, although that was a painful process (because of the personal nature of my

raised awareness) I think it was worthwhile. I think there may be an opportunity to involve staff and parents in a shorter project using what I have learned in this research.

Similarly, the parents became involved to the extent they were able, and to support my research. I would feel more comfortable and confident in future sharing ideas about attachment, separation and loss with parents as part of a shorter project on schemas and attachment. I think I possibly chose families I knew well so that they would not make demands on me that I could not meet at that time. We were able to have a reasonably equal relationship because of our history rather than because of how I conducted this piece of research.

### **My Learning**

I have documented my journey during this study by offering a case study entitled the Inside Story. In the first section (Child Development) I stated that my second thesis was that *'as human beings, we all understand our experiences through our constructions of the world first established during childhood'*. I think and feel that through carrying out this study of a small number of children, with an emphasis on affect as well as cognition, I have demonstrated my growing awareness of my construction of the world of relationships. *Through my growing awareness, I have been able to uncover and understand some of my defensive behaviours in relation to distancing myself from situations in which strong emotions are likely to be evoked.*

I have reflected so often on my recent actions that everything I do, say and think has come under scrutiny. I know that I have a tendency to embrace new learning rather obsessively at

first so I am sure that, in time, I will accept myself and temper my current rather over zealous critique of my approach. By way of exemplifying my learning, these were some of the significant moments, recorded in my learning journal:

- 290704 ‘When I look at children exploring, what jumps out at me are the child-object-cognition aspects...What if the parents I am working with, also see their children in isolation with objects? Just thought about how I feel about children being interrupted in their explorations – that’s not ‘children’, that’s me! (I realised that **I** did not like being interrupted).
- 120904 ‘Been reading Harter and realise that a child’s symbolic play must be nearer to their authentic self and can provide a bridge between the true and false self’
- 010305 ‘Growing awareness of disassociating myself from events/trips abroad so I won’t get hurt. If I don’t engage emotionally, then I am not investing in anything and cannot be disappointed or suffer loss’. (I decided I did not want to opt to go on a trip abroad with my work. Then I realised that opting ‘not to go’ was a form of protecting myself from the pain of disappointment if I was not selected to go).
- 060605 ‘At nursery planning, one of the workers was describing a little girl burying play people in the sand and saying something like “the family’s buried” – several people laughed nervously and did not pursue the emotional content of the play. I suggested she might be exploring death or some emotional focus. The worker, who was temporary, looked confused as if to say “What shall I do with this?” I said I



would not lead or make assumptions but listen carefully and make the sort of comments I had heard Margaret making, for example “I wonder what happened next?” or “I wonder what or who you are thinking about?” (I behaved a little clumsily here. The worker showed discomfort and instead of staying with the discomfort, I was quite directive and drew on what I had observed another worker do and say in a similar situation. I was still unsure of how to handle the situation).

- 210605 ‘Have changed the focus of my study to include my understanding – I am questioning everything I do in terms of defenses’.
- 230605 ‘Have been thinking about my tendency to avoid emotions. Judy (Social Work colleague) mentioned ‘staying with the discomfort’ and ‘not knowing’. I need to *stay with the discomfort of the emotion* (usually based on my values and upbringing), or *with the area under discussion; be aware of the language I use; be aware of my usual defensive strategies; slow the process down and not move things on.*’ (Here I detected a back and forth movement between my old way of being and my new awareness with a kind of ‘perspective transformation’ (Mezirow, 1981).
- 290605 ‘Looking through my data prior to PhD seminar, I noticed that I was getting upset about the children’s pain of separation. Maybe I chose some families because I care about them? Am I getting upset because I know them? Did I choose those families because they would not challenge me and would allow me to adopt my usual defensive position in relation to strong emotions?’

I began to think about myself. Was it always my unconscious intention to study myself and those close to me? Looking back, when I was at college in the 1960s I wanted to study my younger siblings but that was not valued, then I learned about child development from bringing up my own children (this was a bit too full on to include records and reflection), then I had an opportunity to study Georgia and Harry and took that further than most people do (by writing books about them)'.

- 101206 Email to an MA student 'Everything we do probably has cognitive and emotional meaning, mediated through our social situation'.
  
- 281206 'Three ways young children seem to use schemas in relation to emotional learning:
  1. Comfort/familiarity to return to especially 'enveloping'
  2. Giving form to, for example 'proximity'
  3. Exploring/trying out to understand a concept or feeling

I have offered a few examples of the many entries in my learning journal that show how my thoughts and feelings were developing slowly over time. I have also begun to value that 'slow knowing' recommended by Guy Claxton. He explained that,

In a state of continual urgency and harassment, the brain-mind's activity is condemned to follow its familiar channels. Only when it is meandering can it spread and puddle, gently finding out such uncharted fissures and runnels as may exist (Claxton, 1997, p.214).

I have also begun to apply some of my learning about myself to other adult learners.

## **Adult Learning**

Since I finished making observations of the children for my study, I have been mostly working with adult learners. I have found myself reflecting on some of their approaches to study, particularly students, who, like me, are very defended. I have been able to apply some of my learning about myself to other adults in order to understand them better. The adults I have had contact with seemed to be using the following three stereotypical models to defend their positions. I have used elements of all three at different times.

### **MODEL ONE**

The adult gathers knowledge and defends it. They only look for affirmation of their knowledge and worth. They often write long passages about the organisation in which they work, claiming some of the shared knowledge built up over time in the organisation. They are saying “I’ve got so much treasure and knowledge (behind me) that you can’t hurt/attack me. I am not moving away from that knowledge”. *This is a ‘stuck’ model.*

### **MODEL TWO**

The adult uses an “I’m not bothered” attitude. The adult does not invest any hope in their endeavour. They expect to suffer loss or failure anyway. They are saying “You can’t hurt me because I don’t care anyway”. *This is a ‘distrustful’ model.*

### MODEL THREE

The adult blames everyone else. This may be the result of confused messages from childhood. This model fits with the old view of intelligence as pre-determined. They are saying “I’m going to fail because of my family/Ofsted/my headteacher/ not being able to access books”. *This is a ‘helpless’ model.*

I now want to draw from my reflections a ‘masterful’ or ‘agentic’ model, that might look something like this:

### MODEL FOUR

The adult takes responsibility for their own learning, expecting to put in effort but also willing to receive and to ask for support from others. The adult gets to know himself and his/her ways of learning and uses that information and insight. The adult is open to new ideas, prepared to listen and to share and sees learning as fluid and ever changing. They are saying “I can trust the learning process”. *This is a ‘masterful’ or ‘agentic’ model.*

### Summary

My reflections on the action related to:

- Basic psychological needs observed in the children
- Repeated patterns as a ‘transitional phenomenon’
- Possible gender differences
- The different functions of schemas

- Links with metaphor and brain research
- Reflective Abstraction and Reflective Expansion
- Raised awareness of my construction of the world of relationships
- Adult Learning

## **Afterword**

Late in this process of reflection, I revisited a paper I had had for some time by Fred Levin (1997). Levin was considering ‘transference’ and was coming from a psychoanalytic perspective and making links with research on the brain and on cognitive development. Some of what he said resonated with me. He described ‘aha’ moments by stating that he had observed ‘two significant basic patterns in the scanning data of Lassen, Ingvar and Skinhoj (1978)’,

First, when people are significantly interested in what they are attending to, they appear to activate simultaneously their primary cortical association areas for touch, hearing and vision; when people are engaged only half-heartedly, however, these same brain areas activate serially (Levin, 1997, p.1130)

I found myself making links with Papert’s passion for gears and with Harry’s passion for string and connecting. When a human being is encouraged to follow their deep interests, they literally light up and the satisfaction they demonstrate is obvious to others. When children are ‘deeply involved’ or demonstrate ‘chuffedness’, they are making or have made some new connections within the affective and cognitive domains (Laevers, 1997; Tait, 2005).

Levin also reflected on metaphor and how metaphor used in analysis could enable a patient to see a situation 'in a novel way'. I thought about how this linked with using video to reflect on children's actions. Metaphor was once removed from the experience and possibly provided a 'containing' experience for the patient (Bion, 1962). In a similar way, viewing video of the children's actions seemed to help me and the parents consider the meaning at one step removed from the original action (Woodhead et al, 2006; Zelenko and Beham, 2000).

Levin saw metaphor as providing a 'bridge' between the senses, so that new insights could be made. I will continue to reflect on the function of metaphor and how it relates to schemas in young children's behaviours.

## 4.2 Reflections on the Literature

### **Introduction**

On reflection, I noticed that I went from what I knew already and was very familiar with, to seek and make connections with new knowledge and finally grappled with literature I found a lot more challenging. I also looked across the literature at the role of the adult as I thought that that would help me address the “So What?” question.

### **Beginning with What I Knew**

I began my search of the literature with what I knew and had studied previously, seeking the comfort of the familiar and affirming my knowledge and thinking. I explored Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s writings more thoroughly than I ever had before and, within those explorations, found some fresh aspects on which to focus my attention. Despite reading and dipping into Piaget’s work over many years, the concept of ‘reflective abstraction’ was new to me. I suspect I had previously ignored the concept as I was on a mission to understand other concepts, such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘accommodation’. Ironically, while I was focussing on gaining a deeper understanding of those concepts, I could not ‘accommodate’ to the concept of ‘reflective abstraction’. It took me a long time to make sense of ‘reflective abstraction’. I did this by some slow thinking and by applying the concept to some data, as described in the last section (Claxton, 1997). I enjoyed searching, not knowing and having my curiosity re-ignited.

## Seeking New Knowledge

The critical incident about Harry and String that I described earlier, prompted me to seek some new knowledge within the literature. I had to move away from the security of child development and take on the challenge of psychoanalytic writing. I decided that I needed to mention Freud's work as background, but that studying Freud thoroughly was more than I could manage in the time that I had.

I had previously studied Bowlby's work, but revisiting his work, in the light of the observations I had made, enhanced my understanding. I also gained a great deal by reading about the Strange Situation (Solomon and George, 1999) and Adult Attachment (Bretherton and Munholland, 1999). *Some of my greatest learning was about my own Internal Working Model of relationships. This knowledge has already offered me some insights into my behaviour and that of other people.* This was where what was happening to me, personally, overlapped with what I was reading about.

I found Fonagy's descriptions of 'mentalizing' and 'reflective functioning' most helpful (Fonagy, 2001, p.166). Fonagy explained that '...to mentalize is to assume thoughts and feelings in others and in oneself...' (ibid, p.169) and is the basis of symbolisation. I was eventually able to apply this concept to myself and to the children and parents. *Whereas adults usually 'mentalize' by thinking, young children seemed to 'mentalize' by replaying their actions and those of others.*



Winnicott was absorbing in a similar way to Vygotsky. He wrote in a very straight forward way. I could understand what he was saying but he had depth and I could see that he deeply understood children and families. He was writing from a practitioner perspective and that showed through. I used his concept of ‘transitional phenomenon’ to think of schemas as repeated actions that enabled children to replay aspects of their experience in order to gain some understanding (Winnicott, 1991). *The schema served as a transition between an experience or feeling and understanding that experience or feeling.*

I was fortunate enough to have some personal contact with Colwyn Trevarthen and Daniel Stern while I was reflecting on the observations I had gathered. Trevarthen shared many of his papers with me and also recommended the work on metaphor by Turner, referred to in the last section. I found Trevarthen’s writing difficult to understand but I did persist and the following was a note I made in my journal on 310705:

‘Have been reading Colwyn’s papers for the last couple of days. Much of the technical, academic stuff I don’t understand yet but all the way through there are some clear messages:

- Babies are programmed to respond to and to interact with other people
- Babies learn from their interactions and shared interests with others
- Babies learn in ‘direct interaction with the emotions of a partner’ (1994, p.2)
- There is an ‘innate motivation for cultural learning’ (1994, p.4)
- The adult partner does not necessarily teach but adapts to the infant’s need to comprehend as in ‘motherese’

I can remember comparing Trevarthen's references to culture and cultural learning with Bruner's approach. Narratives cropped up in Bruner's writing and also in the attachment literature in relation to adults being able to give a coherent narrative account of their early relationships within their family. I began to gain a deeper understanding from reading, applying concepts to the data and was very encouraged to find some similar concepts across the two disciplines of child development and psychoanalytic research.

My knowledge and confidence was further enhanced by meeting Janet Shaw, who had studied schemas and emotions for her PhD (1991). I shared some of my observations with her and, again, gained some affirmation of what I was thinking about the children's explorations.

### **Grappling With the Literature on the Brain**

I was keen to understand some of the recent research on the brain. In this instance, I found it extremely difficult to make connections with anything I already knew about. Just as, in the early days, I needed Bruce and Nutbrown to translate the difficult language associated with schemas, I now needed a translation of how the brain functions in simple language.

Some books were easier to understand than others. I got very excited about Damasio's work at one point (1999). He seemed to be saying that actions included emotions. He stated (1999, p.92) that 'specific behaviours are accompanied by a flow of emotional states as part of their unfolding'. He related emotion to motion as Trevarthen did (ibid). However, I was not sure what I was looking for although Chris Athey had indicated that Edelman held the key to understanding how children's explorations linked with their brain

activity. Edelman’s writing was difficult at first for me and even though I revisited it, I did not have enough basic knowledge about the brain to make links.

When I came across Matthew’s explanation about ‘attractors’, that was something of a breakthrough for me (Matthews, 2003). This was something I could understand and relate to. Modell’s explication of Edelman’s work was similar and linked closely with repeated patterns that are categorised and stored as ‘a potentiality awaiting activation...’ (Modell, 1996, p.221). Those patterns of action enabled children to begin to generalise so it seemed logical that each event was categorised in the brain in some way.

### **The Role of The Adult**

I knew that the role of the adult was critical in practice with young children, so I looked across the literature to see and record what was being recommended. The theorists are presented in the order that they appeared in my study:

Table of Adult Role Across the Literature

Theorists/Researchers	Adult Role Recommended
Piaget (1951)	Arrange the environment so that children can discover and extend their concepts
Vygotsky (1978; 1986)	A more able peer or adult observes and leads with next step within the ‘zone of proximal development’. Children learn by doing real tasks.
Athey (1990)	Constructivists are interested in what the learner brings to the learning situation. Adults validate with interest and approval and offer language to match actions
Matthews (2003)	The best teachers relate to very young children as fellow learners. A teacher is an adult companion to the child on an intellectual adventure. Adults and children need shared understandings and the adult offers the child the illusion of complete control.

Bruner (2006)	The adult assists by ‘scaffolding’ what was initially beyond a child.
Moll and Greenberg (1990)	Sharing ‘funds of knowledge’. Knowledge is obtained by the children, not imposed by the adults.
Rogoff (2003)	Learning in ‘intent participation’, children are expected to join in community activities.
Goodman and Goodman (1990)	Teachers as, initiators, observers, mediators and liberators.
Reggio Approach – Rinaldi (2006)	Learning is situated in a social context. Adults and children co-construct learning. The web of reciprocal expectations sustains individual and group processes. Emphasis on observing, documenting and interpreting children’s processes.
New Zealand – Carr (2001)	Children learn through artefacts, activities and social communities. Documentation of children’s, parents’ and teachers’ learning stories is emphasised as well as children’s dispositions to learn in different contexts.
Rogers (1980)	Acceptance, genuineness and non-possessive love.
Balbernie (2003)	Naming feelings and non-verbal interactions, such as pretend play, mutual referencing and shared states all contributed to making the child feel secure and consolidate a reflective function in the child.
Music (2004)	‘One foot in the ditch’, could be playfully in touch with, but not feel overly threatened by their infants’ emotion.
Biringen et al	Four parental dimensions (sensitivity, structuring, nonintrusiveness, and nonhostility) and two child dimensions (responsiveness to parent and involvement of parent).
Trevarthen (2002)	Concept of ‘companionship’, two head thinking. The adult adapts to the infant’s need. The child is in direct contact with the emotions of others.
Elfer (2007)	The adult is emotionally open to what can be felt as well as seen and heard when observing young children.
Pen Green Research (2005)	Ten Pedagogic Strategies (2005) Including Subtle Intervention

Looking across the literature, the emphasis seemed to be on a two way relationship and power sharing. The adult sometimes led but often children would lead by ‘obtaining’ the

knowledge they needed. Real tasks and relationships were important. John Matthews' description of being 'an adult companion to a child on an intellectual (and I wanted to add 'and emotional') adventure', resonated with me.

## **Summary**

In my reading, I have drawn on the three disciplines of Child Development, Psychoanalytic Writing and Brain Research to gain a clearer understanding of the links between schemas, emotions and attachment. I went from what I knew well to literature that I could barely understand. I began to know I was making some progress when:

1. I could understand concepts I had previously found too difficult to comprehend and articulate;
2. I applied the concepts to data I had gathered;
3. I began to come across similar concepts within the different disciplines.

### 4.3 Reflecting on Preparing for the Action

*‘Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgement will be sure; Since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgement. Go some distance away because the work appears smaller and more of it can be taken in at a glance, and lack of harmony or proportion is more readily seen’ Leonardo Da Vinci*

#### **Introduction**

In this section I have reflected on:

- What worked well?
- What difficulties arose?
- In future I will... in relation to the method.

#### **What worked well?**

On reflection and taking a step back from the research process in order to see more clearly, it was the combination of the following three aspects that worked well together:

- Applying theory to practice;
- Engaging in dialogue;
- Reflection.

Gathering video observations meant that the raw data was always available to revisit, either alone or in dialogue with parents and workers.

It took me a long time to decide to use the two theoretical frameworks of attachment and schemas but once I had taken that decision and I began to apply the theories systematically, I really started to engage in a process of deepening my understanding.

Using a learning journal enabled me to reflect and to record very minor events or thoughts that only took on significance later on in the process.

Writing up took two years. I found that I had to wallow in the data in order to get to know it well and to begin to make some sense of each child's story. I enjoyed wallowing and at times suspected that I was using the opportunity as an escape. Wallowing also meant that I began to feel what each child felt to some extent. Laurel Richardson (2000, p.923) described 'writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic' She continued by stating that 'This "worded world" (that we attempt to write about) never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying' (ibid).

Cherryholmes (1988, p.67) made a similar point about reading, 'Reading uncovers multiple messages and voices in the text as the reader moves back and forth from herself or himself to what is written'. I certainly became aware of the language I was using when I was writing up and when I was distancing myself from an idea or a relationship in my writing. The use of the word 'I' was very significant and I have only been referring to the study as 'my' study for the last few weeks, after being challenged to do so by a colleague.

Rather than the traditional image of triangulation of research in order to validate findings, 'Laurel Richardson offered the idea of crystallization as a better lens through which to view qualitative research designs and their components'(Janesick, 2000, p.392). She offered the image of the crystal as something that 'grows, changes and alters'. Another aspect of the crystal was that 'What we see depends on how we view it, how we hold it up to the light or not' (ibid). I have also been thinking about the *process* of crystallization as a metaphor for how I conceptualised my ideas over time.

### **What difficulties arose?**

The sheer volume of data generated by gathering 15-30 minutes of video data on each child monthly was hard to handle. My intention to watch all of the video sequences alongside parents and workers, sometimes separately, was unrealistic.

Being in a state of not knowing was sometimes difficult for me. I could not offer the parents and workers much clarity about what I was doing for some time (see the letters in Appendix Seven). I felt that it was my role to be clear and to communicate a coherent plan of action. I now understand that not knowing is a state I am likely to be in much of the time if I am prepared to be open to new learning. If I can be confident in not knowing and in doubting what I think I know, perhaps there will be space for me to hear what others have to offer.



## **Next time I will...**

If I were to repeat this study, I would

- Ask for interested parents to volunteer
- Share the two theoretical frameworks with parents and workers prior to embarking on the study
- Gather data and make time for dialogue during a shorter research period, for example, six months at the most
- Identify a 'hot spot' during which to film five minute sequences, perhaps during separation or another transition time during the day (Jordan and Henderson, 1995)
- Perhaps offer a group experience during which to view the video
- Involve parents and workers much more fully in the interpretation of the observations

#### 4.4 Implications for Practice

My learning from this study has been valuable and worthwhile to me, as an individual, as well as to me, as a worker and researcher. My raised awareness of what I think is happening for the children, as well as my increased awareness of my own style and defensive behaviours, is worth sharing more widely.

I would like to be part of a movement, which has, I think, already begun, to promote affect, so that we work with young children in early childhood settings in a more holistic way (Goleman, 1996). It is more than ten years since Daniel Goleman's book on 'Emotional Intelligence' was published. It was considered groundbreaking then. Goleman showed how 'emotional intelligence could be nurtured and strengthened in all of us'.

The main outcomes of my study indicate that work could be carried out on:

- The association between affect and cognition as shown in children's schemas and attachment
- Helping workers to plan to support children's understanding of emotions and attachment
- The possibility of raising the level of awareness of their own feelings and motivations in adults undertaking child study
- A better understanding of the role of the adult in relation to children's all round development

Adults need space to think about emotions and children need space to explore emotional issues. I want to propose three ways of thinking about taking this work forward:

- (1) Through exploring what the findings mean, in terms of everyday practice in settings with young children
- (2) Through offering professional development to multi-disciplinary teams on schemas and attachment
- (3) Through carrying out a shorter study with children, parents and workers, taking into account the learning about method. This could result in short case studies of practice, put together to form a book to disseminate ideas more widely

### **(1) Implications for Everyday Practice**

Susan Isaacs was a teacher and a psychoanalyst and was keen to differentiate between the two roles. The educator, according to Isaacs ‘must be a “good” parent to the child, even though she be a strict one’ (Isaacs, 1933, p.410). The analyst needed to ‘tolerate the hate and aggression’ of a child, whereas the educator ‘attracts to herself mainly the forces of love’ (ibid). She acknowledged that her psychoanalytic training had given her insights into the children’s inner worlds but she insisted that

The psychoanalytic study of young children serves to reinforce the established values of the best practice of modern educators. The value of play, play with companions, free imaginative play as well as play leading to ordered skill and knowledge, is enormously supported and confirmed by this deeper study of children’s phantasies (ibid, p.428)

In her volume on Intellectual Growth, Isaacs stated that

They were just as free to play out their phantasies by imaginative and dramatic games as they were to garden, to cook, to sew or to go shopping (Isaacs, 1930, p.46).

The emphasis in the Malting House School was on freedom of expression and the acceptance of and interest in the whole range of behaviours displayed by the children. This meant that children were still given boundaries but not whipped, as was common at the time. Usually, within the school, misdemeanours were dealt with mildly.

I think that when I was using a purely cognitive focus to analyse children's schemas, I was missing out on a great deal of the information available. I was not accepting or deeply interested in all of their motives and behaviours. In everyday practice, I would listen more, try to notice and be open to or even 'feel' what children are feeling. I am not sure that we can 'learn to feel' more but if we listen and watch children carefully and guard against closing down any expressed feelings in the children, then that is a beginning.

The role of the adult, as expressed in the literature is a very subtle one, promoting the idea of companionship, being alongside, creating the illusion of mastery and control in children...It seems that *less is more, in terms of how adults respond to children's emotions*. Holding my arms open to a sad child, instead of distracting them with a story...Not being engulfed by their pain but listening, holding and 'containing' the pain and reassuring them that they will recover while acknowledging their current hurt...Planning stories to nourish each child's emotional development...Sharing a child's pain with their parents...even for the loss of a pebble.

## **(2) Offering Professional Development Opportunities**

Within my experience, working with multi-disciplinary teams in a group often provides a cognition/affect balance because of the different professional training and expectations. I could envisage sharing some of what I have experienced and worked through with groups of workers on a one or two day professional development opportunity. In this instance, I would introduce the two theoretical frameworks of attachment and schemas and use some of the case study material as raw data for participants to analyse. I would encourage reflection during the training and subsequently. Participants could be encouraged to carry out a child study in their own settings, using a similar methodology.

## **(3) Carrying Out Further Research**

I would like to give other workers an opportunity to experience some of what I have experienced. The parents and workers of six children could be invited to participate in a six month study. I think that some preliminary work on the theoretical frameworks would mean that each would get more out of the study. A rough time plan could be:

- *Five weeks preparation* – parents and workers to self select and be clear about the time commitment, that is, weekly meetings lasting one and a half hours over a six month period
- First meeting – information sharing about study
- Second meeting – background information about children
- Meetings three and four – sharing theoretical frameworks

- Meeting five – discussion about who is most appropriate to film each child, participant worker or colleague, researcher, parent
- *Five weeks filming* – after some preliminary ‘getting to know’ each child and using the camera, five minutes film gathered once a week for five weeks. Group meet weekly to share material, feelings and reflections
- *Five weeks revisiting and reflecting* – with the idea of constructing short case studies, the weekly group meetings focus on revisiting video sequences, discussing, analysing and reflecting.

The findings could relate to

- understanding each child’s behaviour with regard to; cognition, affect and the interaction between the two; gender; general development
- understanding each adult’s behaviour and feelings
- testing the method

### **Afterword**

I want to say a few last words, some relating to the study and others to me, as a student. I want to reiterate the value of child study from which I have learned so much. During the process of getting to know those few children, I became an advocate for each of them. There were generalizable aspects but also unique aspects about each child and I do not want to forget those aspects in my enthusiasm for wanting to show the value of my study for others in the field. To understand another individual’s passions and interests and ways of knowing and feeling is a fine thing to achieve.

As a student, I could carry on with this study for ever. I have known for some time that I did not want to finish, to let go of what has become such a major part of my life. I have, however, been preparing to end this study rather than finish studying as I am sure I will continue to be interested in young children's development and learning in the future.

Ten years ago I concluded my Master's Study with a quote from Alexander Pope, one of my favourite poets. It was written over two hundred years ago and seems appropriate now:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,  
The proper study of Mankind is Man (Pope, 1985, p.121)

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## Appendix One

Jordan Date of Birth: 13-03-00

Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
12-12-02 2:08:29	2 hours narrative	Rather unfocussed, unsupported. Interest in inside/outside of containers, suspending his bottle, going through
31-1-03 2:10:18	1 hour narrative	Throwing self against adults. Jumping off steps in softroom/pushing other children
13-3-03 3:00:00	20 min video obs	Containing water and play person in container/filling and emptying. Very focussed/Tracey supporting
27-3-03 3:00:14	20 mins video obs	String and connecting and lines with Colette
29-5-03 3:02:16	Narrative	String and connecting with Cath
17-6-03 3:03:04	Narrative	Scooting on a small trike
10-7-03 3:03:27	20 min video obs	Playing with Shaye, both pushing buggies and dolls/ going between tree stumps/using same route
11-8-03 3:04:29	24 mins video obs	Connecting with string to Cath, rotating and enclosing handle bars with string
10-9-03 3:05:28	Narrative	Tipped out water and immersed hand in it/stopped at threshold to outside
18-9-03 3:06:05	Narrative	Lined up edge of tea towel with table edge and immersed hand in spilt drink and yoghurt
19-9-03 3:06:06	Narrative	Made sounds/throwing voice/ trajectory?
22-9-03 3:06:09	Narrative – Sihaya's first day	Searching behaviour
25-9-03 3:06:12	Narrative	Sneaked looks at Maria and Sihaya
30-9-03 3:06:17	Narrative	Played 'Hello/Goodbye' with buggy and doll
6-10-03 3:06:23	26 mins video obs	Sneaked looks at Tracey/going through and breaking boundary/Hello/Goodbye with shopping trolley
20-10-03	Discussion with Andrew	
21-10-03 3:07:08	30 mins video obs	Being contained in barrel/wanting to be completely enveloped/disappearance-reappearance
27-10-03 3:07:14	Narrative	Drew lines with chalk/threw chalk and jumped over line
28-10-03 3:07:15	Narrative	Trajectory/jumped down steps
31-10-03 3:07:18	Narrative	Stood against me (Tracey off sick)/Made a side to side gesture to communicate "Again"

Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
4-11-03 3:07:22	Narrative	Tipping out/Going behind the blinds, envelopment/trajectory, jumping down steps
6-11-03 3:07:24	28 mins video obs	Sweeping/trajectory and containing in dustpan and bin with Tracey
7-11-03 3:07:25	Narrative	Throwing voice/echoing "are!" for "We are!"/After lunch ritual
10-11-03 3:07:28	Narrative	Throwing voice inside garage
17-11-03 3:08:04	18 mins video obs	Making birthday cake with Katey/core with radial/intoned counting/swept up glitter and dough
28-11-03 3:08:15	30 mins video obs	Going through a boundary/threading with Tracey/ "Bye bye" with side to side gesture
5-12-03 3:08:22	32 mins video obs	Dance at the gym/very intimidated/letting go of balloon/connecting string to branch of tree
15-12-03	Discussion with Tracey	
13-1-04 3:10:00	Narrative	Connected string to branch of tree/made a swing shape
13-2-04 3:11:00	34 mins video obs	Dance at the gym/green wellies very important to J/jumped off giant reel in Beach Area along with other children
16-2-04 3:11:03	Narrative	Led me to reel and jumped off/trajectory
19-2-04 3:11:06	Narrative	Played with Andrew/enveloped in box and bursting through/person permanence/here and gone/going through
22-3-04 4:00:09	15 mins video obs	Filled buckets with sand, smoothed surface, tipped out and squashed/wants only Cath to join in
1-4-04 4:00:19	Narrative	Divided paper systematically/lines and trajectory
15-4-04 4:01:02	16 mins video obs	Pushed trolley between me and Katey/connecting and lines/Placed lock gates in and removed them/trajectory
10-5-04 4:01:27	14 mins video obs	Joined in with 'Sally the Camel' by banging table/trajectory/pushed trolley/trajectory/threw voice
13-5-04 4:02:00	Narrative	Joined in with actions at lunch/climbed fence/tried to connect sellotape to fence/kissed Maria 'Goodbye' and then wanted to go with her
14-5-04 4:02:01	Narrative	Pushed Chloe on swing/trajectory/wanted sellotape connected to fence
18-5-04 4:02:05	35 mins video obs	Dance at gym with Colette filming/joins in/liked being enveloped by parachute
3-6-04	11 mins video obs	Banged on table to symbolise Angela's

4:02:21		absence/scooting on trike up and down hill near Sihaya/Goodbye kiss for Maria/interested in ball suspended and swing
Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
9-6-04	Discussion with Maria	
15:06:04 4:03:02	Narrative	Waved side to side to communicate I told him I was going
15-6-04 4:03:02	10 mins video obs	Jordan at dance in the gym looking very confident/enjoyed holding elastic enclosure and being enveloped with parachute
17-6-04 4:03:04	Narrative	Being pushed in a buggy by Kearnu (very pleased)/filling a hole with Trevor/looked to see if I noticed
22-6-04 4:03:09	7 mins video obs	Outside on bike after lunch/inside large cube singing to self/voice amplified
28-6-04 4:03:15	30 mins video obs	Secured rope to fence/climbed onto cube and tested security of rope
5-7-04	Meeting with Maria and Andrew	
10-8-04	Meeting with Tracey	

## Appendix Two

Chloe Date of Birth 28-7-00

Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
17-1-03 2:05:20	1hr 40m narrative	Filling and emptying
31-1-03 2:06:03	11mins video obs	Role play in homecorner with Megan/up-down movement with spoon/using phone/mouthing objects/pushing buggy and doll/switching light on and off
25-2-03 2:06:28	20 mins video obs	Covering hands with paint alongside Connor. Washing paint off/cleaning/filling and emptying/watching Connor and Ryan throw wet paper towels at mirror and wall. Back to handpainting and handwashing
7-3-03 2:07:07	25 mins video obs	At sink near Ellis/holding bunch of straws/holds one under flow of water. Manipulating buttons in a container/empties them out. Paints large egg tray. Paints enclosures then fills in
20-5-03 2:09:22	30 mins video obs	At sink filling jugs with water, fills plant pot (goes through), tries to fit large spoon in container/wets paper towels. Filled bottles and lined them up/took jug to bathroom, put soap in and filled it making bubbles/empties. Makes "coffee". Cleans table/spreads cloth out
9-6-03 2:10:12	30 mins narrative	Filling watering cans with water and pretending it's beer with Connor
7-8-03 3:00:10	41 mins video	Filling buckets with sand/using hose/restricting flow with finger. Filling back of truck with water for a long time (goes through)/looks through. Intersted in looking through camera. At water tray alongside Connor filling and emptying bottles and transferring water from one to another
21-8-03	Discussion with Arlene	
26-9-03 3:01:29	17 mins video obs	Filling line of buckets with water alongside Connor. Restricting the flow of water with finger. Counting
21-10-03 3:02:23	29 mins video obs	*Changes at home. Clingy. Using computer alongside Connie. Cuddles from Denise. Trades to get high heels she wants.
27-10-03	Discussion with Arlene	
6-11-03 3:03:09	9 mins video obs	Playing mum and baby with Connor in bed in the homecorner. Feeding Connor with pretend bottle
28-11-03 3:04:00	30 mins video obs	Playing with putting cards into a box and placing the lid on. Goes in puddle and gets her tights wet. Sweeps the surface of the water in the barrel alongside Connor and directs hose.



Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
1-12-03 3:04:03	Narrative	Comes for a cuddle with Angela. Mentions fireworks and a car set on fire
5-12-03 3:04:07	32 mins video obs	Playing going to McDonald's and going to Asda with 3 dolls in playcar. Lights off. Proud of having 2 phones. Throwing doll down the stairs. Interest in being bigger.
26-1-04	Discussion with Chloe while viewing video	
19-3-04 3:07:19	Narrative	My first day back off hols. Chloe's Great Gran has died and her Gran has throat cancer
22-3-04 3:07:22	25 mins video obs	*Feeling low. Filling containers with sand alongside Louise and surrounding herself with them. Interested in "we" – she and Louise
23-3-04 3:07:23	Conversation with Arlene	Chloe accepts Great Gran is in heaven, thinks she is a star. Gran has had an op
26-3-04 3:07:28	Narrative	Chloe asks Denise to "Hold me like a dolly".
2-4-04 3:08:05	Narrative	Is low and unassertive. I have to be her advocate with Robert.
15-4-04 3:08:18	Conversation with Louise	Possessiveness increased. Closer to Louise. Things difficult at home.
15-4-04 3:08:18	20 mins video obs	At the dough table with Louise and other children. Wanted 'lots'. Became Kearnu's friend when he added water to the mixture.
19-4-04 3:08:22	Narrative	Video camera stolen from Chloe's home.
15-5-04	Journal	Denise is off long term and Chloe looks needier than usual.
15-6-04 3:10:18	28 mins video obs	Adult led game for Chloe and Megan involving numbers, colours and sequencing. Drawing core with radial shapes. Looking at books, not wanting to share with Megan. Looking at beds in catalogue.
22-6-04 3:10:25	16 mins video obs	Going around and round on swing and wearing ballet skirt. Cuddle with Kirstie. Adds water to cornflour through spraying. Tips mix from large container into smaller container.
24-6-04 3:10:27	Narrative	Insight into thinking – "My hair's not growed yet". Me "Are you growing your hair?" Chloe "It grows itself".
24-6-04	Journal	Chloe visits school.
5-7-04 3:11:07	27 mins video obs	Clingy to Arlene on arrival. Joins Megan outside on two wheeler bikes, then shows expertise at going across the monkey bars.

### Appendix Three

Steffi Date of Birth 14-11-99

Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
29-09-03 3:10:15	2 hrs 30 mins tracking	Paints, plays with dough, then trains. Plays at sink, 'daddy dying', then with the farmyard. Steffi and Dana fall out. Burying animals in sand.
3-10-03 3:10:21	14 mins video obs	Covering dinosaurs with wet spaghetti. Trains going through tunnel blocked by fierce animals. Burying lion in sand.
21-10-03 3:11:07	21 mins video obs	Plays mummy and daddy trains. Layers dough to make snowman.
6-11-03 3:11:22	27 mins video obs	Play with animals at tray of lentils. Themes of sleep, having a bath, jail and death explored. Mum, Dad and baby with animals and trains.
13-11-03 3:11:29	32 mins video obs	Being a dog in the homecorner.
28-11-03 4:00:14	30 mins video obs	They are both 4 years old. Playing outside on beach but rather intimidated by boys roaring near them. Painting and watching Margaret use puppets..
5-12-03 4:0:21	25 mins video obs	Storytime with "Hello" song, 'Dear Zoo' and 'Old McDonald'.
30-1-04	Discussion with Jackie (mother)	
17-2-04	Discussion with Margaret (Family Worker)	
2-4-04 4:04:19	42 mins video obs	Playing with duplo, then trains and finally, mummies, daddies and babies with animals.
20-4-04 4:05:06	17 mins video obs	Being a 'white lion', then a wolf.
28-06-04 4:07:14	16 mins video obs	Painting with brushes and then envelops hands with paint.
2-07-04 4:07:18	18 mins video obs	Digging in beach area.

## Appendix Four

Susan Date of Birth 13-11-00

Date and Age	Length and Type of Obs	Summary of Action
31-10-03 2:11:18	2 hrs tracking/narrative obs	Interest in going through marble run, funnel and garlic press. Putting money into till.
6-11-03 2:11:24	30 mins video obs	Using drill and saw to go through a boundary. Covering with cornflour and washing off. Near Annette. Denise off.
13-11-03 3:00:00	25 mins video obs	Playing in homecorner near other children. Staying near Angela. Denise there. Dad has been visiting.
28-11-03 3:00:15	35 mins video obs	Using computer and flipchart. Filling bottle with water through funnel. Near Annette. Denise off.
5-12-03 3:00:22	30 mins video obs	Using face paints, putting on and washing off. Transferring water from one container to another. Denise there.
8-12-03 3:00:25	31 mins video obs	Playing at sink, filling rubber glove with water. Washed Sihaya's hands and arms.
8-12-03 3:0:25	27 mins video obs	Grouptime with Denise. Susan enjoyed the action rhymes. Transferred water from one container to another.
19-04-04 3:05:06	16 mins video obs	At the sink, washing hands. Then manipulated 2 play people, drew horizontal lines, then sorted pencils by colour. Played in homecorner, pretending to wash up.
June 04	Home video	At Daniel's birthday and at the fair.
28-06-04	Meeting with Sian	Denise off longterm, replaced by Kirsty.
2-07-04 3:07:19	48 mins video obs	Ran marbles through a run, connected the run, trains and track. Interested in wheel/gates – rotational movement to facilitate going through. Face paint on hand and arm and story of Blue Balloon from Alison.
5-07-04	Meeting with Sian and Susan	
9-07-04 3:07:26	25 mins video obs	Grouptime with Kirsty. Visited the dining room in preparation for having lunch at nursery. Manipulated 2 play people and cloth. Reunion with her mother.
5-08-04 3:08:23	21 mins video obs	First day of having lunch at nursery. Helped self to food, worried about spilling water. Talked about Denise's baby. Outside on beach manipulating sand.
21-09-04 3:10:08	5 mins video obs	Susan learning to ride a two wheeler bicycle. Crashed and cried. Then continued practising.

Appendix Five

Table One  
Table of Schemas and Interpretations Across the Children

Child	Schema	Interpretation
Evan	Lines	Sequence of Events/time
	Connecting	Smoothness of transitions
Hattie	Containing	Possession/having more than rivals/ 'what is mine is <b>me</b> '
	Transporting	Connecting home and nursery
	Separating	Stopping another child from connecting
	Enveloping	Power to wipe clean and arrange in her own way
Edward	Symbol misnaming	Playing with relationships and ideas about connectedness
	Going Through	Physically/with objects/emotionally?
	Connecting	Reunion/being with a friend/feeling strong
	Separating	Separation
	Transporting	Power to take with you and use in own way/repeated journey
	Containing	Seeking a container for his feelings
	Trajectory	Moving away and returning speedily/letting go of his mother/mastering loss
	Horizontal and oblique trajectory	Wobbliness/insecurity/in danger of collapsing
	Enclosing	Holding together
Jordan	Trajectory	
	Connecting	Attachment to people once removed
	Enclosure	Securing attachment (of rope)
	Rotation	
	Proximity	
	Looking through	Searching for mummy
	Going through	Understanding 'Goodbye' and separation/making secure
	Oblique Trajectory	
	Transporting	
	Containing	Here and gone
Chloe	Enveloping	
	Filling/containing	
	Trajectory	Lines of full objects/reinstating/making whole/repairing the damage (practically and therefore emotionally). Least to most desirable (high heels) – power/status symbol
	Transporting	Containing to carry or possess/link between possession and love. Transporting objects to initiate a conversation – an 'object of transition'. The power of <b>having</b> and <b>sharing</b> – wanting to have and be the same - identity
Chloe	Containing	Symbolic cup of coffee – like her mum, representing both power and closeness Filling, being close, placing objects close to each other, buckets in close proximity. Feeding with bottle – power differential/keeping objects safe to trade with others
	Enveloping	Sensation of covering hands with paint and

		soap/transforming water with paint. What's inside when objects are covered/what's happening 'inside' another person
	Enclosure	Protective shield/enclosing self with containers of sand/creating a container for herself/held in the arms of Denise/holding Connor
Steffi	Enveloping	Going to bed, getting sick, going to sleep, dying, having a bath, gone to jail (all symbolically)
	Containing	Eating up, keeping things safe/concealed (in special box)
	Seriation	Wanting the bigger one – wanting to feel more powerful Classifying daddy and mummy as bigger, stronger, more powerful than baby. Power, strength and survival (Lion, Witch and Wardrobe)
	Classification	Baddies
	Trajectory	Rain/hierarchy of attachment figures
	Going Through a Boundary	Going through a dark time before coming out. Scary inside the tunnel (creating a fearful situation in order to feel it and practise going through)
		Paradoxes – strong daddy who is injured and might not survive. Powerful lion who is sad and lonely with no companion. Link between 'having' and 'being' – can 'having' result in 'being'?
Susan	Enveloping	Transformed into someone else (a witch) Not there/seen (Daniel at his friend's house) Being here and gone Keeping people/objects together
	Going through followed by containment	Fear of unknown – sharks in Scotland?
	Trajectory	Expressing 'ambivalence', throwing away a phantasy
Courtney	Containing and overflowing	Feelings uncontained
	Proximity and separation (in Denise's language)	Conversation about Granny feeling sad and staying at home while Courtney had to come to nursery
	Trajectory and core with radials	Exploration of death by shooting, the bullet travelling and the explosion of gunfire

## Appendix Six

Pen Green Research Base,  
Pen Green Lane,  
Corby,  
Northants  
NN17 1BJ

27-01-02

### Letter of Co-operation

Dear

I am currently starting to study for a degree with University College, Worcester. I hope to carry out some research in Pen Green Nursery as the major part of my study. I hope to study two children during the first 6 months ie January to July 2001. Then, using what I learn from studying the two children, I want to study four more children over a period of 18months ie from January 2002 to July 2003.

I am interested in looking more closely at the personal, social and emotional lives of young children. We say that emotional development is the most important aspect of children's lives, but do we always treat it as the most important? Do we see emotions as negative? Do we value equally all of the experiences that children have?

In order to carry out the study, initially I would like to interview the parents/carers and Family Workers of the six children. I would like to video and photograph the children during the nursery day. I want to look at the photographs with the children to get their view on what is happening. I want to view the video with parents/carers and then workers to get their views on what is happening. This process will be repeated every 2-3 months during the study. I intend to write case studies on each of the six children.

I will be following the code of ethics outlined in Whalley, 2001, which says that "Research at Pen Green should always:

- Be positive for all the participants
- Provide data that are open to, accountable to and interpreted by all the participants
- Focus on questions that the participants themselves (parents, children and staff) are asking
- Be based on a relationship of trust where people's answers are believed, and
- Produce results which are about improving practice at home and at nursery, or at least sustaining it."

I am writing to ask for your co-operation and interest. I feel sure that everyone involved will learn a great deal from each other and that we will be able to contribute some new knowledge to the field of Early Childhood Education.

Please fill in and sign the accompanying letter

Yours truly

Cath Arnold

## Letter of Co-operation

Name.....

Position in the organisation (please tick)

Child	
Parent	
Worker	
Manager	

I am happy to co-operate with the aspects of the study that affect me/ my child/ a child I am working with.

If, at any time, anything crops up that I feel is going to be detrimental to my development or to the development of any of the participants, I will discuss it with either the researcher, Cath Arnold, or Head of Centre, Trevor Chandler.

If I decide that I do not want material (written, filmed or photographed) included, then I agree to speak to the researcher, Cath Arnold, or Head of Centre, Trevor Chandler, promptly about the material.

I expect to be consulted about what is written that relates directly to me and to see the final study.

Signature.....

Pen Green Research Base,  
Pen Green Lane,  
Corby,  
Northants  
NN17 1BJ

30-9-03

### **Letter of Co-operation**

Dear

I am currently studying for a degree with University College, Worcester and I have been carrying out some research in Pen Green Nursery as a major part of my study. Last year, along with their parents and workers, I studied two children, for 6 months. Using some of the things I learned from studying the two children, I now want to study four more nursery children from now until July 2004.

I am interested in looking, with parents and workers, more closely at the personal, social and emotional lives of young children. We say that emotional development is the most important aspect of children's lives, but do we always treat it as the most important? Do we see some emotions as negative? Do we value equally all of the experiences that children have? How do children express their emotions?

In order to carry out the study, initially I would like to interview the parents/carers and Family Workers of the four children. I would like to video and photograph the children during the nursery day. I want to look at the photographs with the children to get their view on what is happening. I also want to view the video with parents/carers and workers and to listen to what they think is happening. This process will be repeated every 2-3 months during the study. I intend to write case studies on each of the children.

I will be following the code of ethics outlined in Whalley, 2001, which says that "Research at Pen Green should always:

- Be positive for all the participants
- Provide data that are open to, accountable to and interpreted by all the participants
- Focus on questions that the participants themselves (parents, children and staff) are asking
- Be based on a relationship of trust where people's answers are believed, and
- Produce results which are about improving practice at home and at nursery, or at least sustaining it."

I am writing to ask for your co-operation and interest. I feel sure that everyone involved will learn a great deal from each other and that we will be able to contribute some new knowledge to the field of Early Childhood Education.

Please fill in and sign the accompanying letter if you are willing for your child or a child you are working with to be included

Yours truly

Cath Arnold



## Letter of Co-operation

Name.....

Position in the organisation (please tick)

Child	
Parent	
Worker	
Manager	

I am happy to co-operate with the aspects of the study that affect me/ my child/ a child I am working with.

If, at any time, anything crops up that I feel is going to be detrimental to my development or to the development of any of the participants, I will discuss it with either the researcher, Cath Arnold, or Head of Centre, Trevor Chandler.

If I decide that I do not want material (written, filmed or photographed) included, then I agree to speak to the researcher, Cath Arnold, or Head of Centre, Trevor Chandler, promptly about the material.

I expect to be consulted about what is written that relates directly to me and to see the final study.

Signature.....

22nd Sept 2004

**Cath Arnold: Study of Young Children's Emotional Development**

Dear

Some time ago I obtained your permission to study you/your child in the Pen Green Nursery. At the time, I knew that I wanted to consider young children's emotional development and how workers could support that development more effectively.

I have now almost completed data gathering. The data consists of: written and video observations of children (sometimes with parents and/or workers) in the nursery; interviews and discussions with parents and workers in order to understand the observations. My task is now to spend the next eighteen months analysing and writing up the findings of this study. I do still need your collaboration.

I am now much clearer about what I am trying to find out so I wanted to share my ideas with you. For a number of years workers and parents at Pen Green have been identifying children's repeated actions (schemas) in order to understand what the children, themselves, are trying to learn.

We have a lot of evidence to support the following ideas:

- Schemas are biological patterns (we all use these patterns to find out how things work)
- Schemas are universal (human beings all over the world use these same patterns to find out how things work in their environment)
- We explore the patterns at different levels (through actions or doing, pretending, knowing how things work and in our thoughts)

For some time, we have been thinking that schemas are about emotions too. When a child brings something from home to nursery because they are feeling a bit low, they are **transporting**. This is a well-known schema. In this instance, they are **transporting** objects from home to nursery in order to feel more secure emotionally. They will also be learning other things from carrying objects, eg how heavy they are.

Another commonly observed schema is **enveloping**. When children **envelop** objects, they are finding out about size and area. Sometimes a child might cover their arms with paint or take part in massage, because it feels nice and is comforting emotionally.

Some children we have observed, like **connecting** with string or sellotape. My grandson, Harry, spent a lot of time **connecting** with string at home and at nursery, just after his parents had separated. It was as though he was trying to work out what had happened within his own family. He was also learning lots of other things about knots and tying at the same time.

There are lots of schemas but these three seem particularly important to children's emotional well-being.

Sometimes children seem to repeat the pattern (schema) for comfort. Other times children seem to repeat the pattern (schema) to work out and understand what is happening in their lives.

Often young children are separating from their parents for the first time when they start coming to nursery. For some children, this is painful and they need to find either someone from whom they can receive comfort or other ways to comfort themselves. They also need to work out that their parents will leave but will come back each day. Some children we have observed like using the marble run. The marbles disappear and **go through** a kind of tunnel before reappearing. This may help children understand that their parents go away but come back after a while.

I think there is an association between schemas and emotions and that this is an important new discovery. I need to know whether this makes any sense to you in relation to your child or other young children you know or are working with. (Fill in the reply slip).

I also need to know whether when I write up the study I should use yours or your child's real name? Also, how would you feel about photos or video stills of you or your child being used in the final report? (Fill in the reply slip).

Eventually, the report would be available in the University Library at Worcester and also in our library at Pen Green. We hope to produce some training materials, including a video, so you should think about whether you would be happy for us to use video of you or your child in the training materials.

I hope to meet with you again when I have a better idea of what I am writing about you or your child – I will need your written permission at that stage to include what I have written.

Yours sincerely

Cath Arnold

Well-being Project

**Reply Slip** (Please send to Cath Arnold, Pen Green Research Base, Rockingham Road, Corby, NN17 1AG)

Name of adult.....

Name and Date of Birth of Child.....

Address.....

Telephone contact number.....

**Association between schemas and emotions**

Have you any examples of what you have seen your child or other children do repeatedly that might link with their emotions?

**Using names and photos**

Would you prefer me to use a different name for you or your child in the report?

How do you feel about photos of you or your child being used in the report?

Signature of parent or worker.....

(You can change your mind at any time about this)