

**How do Nursery Nurses, working in Day Nurseries,
interpret the 'Early Learning Goals'?**

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Abstract

In this thesis I address the research question, 'How do nursery nurses, in day nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals?' This question arises out of questions raised during my work as an Ofsted Nursery Inspector (RgNI) and the changing curriculum for pre-school children. Nursery nurses have an outcome curriculum which they are required to follow upon and this curriculum stresses the importance of literacy and numeracy. Most nursery nurses have had little training in these matters. I look at the changes in the curriculum and the effect it has had on nursery nurses working in day nurseries. I discovered that the child developmental approach, found in nursery nurse training, runs contrary to the outcomes curriculum which is being developed at present. I found that the introduction of the Early Learning Goals and the Foundation Stage, which the nursery nurses are required to follow, has caused confusion, time wasting and a lowering of morale in some day nurseries. The change from a child developmental curriculum to an outcome curriculum has meant that nursery nurses have to plan, assess and teach children skills, for which they judge many are not ready. Nursery nurses have not been trained to teach reading and writing skills or to teach anything other than basic numeracy and they do not think that teaching those subjects is necessary. I also set out to show how the role of the nursery nurse as a carer is being diminished, in order that the literacy and numeracy of children in school are improved. I show that many children in the

day nurseries that I studied, needed the care that nursery nurses can give them, if they are to be ready for the world of school.

The method used for this study was a qualitative or naturalistic research. I used a small-scale study and decided that the theories to be tested would arise in the data. I decided to collect the data over a period of eighteen months, by interviews and observations in three different types of day nurseries; a community nursery, a local authority nursery and a day nursery which was part of a large chain. I then analysed the data and built up a picture of the complex roles and tasks of a nursery nurse. I then looked at the training of nursery nurses, using documents which nursery nurses in my study would have used for their training. I compared this with the present outcomes related requirements by Ofsted. I suggest that young children in day nurseries still need a great deal of help with their personal, social and emotional development, as well as their health and hygiene skills and language development. The nursery nurse training fitted the nursery nurses with a caring role, which they saw as important. They were trained to help three to five-year-old children adapt to a group situation and also provide the atmosphere and learning through play, which they might get if they were at home. They felt that it was important for children to have a good self-image and for them to enjoy being with other children.

I found that the nursery nurses, whom I interviewed, thought that there needs to be an acceptance that some children require more caring and less teaching between the ages of three to five years, in order to prepare them for school. I

conclude that the outcomes curriculum fails to take these arguments into account and that it is more important that young children are well prepared for school, where trained teachers can then develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

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1. Introduction

Aim, Purpose and Focus of Study

The aim of this study is to answer the question 'How do nursery nurses, working in day nurseries, interpret the 'Early Learning Goals' The study sets out to discover how nursery nurses (trained childcare workers) in day nurseries, cope with the areas of learning in the early learning goals for three and four year old children and how their interpretation is affected by their training. All childcare settings which receive Government funding for children of this age are expected to follow these goals. Most nursery schools, nursery classes and combined centres have a teacher on the staff who implements the teaching aspect of language and literacy and numeracy. Most day nurseries, by contrast, do not, and the staff have had very little training to teach the aspects of numeracy and language and literacy, which are now included in the curriculum. As an Ofsted nursery Inspector, I was interested to discover how the nursery curriculum (Early Learning Goals) had evolved and what effect it was having on pre-school settings, particularly day nurseries.

The purpose of the thesis is to see how nursery nurses cope with the new curriculum, especially the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, which has been introduced by the Government to all pre-school settings. My intention was to

discover if their training fits them for this role and if the emphasis on these two areas is serving the purpose for which it was intended. The thesis sets out to investigate the changes which have taken place in the care and education of three and four-year-old children in day nurseries, since the 1972 Education White Paper (Department for Education and Science 1972). In it I will look at the introduction of the National Curriculum for school age children in the 1988 Education Reform Act (Department for Education and Employment 1988) and the influence this has had on pre-school children. I will look particularly at the educational funding introduced by the Government for three and four-year-old children and the subsequent introduction of a curriculum for these children called the 'Desirable Outcomes' (Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority 1996). These were subsequently changed to the 'Early Learning Goals' which were part of the 'Foundation Stage' (Quality and Curriculum Authority, 1999), which included children from age three to the end of the reception year.

I hope that the research outlined above will contribute to the understanding of how nursery nurses in day nurseries try to adapt to new Government policies on curriculum and training. I hope it will elucidate how they prepare for Ofsted inspections and how they equip their nurseries and train their staff on limited budgets. Day nurseries have many different roles to play and the education side of the curriculum is not necessarily as important to many of the staff as the caring aspect of their work. Because many of the staff are 'care' trained and not 'teacher' trained they interpret the curriculum differently from teachers. This results in less emphasis on the early stages of language and literacy and

mathematics, and more emphasis on personal, social and emotional aspects of the curriculum.

The thesis will highlight the fact that there still are many day nurseries, which are not, and have no opportunity to be, in the foreseeable future, linked with nursery schools or have a fulltime teacher on the staff. There are also many nursery nurses who do not see this as desirable. I also hope this research will encourage policy makers to consider whether putting emphasis on literacy and numeracy in pre-school settings is as productive as was first thought; when many children need much more help with personal, social and emotional development. I therefore hope that this may be of some small help to policy makers and the Area Directorates.

Day nurseries are mainly for children of working parents. They offer full day care (usually 8.00.am to 6.30.pm) and have an adult child ratio of 1: 8. A day nursery has to be registered with the Government regulatory bodies and is inspected every year. At least half the staff must be qualified in an early years discipline. Changes to the early years curriculum and inspection arrangements have had a particular impact on them. This is because more emphasis is now put on planning, assessment, language and literacy and mathematics. Day nurseries, traditionally, have put more emphasis on health and caring. In 2005 there were at least 13,570 day nurseries providing places for 630,525 places for children between three months and eight-years-old (Blackburn, 2005).

Personal reasons for study

I spent many years as a lecturer in a College of Further Education, training nursery nurses for the Nursery Nurse Examination Board (NNEB) qualification; I was also involved in the introduction of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in Child Care and Education. As a trained teacher, I was particularly involved in the educational aspect of this training and this included being responsible for arranging and visiting the students' placements. Having helped to train nursery nurses for twenty years and having worked as an assessor, internal verifier and external verifier for NVQs in Child Care and Education, it seemed for me a natural progression to apply for the newly-advertised post as a Registered Nursery Education Inspector (RgNI) for the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). I applied and was asked to go for one week's training in London. This consisted of going through documents, watching short clips of video and short discussions. It was quite nerve-wracking, as we had to give our ideas about activities shown on video clips and there was a great deal of paper-work to go through. We were told how to contact the nursery, what documentation to ask for and how we should conduct the feedback at the end of the inspection. We also had some role-play situations to prepare ourselves for this new situation. It was explained to us that we had one whole day or two half days to conduct the inspection and that we must write everything down in the printed notebook and give our findings to the supervisor or manager at the end of the day. We were given instructions about how to conduct ourselves and what facilities we should expect (a separate room to write up our notes and to look at the documentation provided).

I passed the training and took part in the pilot inspections. There was a great deal to think about as everything was new both to the nurseries and to me. My first inspections were

- a. A playgroup in St John's Hut in Norfolk;
- b. A private nursery school in Kensington;
- c. A day nursery in South London.

The notebook gave all the areas to be looked at. I found that if I immersed myself in the nursery and gave myself time to understand how they organised their day, I soon built up a picture of how they covered the different areas of learning and if they tried to ensure that all children were involved. Sometimes I found that the staff ensured that all areas of learning were covered, but several children were not involved. For example, I remember seeing a member of staff playing with a group of children outside and involving them in number work, in a game of Hopscotch. As far as she was concerned that covered number work, although only four children were involved. Others ensured that all children were involved in some aspect of number work. I seldom found it difficult to reach a judgement, provided I had seen everything in the notebook and that I had prepared well beforehand from the documentation sent to me.

My main concerns were to make sure that I saw and wrote down everything mentioned in the notebook. This was not always easy as some things took place when I was elsewhere. Staff were often very nervous and some completely seized up and forgot to show me essential things. I soon learnt what to ask for

and how to put people at their ease. However there was no time to spare. I interviewed the supervisor, watched activities, made notes, looked at documents while eating my sandwich and had to be ready to give the 'feedback' by 5 pm. at the latest. I had to be sure of my facts, because the report could only contain what I had said at 'feedback'. I was kept quite busy writing reports and inspecting. I remember wondering how many nurseries would ever be able to reach some of the standards we were looking for but never really challenged what we were asked to do. The fact that Ofsted was involved and the whole system of funding and the 'Desirable Outcomes' had been produced by the Government, made it feel all right. I just did the job. Some playgroups, which I visited, were not very good, in my judgement, but the inspections made them provide more stimulating activities and give more thought to what they were providing. This made me feel that the job was worthwhile.

The feedback session was sometimes quite stressful; occasionally I had to give bad news and supervisors or owners did not agree, or they complained about lack of training or Ofsted generally. I found that if I was friendly, polite and tried to ask questions in a positive manner, the staff responded and at the feedback session I had to be confident, friendly and firm. Sometimes this session needed controlling. For example, at the beginning, we were not given guidance on the number of people attending. The second one I inspected was a playgroup, when the whole committee came bringing their children. I managed to persuade them to leave the children outside with one person so that we could concentrate. It was very difficult to finish the session, as they wanted me to give them advice and help. It was a good playgroup but they really had no idea what

was expected from them or where to get planning material or guidance. Several nurseries asked for advice and guidance. I pointed out weaknesses and at the beginning I gave help where I could. After a few months we were sent instructions that we were not to give any advice at all and not to say that Ofsted required them to do things. We were just to refer to the document. I found this very difficult. I felt that I was in a very good position to give advice if the staff asked for it. They felt upset if I refused. I could easily point them to literature or help them to improve areas in physical development or whatever they required. However when I attended a training day I realised that some Inspectors were giving lots of advice and suggesting their own nursery documents. I suppose Ofsted felt some of the advice might be incorrect.

I also inspected several settings where the staff were against the inspections. At one playgroup I went to, the staff refused to speak to me at first. I had to work very hard to get them to relax and understand that I was only doing my job. It was just before the General Election and they thought the Labour Government would stop the inspections. This was a common perception at the time.

After a few years, the nursery staff were given the opportunity to evaluate the report and the Inspector. In one day nursery, the owner was very upset at some of the wording in the report, because she said the nursery down the road had had a better report and the parents would send their children to that one. I pointed out it was only a few words but she maintained it made her nursery sound worse. This made me realise how important these reports were to the nurseries.

My findings as an Inspector

It was only after inspecting many different settings that I really began to think more deeply about what these nurseries were being asked to do. I saw four-year-old children in a formal classroom setting, while the younger children were having free play activities. I also saw children having interesting and stimulating activities, although the written planning and assessing were non-existent. The more settings I inspected, the more I began to wonder how all these diverse settings could possibly conform to one curriculum and what was best for the children. One thing I did learn; if children are happy and well-behaved and kind to each other, they were more likely to be learning.

I quickly noticed a difference in the findings for different types of settings. The main difference was between those settings with teachers on the staff and those which only had staff with child care qualifications. Ofsted treated all settings as if they were the same. I noticed a difference in the grading for Communication, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Planning and Teaching. In these areas Ofsted were looking for more teacher input.

Almost all children have experience of counting games and number songs and can use mathematical language fluently. However, weaknesses persist in developing children's mathematical skills and understanding, with only three-quarters of settings requiring children to undertake practical activities designed to help them solve problems and develop their

awareness of basic numerical operations such as addition and subtraction.(Ofsted, 2000 p.11)

If the outcome for the inspection was 'Good' the provider could expect the next inspection in 2-4 years time. However if there were significant weaknesses, the provider would be inspected again in 1-2 years time. In 2000 out of the 224 settings in the 1-2 year category for further inspections, 171 of them were playgroups and pre-school settings and 27 were private day nurseries. These settings had been inspected twice and were still in the 1-2 year category (Ofsted, 2000).

By the time I retired in 2001, I had inspected over a hundred different settings. These included playgroups, pre-school groups, private day nurseries, local authority day nurseries, kindergartens and nurseries attached to private schools.

My personal ideas for a PhD research project

As an Inspector for Ofsted I had become increasingly aware that the nursery curriculum was being imposed upon settings, many of which had very little idea of what was expected. Training was sparse and often expensive. Unless settings conformed they did not receive funding. The variation in staffing and purpose of the settings meant great changes for some. It became obvious to me that the biggest difference was between day nurseries and pre-school settings and nursery schools and nursery classes. To employ a teacher is very expensive for day nurseries, so many obtained some advice and introduced the minimum

required to pass inspection. Many did not really understand the new curriculum. This aspect worried me and I also began to question the amount of emphasis being put on language and literacy and mathematics.

The differences between the settings' interpretations of the curriculum and inspection results concerned me and aroused an interest into researching how childcare trained staff interpreted the 'Early Learning Goals' and prepared for inspection.

Nursery inspections by Ofsted and the implication for nursery providers.

Ofsted Inspectors inspect all settings receiving educational funding for three and four-year-old children. These include playgroups, day nurseries, private kindergartens, nursery schools and nursery classes. The settings are inspected against the same prescribed curriculum for the Early Learning Goals, regardless of the training of the staff and the type of care that children are receiving. The Inspectors' reports are circulated to all the parents and can influence parents' choice of nursery. The Government has control over these settings because failing nurseries do not receive funding. There are questions that need to be answered. How can 'care' trained staff working in a day nursery, provide the standard required by the 'Early Learning Goals? Should they be expected to and is this the best experience for young children?

The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002) study found that having trained teachers on the staff was better for the children.

'The most effective settings encourage 'sustained shared thinking' but we also found that does not happen very frequently. When it does occur it has been shown to extend children's thinking.'

'In the most effective (excellent) settings the importance of staff members extending child-initiated interactions is also clearly identified. In fact, almost half of all the child-initiated episodes which contained intellectual challenge, included interventions from a staff member to extend the child's thinking.'

'We have found that qualified staff in the most effective settings provide children with more experience of academic activities (especially literacy and mathematics) and they encourage children to engage in activities with higher cognitive challenge. Whilst we found that the most highly qualified staff (teachers) also provide the most direct teaching, we found that they were the most effective in their interactions with the children, using the most sustained shared thinking interactions. Further, we found that less qualified staff are significantly better pedagogues when they are supervised by qualified teachers.' (Siraj-Blatchford, et al. 2002 p.10, 11)

These differences in quality are similar to recent Ofsted reports on variation in the quality of pre-school provision. It seemed to me that the outcome that Ofsted required, needed a qualified teacher input, but this is often not economically viable in day nurseries. It also poses questions such as, 'Does this new curriculum agree with the early years theorists?' 'Where has this new curriculum come from?' There are different opinions amongst educationalists as to how much structured teaching in language and literacy and mathematics young children under five-years-old, should receive. Several educationalists see too much emphasis on letter and word recognition and structured learning as being harmful to children at an early age:

Play or playful approaches to learning have a number of advantages.

These include:

The self-posed 'questions' of play activity are meaningful and relevant to the child (or children) involved.

There are usually many possibilities in play, rather than a 'right' answer.

(Nurse, 1999 p.173)

An approach which over-emphasizes letter and word recognition at the expense of developing positive attitudes to reading is one which will doom many children to a life where they can read but gain no pleasure from doing so. (Edgington, 2002 p.33)

'The language of 'teaching' engenders concern in early years practitioners who feel that they support children's development within an

enabling, facilitating and observing role rather than directly as teachers.'

(Moyles, et al. 2002 p.1)

Reasons for looking at numeracy and literacy in data

In 1996 the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning were published (SCAA, 1996a). The document states that:

The desirable outcomes are goals for learning for children by the time they enter compulsory education. They emphasise early literacy, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills and contribute to the understanding and skills in other areas. Presented as six areas of learning, they provide a foundation for later achievement .(SCAA, 1996a p.1)

In 1998 the Government introduced the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) and in 1999 the National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE, 1999). These were aimed at raising the standard of all school children. These areas were also to be encouraged in pre-school settings. Anning and Edwards, although accepting the emphasis on literacy and numeracy, were encouraged to see informal play acknowledged. There was an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, in line with the Government drive to raise standards in 'the basics' but the goals also acknowledge the importance of informal play-based learning in promoting young children's communication and social skills (Anning and Edwards, 1999).

As an Ofsted Nursery Inspector, I had to look particularly at the quality of the language and literacy, mathematical and personal and social and emotional development of the children. These were seen as the most important areas. For a setting to be judged good, all three of those areas had to be good. The other areas were not seen as so important. The day nurseries usually had more weaknesses in literacy and numeracy and less in personal, social and emotional development. Private schools pre-school classes, on the other hand, had fewer weaknesses in literacy and numeracy and more in personal, social and emotional development. I then looked at the staff training and discovered that day nursery staff were usually nursery nurses with the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 2 and 3 in Child Care while the staff in the private pre-school classes were usually trained teachers sometimes assisted by a nursery nurse. As an Inspector, I had to judge all settings as if they were the same, but obviously they were not.

Structure of thesis

In Chapter 2 I try to discover who nursery nurses are and explore the gendered and classed nature of nursery nursing. It seemed important to discover who nursery nurses were and why they chose to work with children before I could answer my research question. A picture emerges of mainly young women who like small children and who have been encouraged by schools and colleges to work with children because child care is women's work. They are usually 'working class' because 'middle class' young women have been encouraged to take 'A' levels and get better paid jobs.

In Chapter 3 I describe the methods used. The question I am asking is ‘How do nursery nurses, working in day nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals?’ To answer this question I needed to come into close contact with the lives of the nursery nurses, while they were working in day nurseries. I had to learn what their work involved and observe them while they were working. This was done mainly through observation in three different types of day nurseries and also included interviews with the supervisors and the nursery nurses in charge of the rooms where I did the observations. These proved to be rich sources of information. I used a naturalistic approach. Buchbinder, et al. (2006) saw this approach as especially appropriate for childcare sites, when studying everyday practice, government policies and practice theories. The approach was successful and I gained much useful information. I investigated by observation and interviews, how the nursery nurses interpret the curriculum presented to them.

In Chapter 4 I describe the changing curriculum for pre-school children and look at the policies which have led to the formation of the Early Learning Goals. I show how the curriculum has evolved and changed since the introduction of the ‘National Curriculum’ in 1988. I consider how a curriculum for the early years, called the ‘Desirable Outcomes’ was introduced in 1995 and then succeeded by ‘Early Learning Goals’ in 1999. I show how the tension between the discourse of caring and informality and standards, inspection and formality continues.

In Chapters 5 and 6 I look at the training of nursery nurses since 1945, how the training influenced their work, how they saw their role and how this is still true today. I show how nursery nurses see the personal, social and emotional development as being more important than literacy and numeracy development in spite of the Government demands. I show how this causes tension between the nursery nurses and the supervisors who try to prepare their day nursery for an Ofsted inspection and are required to follow the Early Learning Goals. In these chapters I also look at the introduction of NVQs in Child Care and how these have sometimes led to a lowering of standards in the training, especially for young people with no child care background.

In Chapter 7 I use data from my observations and interviews to answer the question set at the start of the study, 'How do nursery nurses, who work in day nurseries, interpret the 'Early Learning Goals?' I look at the conflict between the discourse of 'caring' and informality and the discourse of 'standards', inspection and formality. Using my data I show how this causes tension between the supervisors/manager and nursery nurses. I show how nursery nurses in my study use rhetorical justification (Sparkes, 1987) to convince an Inspector that they are following the Early Learning Goals but continue to follow their own goals.

In the conclusion I show how the nursery nurses, I interviewed, try to convince supervisors/manager and Ofsted Inspectors that the nursery is following the Government requirements. However, at the same time they believe that the children in their care, need all the time and attention they can give them to develop their personal, social and emotional development before

they enter the world of school. In order to follow their professional judgement they use rhetorical justification to justify their interpretation of the Early Learning Goals.

2. Gender, Class and Nursery Nurses

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to show that, in spite of the emancipation of women and more equality in the work place, working-class women still dominate the workforce in day nurseries. Nursery nursing is a predominantly female profession. Mori (2003), in a survey for the Day Care Trust, found that fewer than 3% of the childcare workforce were men but more than seven in ten people surveyed thought there should be a higher proportion of men working in childcare. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC, 2005b) found that only 2% of childcare workers were men.

I looked at the historical reasons for women being responsible for child care. I have used training literature, written as a text book for nursery nurses, which assumes all nursery nurses will be women. I have also used literature about the education of women and literature written to encourage men into the work force. In common with other occupations that are seen as 'feminine', the status of early years educators is low and the pay is correspondingly low. I show that the working conditions of low pay, long hours and little promotion helps to keep the profession for mainly working-class females. This chapter shows that working class girls are still encouraged into childcare because childcare continues to be

seen as women's work and young girls with no other ambitions are channelled into childcare training.

This chapter also shows some of the reasons why there are so few men in childcare.

Skeggs (1997) found that the image of early years educators as carers and essentially maternal, rather than well-qualified professionals, prevented the involvement of many men. Another reason is that men are still seen as the main abusers of children and still mistrusted in day nurseries. Skelton and Hall (2001) suggest that some see men as a potential threat to young children because of sexual abuse. Changing the gender mix of childcare staff requires an understanding of why childcare work is dominated by women. To understand this we first have to look at the history of childcare training.

How history has encouraged the concept that women are better at childcare

During the nineteenth century women became more and more responsible for childcare. According to Gaine and George (1999) at the beginning of the nineteenth century the family represented a working relationship which was engaged collaboratively in the production of such things as food and clothes. Women's skills were indispensable and interdependence between husband and wife was critical. As the century progressed, market forces dramatically altered the structure of this working relationship. The world of the family and the world of production became separate entities:

The division of labour by gender could be characterized in the following ways: for the middle-class male, the public sphere offered waged employment, a rigid distinction between work and leisure and an income which brought with it power and independence. The middle-class woman, on the other hand, was engaged in un-waged employment, with no defined work or working hours and no defined leisure time. The middle-class ideology of women as domestic labourers and responsible for childcare, and men in paid employment, became sedimented into British culture.

(Gaine and George, 1999 p.11)

Working-class women did, however engage in paid employment. Those who worked in privately-owned houses were considered acceptable but those working in factories or mills were seen as degraded beings. Women who worked in factories and mills lost many of the skills they had previously acquired.

However according to Purvis (1991):

What becomes clear is that the proper station in life for working class girls was considered to be a domestic location within the home, usually as a 'good' servant and then as a 'good' wife and mother. (Purvis, 1991 p.21)

The introduction of a domestic curriculum for girls

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a movement to promote the teaching of domestic subjects to working-class girls in all schools, especially

the new Board Schools (Purvis, 1991). According to Dyhouse (1977), girls were offered a curriculum of needlework and cookery. To cope with the growing demand for teachers to teach these subjects, the first teacher training college for domestic subjects, 'The National Training School of Cookery', was opened in 1874 (Stone, 1973).

The poor conditions in the slums during the 1900s caused concern and according to Dyhouse (1977), women in particular were blamed for their diminished sense of maternal obligation and erroneous ideas of infant care. One reason for teaching domestic subjects was to improve the competence of working-class women, as many argued that the poverty and squalor of many working-class districts could be attributed to them. One argument which was put forward was that poverty could be cured through thrift and careful housekeeping (Dyhouse, 1978). Ross (1986) states that working-class mothers were generally considered to be ignorant and neglectful. Lewis (1984) found that most late-nineteenth century investigators were repelled by urban working-class neighbourhoods because of the noise, smell and excitement. The British Government were also concerned about the 'physical deterioration' of the population, particularly in the slums in the big cities. According to Dyhouse (1977), in 1910 a memorandum was compiled by Dr Janet Campbell, a Medical Officer, which stated that there should be teaching of infant care to girls in Elementary schools. Newsholme, Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Education, was convinced that if girls and women could be taught how to take care of infants, it might be possible to diminish the high infant mortality rate and the ill-health and physical suffering caused by infant neglect, even though his

own researchers failed to support the hypothesis (Dyhouse, 1978). It is interesting to note that nothing was said about improving the living conditions in the slums, but women were to be taught how to be better at managing in the terrible conditions. Middle-class legislators failed to confront the fact that many industrious working-class men did not earn enough to keep a wife and children (Lewis, 1984). Women were forced to augment the family income by their own efforts, mostly by the sale of their own labour, thus being forced to spend less time at home (Purvis, 1994). The Victorians blamed the women instead of improving wages and the congested conditions in the slums.

Another reason for teaching domestic subjects was that the middle-class were afraid of a shortage of domestic servants in England (Dyhouse, 1978). It was hoped that the teaching of domestic subjects would encourage a proper respect for domestic duties (Dyhouse, 1977). In Victorian times many saw the function of the Board Schools was to train working-class girls to behave well and be content with lowly aspirations in the world. In other words working-class girls should know their place instead of seeing it as a life of drudgery. Whereas Dyhouse (1989) suggests that the working-class woman saw work as yet another source of oppression, to be given up as soon as economic circumstance permitted.

There were people in favour of working-class girls learning cookery and needlework and home-craft but who did not want women to study academic subjects because they thought they would become poor mothers. According to Dyhouse (1977), there were some protests about the training of girls for

marriage and motherhood from feminists such as Ida Freund and Rona Robinson but they had little effect. The move to confine women to their role of housewives and mothers was often based on assumptions about evolution. Dyhouse also points out that people such as Herbert Spencer (1893) thought that educated women showed an inability to breast feed their children and too much intellectual activity produced sterility in women. He suggested that in the 'highest' forms of human society, women were exempt from working outside the home.

A specifically female science, 'domestic science', had been introduced as an alternative to physics and chemistry in girls' secondary schools (Paechter, 1998). The increased emphasis on domestic science into the curriculum as a vocational subject had disadvantages for girls. The time taken out of the timetable for teaching domestic science displaced the teaching of other subjects. Inevitably, opting for domestic science meant that girls had to drop other subjects such as mathematics, science and a foreign language. This set the scene for the next thirty years. As Attar (1990) points out:

While girls are learning domestic subjects they are not learning anything else. (Attar, 1990 p.49)

During the First and Second World Wars women were encouraged to work in the engineering and explosives industries but were expected to return to the home at the end of both wars to focus their efforts on child rearing and home making. Professionals and politicians stressed the need to rebuild the family, and

attention focused on 'adequate mothering' as the surest way to secure future social stability (Lewis, 1992). After the Second World War, Bowlby's 'Maternal Deprivation Thesis' (1965), which suggested that any separation of a child from its mother could lead to emotional damage in the child's relationships in later life, became a forceful pressure on women to return to the home. The socialization of children and the importance of good mothering were the most frequent themes (Lewis, 1992). According to Riley, working class girls had only one option and that was the domestic curriculum. At the same time, however:

For most middle-class girls, private education provided the academic opportunities for a few but also created the social class solidarity that enabled them to get the 'right' husband. (Riley, 1994 p.36)

In the middle of the twentieth century, some influential people thought men were not suited to working with children and therefore it was obviously better for women to take childcare jobs. According to Apple (1984), women's work was considered somehow inferior or of less status simply due to the fact that it was women who did it. Caring qualities were seen as inherent in a person, not something to be taught. Some people believed that all women had a maternal instinct and therefore were suitable to work with young children. For instance Newsom (1948) put forward the same argument as in the nineteenth century, that men and women were physiologically and psychologically different and that they had different roles in society, which were complimentary and equally valuable. He suggested that women's role was in homemaking and the early nurture of children:

Few men have the patience to look after young children; a job, like nursing, for which women are peculiarly well fitted. (Newsom, 1948 p.140)

According to Lewis (1992), Winnicott, in his radio broadcasts on motherhood in the late 1940s, stressed the natural qualities of the relationship. Policy and practice, which supported this 'domestic ideology' for women and girls and the need for a curriculum differentiated by gender, was sustained by a series of highly influential reports. These included the Norwood report (Norwood, 1943) which identified the need for domestic subjects to be included in the curriculum for girls to prepare them for marriage or vocational training. Vocational training for girls usually meant subjects which prepared them for marriage, domestic service or looking after other people's children:

The grounds for including Domestic Subjects in the curriculum are (...)

The knowledge of such subjects is necessary equipment for all girls as potential home makers.

A girl is going to take up some occupation in which knowledge of domestic subjects is necessary and she desires at school to be sufficiently prepared to enter upon a course of training. (Norwood, 1943 p.128)

The Newsom Report (1963) reinforced this notion of domesticity as a vocation and introduced the idea of the care and upbringing of children as a vocational education:

For all girls, there is a group of interests relating to what many, perhaps most of them, would regard as their most important vocational concern, marriage. (...) Many girls are ready to respond to work relating to the wider aspects of homemaking and family life and the care and upbringing of children. (Newsom, 1963 p.129)

However in a sign that ideas were changing a little, the report also states:

We have not labelled crafts 'boys' or 'girls', although the workshop crafts will generally be taken by boys and the domestic crafts by girls. We regret that in many schools girls are denied the satisfying crafts of rural science. (Newsom, 1963 p.131)

As a result of these two reports there was a move to greater vocational training; for girls this resulted in more emphasis on homemaking and childcare. Apple (1984), looking back to this time, found that women's supposed nurturing capabilities and 'natural' empathetic qualities were seen to make them an ideal choice for teaching and caring for young children.

Attar (1990) points out that not only were girls seen as having maternal instincts, making them ideal to look after children, but in the middle 1960s girls considering a career as domestic science teachers were expected to be good at home crafts, have an attractive voice and also have an attractive appearance.

There were similar expectations for those working with young children. The National Nursery Examination Board was formed in 1945, conferring a nationally recognised qualification (NNEB Certificate) to train women to work with young children up to the age of five. This was later extended to seven. There was no suggestion that men would take this qualification. This assumption persisted into the 1980s. In their text book written for NNEB students, Brain and Martin (1980) write:

The quality of person she [nursery nurse] is herself will determine the quality of the care she dispenses. She needs to be physically strong and healthy, and of wholesome and attractive appearance for the children.

(Brain and Martin, 1980 p. vii)

There was, and still is, the view that workers in the early years need not be particularly intellectual. For example, in 1996 the government encouraged the link in people's minds between 'maternal' and childcare when it talked of a 'Mum's Army' of early years teachers who could teach nursery-aged and Key Stage 1 children but would be non-graduates (Browne, 2004). This encouraged the idea that it was unnecessary to be highly qualified or intellectual to work with young children. Many colleges encouraged girls with few or no qualifications to take childcare courses. Skeggs (1997) points out that colleges gave the impression that almost anyone could do childcare. She notes that with the shortage of caring staff, many young women were encouraged to take vocational courses, providing they had no history of major personality problems,

no matter what their aptitude or academic ability. A community care course
tutor notes:

All are given a chance, no-one is turned away, we try and fit their abilities, their aptitudes to the course, the only reason people are turned away is if they are physically unfit or have major personality problems which would make them unfit for caring, even those with appalling school records are given a chance. (Skeggs, 1997 p.58.)

Girls and young women, seen as having inherent qualities suitable for looking after young children, and those thought to be without academic ability, continued to be channelled into childcare. As Browne (2004) points out, the construction of early years' educators as carers and essentially maternal, rather than well-qualified professionals, has prevented the involvement of men and given the educators low status and low pay. It has also given the view that early years workers need not be particularly intelligent.

Nursery nursing – a working-class profession?

It would seem that most nursery nurses are working-class women. There are several reasons for this. The women who reach top positions in the labour market are seldom from the working classes (Walkerdine, et al. 2001) and working class young women are employed at the lower grades within most organisations (Plummer, 2000). Childcare is seen as substitute motherhood and

most working class girls do not aspire to higher education; they accept low wages and low status for the enjoyment and fulfilment of working with children (Rolfe, 2005).

Walkerdine, Lucey et al. (2001) argue that working-class girls have working-class futures and middle-class girls have middle-class futures. They point out that many women have reached parity with men in the workplace; however this is mainly the middle-class women. Although there is cause to celebrate the achievements made by and for women at work, there is still much to be concerned about, particularly the differential participation of women in the labour force. Walkerdine, Lucey et al. also suggest that many see childcare as a mechanism to enable others to participate in real careers which afford status and wealth:

Diversity in relation to the school-work transition was very much the province of the working class young women, who as a group occupied many more locations in relation to employment and study and were far more likely to move in and out of the labour and education markets. Unlike their mothers and fathers at the same age, of the working class daughters 41% of the research group had experienced periods of involuntary unemployment. (Walkerdine, Lucey et al. 2001 p.63)

Plummer (2000) shows in her research how women from working class backgrounds still end up in low-status, low-paid caring roles. She suggests that women learn from their mothers what life as a working-class woman entails.

McRobbie (1991) writing about the culture of working-class girls in the 1980s suggests that working-class girls are one of the most powerless sectors of society. They found little in school to identify actively with; they were in school but not at school. They identified with the ideas and values of their mothers and other female members of the family.

In my study from 2002 to 2004, several nursery nurses had been made redundant from previous jobs. However the fact that some had been made redundant did not seem to affect their attitude to leaving a job. The low pay and low status of the jobs seemed to result in staff frequently changing jobs, especially if they were upset by quite minor issues. Rolfe, Metcalfe et al. (2003) found that the staff in day nurseries stayed for relatively short periods and nurseries had to recruit almost continuously to retain staffing levels. The reasons given for dissatisfaction were usually low pay, long hours, having to take work home and that the staff considered the work to be substantially undervalued by society. The nursery nurses I interviewed also complained about taking work home. Rolfe, Metcalfe et al. (2003) also found that those who were thinking of leaving were going to another childcare job. I also found that some moved to other jobs frequently, sometimes because they were unhappy with aspects of the job and sometimes because of travel problems or financial rewards. Several of the reasons seemed quite trivial. The nursery nurses seemed very sure they could easily get another job. Some did not seem to worry about promotion or stability.

However Rolfe, Metcalfe et al. (2003) also found that the work itself was highly rated by the nursery nurses who valued the contact with children and variety of

the work. Cameron, Owen et al. (2001) and Cameron, Mooney et al. (2001) found similar results and also found that nearly all childcare workers were women who found caring work rewarding and enjoyable. Rolfe (2005) suggests that if a job has positive features, such as contact with children, employees will accept lower wages.

In the study by Walkerdine, Lucey et al. (2001) the overwhelming majority of working-class young women in paid employment were employed at the lower grades within their organisation. More worrying was that half of this number could not expect to achieve a promotion, an increase in pay or an improvement in job security if they stayed in their current post. They found that girls faced the labour market of the future deeply regulated and bitterly divided by class:

Women's position in the new economy is not comfortable. Young women watch their mothers struggle and do not want to have to combine work and family, but they know very well that that is precisely the future they face. Indeed more than that, they may also have to cope with men who are feeling intensely the loss of previous modes of masculinity. In these circumstances it would be difficult to say the female story is rosy.

(Walkerdine, Lucey et al. 2001 p.216)

Fenwick (2004) writing about Canadian women has this to say:

Women continue to be economically and culturally disadvantaged by gendered divisions in paid and domestic labour; women earn less, achieve

fewer of their vocational expectations, have less access to learning and advancement opportunity.---most disturbing, girls appear to accept these conditions. (Fenwick, 2004, p.182)

Rolfe, Metcalfe et al. (2003) in their research study found that nursery nurses in day nurseries were predominantly young, female and white and had low educational qualifications. Simon, Owen et al. (2003) found that childcare workers' hourly pay was two-thirds the average pay for all women and nursery nurses have the youngest profile of all care workers. Osgood (2005) argues that the classed nature of the childcare profession provides a convincing explanation for the low status and poor working conditions educators experience. She also argues that the emotional labour that working-class women invest in their jobs has little exchange value in terms of status and respect in the fast-changing world. Skeggs (1997) found that in the ever-increasing demand for caring courses, coupled with the informal policy of the caring sector to interview all students, the courses were always full. This enabled many working class girls to find training both acceptable to their peer group and families. Nursery nursing was seen as a suitable feminine job and suitable for a working class girl. It was seen as a nice safe job. She found that the decision to go on a caring course was not so much a positive decision, as an attempt to find something within constricting cultural and financial limits and something at which they were unlikely to fail:

For those who had already experienced the negative allocative function of the education system by the age of 16, whose employment prospects are

bleak and cultural capital limited, caring (whether paid or unpaid) offers the means to value, trade and invest in themselves, an opportunity to 'make something of themselves'. It enables them to be recognised as respectable, responsible and mature. (Skeggs, 1997 p.56)

According to Penn and McQuail (1997), female students were directed to childcare courses by careers officers if they were not seen as academically able for teaching. Male students were less likely to be directed towards childcare. They also found that, however hard the training, the possession of the qualification in childcare was regarded as very important, not only as a ticket to a job, but also as a solid achievement for those who had had a poor educational start. Caring may have been a means to enable young women to feel good about themselves. They had found a course where they could achieve. Most of the nursery nurses in my research had been to further education colleges because when they left school they had been encouraged to take childcare courses. Several had taken National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 in Child Care and stayed on to take NVQ level 3. One had an A level but had been encouraged to take The Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) National Diploma and another had taken National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare (NAMCW) part 1 and been encouraged to stay on and take the next level which is equivalent to NVQ level 3.

Social class remains a 'key factor' in educational success. Vocational options have grown and are largely taken up by working-class pupils and those in lower

attainment bands. Lucey (2001) found that the background of the girls they studied directly influenced how well they did at school. Examination achievements of even the 'good' working-class girls were simply not of the same order as those of middle-class girls. She also suggests that, when looking at the relationship between social class, gender and education it is necessary to look at the profound transformations that have already taken place and continue to take place at all levels of the individual, family and social world. Everyone - girls and boys, men and women have had to transform themselves in order to cope and survive in a time of great change:

Working class girls are doing better at school and gaining more qualifications at higher grades than working-class boys, but the improvement in no way challenges the consistently superior examination performance of boys and girls from the professional middle classes.

As if that were not challenging enough, it turns out that the 'new social order' of the twenty-first century retains some distinctly 'old order' features which even the shiniest meritocratic rhetoric of 'can do', 'can have' and 'excellence' cannot entirely banish. (Lucey, 2001 p.177)

She also points out that in the new century the power of class never went away. Class continues to be a vital factor in determining the educational experiences of boys and girls.

The above findings would suggest that working-class girls become nursery nurses because that is what working-class girls do.

Schooling issues resulting in working-class girls becoming nursery nurses

In the 1970s and 1980s a picture of gender inequality in the classroom was exposed. Many people thought that girls were being marginalized and belittled in the classroom, the victims of discrimination from male classmates and teachers and the school system. Spender (1982) wrote about 'Invisible Women' and described how lessons were designed to cater for male interests because if males did not get what they wanted they caused trouble. The teachers were not always aware that they gave more time and attention to boys but the students were. According to Spender, this added to the confidence of the boys and undermined the confidence of the girls. Walkerdine (1989) found that girls and women were said to be different, lacking, while boys and men's 'mastery' of mathematics, their claim to superior rationality and scientific truth, was unchallenged. As Spender (1982) commented, this was significant because qualifications in these subjects were often necessary for access to prestigious and highly remunerated careers. Walkerdine (1989) found that girls were still considered lacking when they performed well and boys were still taken to be bright even when they performed poorly. Even in the nursery, teachers had ideas that girls were different from boys and would not be able to build complex structures with building bricks. Francis (2000) writing about the 70s and 80s, found that because girls tended to choose, or were steered into, traditional feminine, non-academic subjects, such as domestic science and needlework, their 'O' level success was not viewed as significant. Delamont (1990) noted

that many girls did not seem to realize that they would have to work for most of their lives in badly paid jobs unless they left school with qualifications, even if they married. Delamont (1990) argued that schools and other educational institutions were enforcing a set of sex and gender roles, which were more rigid than those in the wider society. Schools reinforced old-fashioned sex stereotypes. They encouraged girls to choose stereotypical subjects and careers. Girls tried to plan their futures around more flexible sex roles where both career and family responsibilities were shared, but boys saw a future where they took no part in childcare or housework:

The distinction between what is natural and what is cultural is equally hard to draw. It is especially hard to disentangle the natural, biological aspects of male and female behaviour (sex) from the cultural, adaptive ones (gender). (Delamont, 1990 p.9)

She also suggested that young people derived many of their values from their homes, but, as they moved into adolescence, their friends' ideas on music, fashion, sexuality and schoolteachers became increasingly important. Archer, Halsall et al. (2007) also argue that working-class girls spend their time on their feminine appearance which draws them into conflict with the school. This contributes to their positioning as 'non-academic':

Dominant constructions of the ideal (female) pupil are predicated on a classed and gendered separation of the (working-class, female) body and the (middle-class) academic mind. (Archer, Halsall, et al. 2007 p.77)

When girls were given limited choices at 14 they often opted for feminised subjects and reverted to traditional sex stereotyped patterns. This is true of the generation of schooling from which the young women I studied emerged.

According to Paechter (1998) when choosing subjects, girls did not want to appear unfeminine and boys were the same; they wanted to appear masculine.

According to the DfES:

Pupils' subject choices are influenced by a range of factors: their own views and expectations, those of their peers, parents and teachers and the media. (DfES, 2007 p.1)

Teachers and others, working particularly with adolescents, needed to find ways of preventing male domination and masculine roles, and of protecting from ridicule those, both male and female, who wanted to take up alternative ways of being. Stables and Wikeley (1998) found strong evidence of this. Despite some movement towards equality of take-up of subjects post-14, it remained the case that secondary students perceived at least some subjects as being gendered. Where subjects were not compulsory, boys were more likely to choose physical education and geography and girls, child care, child development and French. They found that students made stereotyped choices for a number of reasons. Peer-group pressure and the need to distinguish oneself from the other gender seemed to be important factors in mixed secondary schools. Education seemed to play a part in reducing girls' self-confidence and feelings of self-worth and consequently in lowering their ambitions concerning

continuing education and future work. Girls were persuaded subtly or openly, that traditional masculine subjects such as the 'hard' sciences and maths were 'not for them'. This helps to explain the low numbers of women progressing to further and higher education during this period.

A National Curriculum was introduced into schools as part of the Education Reform Act of 1988 (DfEE 1988) and introduced in primary schools in Key Stage 1 and 2 in 1989. The National Curriculum, for the first time, required girls and boys to study the same basic subjects up until the age of 16 and claimed to provide a broad and balanced curriculum with equality for access for all pupils. Paechter (1998), writing about the time when most of the young women I studied were at school, suggests that the outcome of this curriculum was that girls did better in set National Curriculum subjects but continued to choose gender-typed subjects and courses such as food technology, textiles and design, when given a choice. The National Curriculum was about the formal knowledge base of schooling and according to Gaine and George (1999) did nothing to tackle the gendered nature of the informal curriculum. Arnot et al. (1999) found that by 1995 girls had improved their academic standards and in many areas were overtaking boys. 37.3 per cent of girls achieved A*/A or B grades in GCSE English, compared with only 23.5 per cent of boys. In the late 1990's girls gradually closed the gaps in performance at A/B grades for A/AS-level subjects in sciences and English. Although the standard of girls' achievements had greatly improved, there was still a gender legacy from the past. -gendered career such as nursery nursing. Stables and Wikeley (1996), in their longitudinal study, found that 14/15-year-olds still often chose gendered subjects and careers.

Girls chose Art, English, Drama, Technology and P.E. and many chose Nursery Nursing and Nursing as a career. Paechter (1998) suggests that schools still encouraged boys to take the subjects which lead to the more powerful jobs:

In schools there is a wide range of voices, but some are more powerful than others. Gender is often important in determining who has power and for whom the most powerful areas of the curriculum are intended.

(Paechter, 1998 p.91)

The desire to appear feminine could still have lasting consequences for girls' future careers:

When at the vulnerable age of 15 or 16 school students have to choose whether to continue with, say, science, girls and boys still seem to make sex-stereotyped choices. Girls are reluctant to make choices that will render them 'unfeminine' and boys equally reluctant to be 'unmasculine'. The consequence may be that the sort of choices made can lead to future work in high status and highly paid professions associated with science or mathematics, or the possibility of entering the market place in a subordinate and poorly paid occupation. (Gaine and George, 1999 p.85)

Paechter (2007) suggests that secondary school students use the academic curriculum as a means for the construction of an identity. Some school subjects are strongly marked as masculine and feminine. According to Rowan, Knobel et al. (2002), the worst insults that can be directed at a boy in school is that he is

acting 'like a girl'. Pressures to conform to gender expectations in education, training and employment can result in boys getting the well paid and powerful jobs. Equal opportunities do not seem to imply that more boys should study childcare. Rowan, Knobel et al. (2002) also suggest that girls continue to be under-represented within the more highly-valued and prestigious subjects at school and university:

This results in the perpetuation of the gendered nature of the workforce and the location of women within stereotypical feminine spaces. (Rowan, Knobel, et al. 2002 p.25)

The jobs usually done by women tended to be paid at a lower rate. The gender pay gap of 14% expresses the difference between men's and women's hourly earnings in 2004. This means that women working full-time in 2004, during my fieldwork, were paid, on average, 85.6% of men's hourly wage (Department of Trade and Industry, 2004). In 2007 the (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007) found that in full-time work, female employees earn 17% less per hour on average than male employees.

Stables (1996) suggests that equal opportunities do not seem to imply that more boys should study childcare or home economics. Pressures to conform to gender expectations in education, training and employment can have consequences for both sexes. It can mean 'choosing' a career that does not reflect interest and ability, and for young women this may mean fewer financial

rewards. Mackenzie (1997) found that in school-based work experience 45% of the girls were allocated caring placements but often this did not always reflect their preferred placement. Boys who did not get their preferred placement tended to be allocated to occupations which were regarded by them as neutral or traditionally male while girls who were unsuccessful were allocated to traditionally female occupations. One girl wanted to be a mechanic but could not get a place so she was allocated a place at a bus company in the office. The Equal Opportunities Commission report (EOC, 2006) found that girls from lower socio-economic groups were still not being given the access to careers advice, work experience placements and training opportunities that would have given them the true freedom to fulfil their ambitions and potential and gain higher pay. Many were still channelled into jobs traditional to their sex. It would seem that there is still strong pressure for working-class girls to be encouraged into childcare work and little encouragement for boys to do the same. The EOC report (2006) found that in one survey of the 45 childcare work-experience placements undertaken, only 2 were filled by boys, whereas only 29 of the girls had listed it as their future choice. This shows that in some schools the situation has not changed since the 1990s. The EOC report also found that many girls did not realise they were entering low paid jobs. Women are still not receiving unbiased career advice. Around 54% of women interviewed by the Equal Opportunities Commission report (EOC, 2005a) thought the advice they received on leaving school and deciding on a job was influenced by their sex. Miller, Pollard et al. (2005) found that 'challenging gender segregation' was taken by those in careers advisory roles to mean supporting those who desired to go into atypical areas, but there was no need to suggest a wider range of options.

They also found that many teachers had a lack of knowledge of many vocational areas.

Such discrepancies between girls' and boys' secondary education remain

Several writers suggest that gendered inequalities at school appear to be holding girls back but seem difficult to change. As Skelton and Hall (2001) point out:

... simply presenting various images of masculinity/femininity is not enough; rather, children need to question conventional gendered characterizations. In order to put together a relevant gender equity programme, schools need to develop their own policies, particular to their own needs. (Skelton and Hall, 2001 p.175)

Schools still need to do more about gender issues. Kehily (2001) suggests that schools are a significant site of social learning:

Issues of gender and sexuality affect the everyday routines of schooling and as such become a significant site of social learning. Much of this social learning can be seen in terms of the regulation of sex-gender categories. Students develop an understanding of the meanings and implications of sex-gender categories and also create their own meanings in a range of informal encounters. (Kehily, 2001 p.125)

According to Dillabough (2001) there have been continuities and change in the social order but there has been enduring stability of the gender order in girls' and women's working lives:

Despite transformations in contemporary gender relations, issues of gender and sexuality affect the everyday routines of schooling and as such become a significant site of social learning. Gender differentiated social codes operate in schools and serve to regulate the experiences of pupils.

(Dillabough, 2001 p.24)

Dillabough suggests that beliefs about sex and gender influence life in our schools and, in turn, how school affects beliefs about sex and gender. She says that schools should be actively concerned with sex equality but although they do not create sex roles in boys and girls they develop and reinforce sex segregations, stereotypes and even discriminations, which exaggerate the negative aspects of sex roles in the outside world, when they could be trying to alleviate them. They encourage pupils to become male and female adults fitted for a world that has vanished. Paechter (2007) concludes that:

Despite the increasing influence of the wider social world, in the secondary years masculinities and femininities remain strongly influenced by the processes and practices of schooling. (Paechter, 2007 p.128)

Francis, (2000) found that boys moved about the classroom and were more physically active than girls. They frequently kicked footballs around, walked or ran around the classroom, pushed, slapped or hit each other, and threw things around the classroom. Girls sometimes walked about in class, but less frequently than did the boys, and they rarely engaged in any of the physical activities mentioned above. Boys were also much noisier than girls. This can also be true in nurseries, where boys often dominate in the play ground and in schools where it is seen as sissy to want to work with children. Browne (2004) argues that the gender issue starts in the early years provision. Children learn what it is like to be a girl or boy from interacting with a wide circle of people and participating in a wide range of conversation. The result is that they are likely to encounter different ideas about what it is like to be a 'boy' or 'girl':

Children are not presented with unambiguous messages about gender that they can swallow whole; instead they are active participants in creating their personal ideas about gender and are involved in a process of making decisions and judgements about the various versions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' incorporated within different discourses.' (Browne, 2004 p.105)

She also suggests that children learn about gender partly through mimicking those around them and receiving positive reinforcement and shaping. This can be alleviated by strategies such as ensuring that books and other resources show girls and boys and men and women engaged in a wide variety of occupations

and activities, many of which are 'non-sexist', and expressing a wide range of emotions. Girls learn to be feminine as early as the nursery and this continues throughout the school years. Unless girls are encouraged to take subjects usually seen as masculine subjects, girls will always be seen as the under dogs, earning less money and holding less powerful positions in society. Reay (2001) found that in one primary school, peer group discourses constructed girls as harder working, more mature and more socially skilled. Yet all the boys and a significant number of the girls thought it was better to be a boy. She suggests that there are clearly confusions within the gender work in this classroom.

Recent figures from the Learning and Skills Council (L&SC, 2005) show that 97% of apprenticeship places in early years care and education were taken by women while only 3% of men take the same apprenticeships. All these reasons help to strengthen the gender bias of nursery nursing. (Daycare, 2007) reports that only 3 per cent of people taking modern apprenticeships in childcare and 2 per cent on the advanced course are men. Similarly NVQ's figures from the Department for Education and Skills, (DfES, 2004/5) showed that females attained more vocational NVQ awards than males at all levels. Nearly all vocational qualifications awarded for construction, planning and the building environment were to men and a negligible amount to women. This compared with 90% of NVQ qualifications for health, public services and care being awarded to women. In my study only one nursery nurse did not have a vocational qualification.

Recruiting men into childcare

Occupational segregation by gender has been increasingly challenged as women move into traditionally male occupations. However, there has been less movement the other way, with fewer men moving into traditionally female occupations. The traditionally male-dominated occupations tend to be those with more status, power and pay. Female-dominated occupations, on the other hand, are likely to be low status, lacking in power and poorly paid.

In spite of all the obstacles put in their way many more girls are choosing to take A level subjects which will enable them to go to university and so on to better paid and more powerful jobs. Girls generally perform better than boys at GCSE and at GCE A level in the UK. In 2007, 63.9 % of girls achieved five or more GCSE grades A* to C compared with 54.8% of boys (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007b). In its final report, before closing in September 2007, the EOC states that women are gaining more powerful jobs. 20% of MPs are women, 10% of the Financial Times and London Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 Directors are women and 9% of High Court judges and more senior judges are women (EOC, 2007). One outcome of these changes is the difficulty that many nurseries are experiencing recruiting staff. Women are finding other jobs and men do not want low paid and low status jobs. The main problems include the poor quality of applicants and a lack of staff qualified for senior positions. The problems become more urgent as the number of registered providers of childcare grew from 106,000 in June 2005 to 108,000 in June 2006 (Her Majesties Inspectors, 2006). The Department for Education and Skills set a

target for Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships of 6% male childcare workers by 2004 but this has still not been achieved. To counteract the loss of some women to higher education, Surestart launched a recruitment campaign in March 2007 to encourage more men into childcare. The reasons given were that more and more childcare places were being made available over the next few years. They were anxious to inspire more men and ethnic minorities to take up careers in early years and childcare (DCSF, 2007a). Although women have shown they can enter the power world of men, men are reluctant or put off from moving into 'women's' work. However, according to the DfES Standards Site (2007) 60% of working women are clustered in only 10% of occupations.

In a report 'Men into Childcare' from the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2005 it was stated that:

Nearly three in ten men would consider working in the childcare sector and one in four boys expressed an interest in working in the 'caring' profession – yet only one in fifty childcare workers are men. (EOC, 2005b p.11)

The report also stated that key barriers to recruiting men into childcare were low pay and conditions, perception of childcare as women's work, feeling of being unwanted and insufficient information for boys at school on caring careers. Wilkinson (1994) points out that women's subordinate economic position has

much to do with how we value care. Women dominate in both paid and unpaid caring roles, which have tended to be undervalued.

Tinklin, Croxford et al. (2005) found that, in general, the young people they spoke to held egalitarian, rather than traditional, views on the roles of men and women in work and the family. However, their views were tempered with what they saw at home and in the work place. They believed that looking after children was a joint responsibility but they were aware that this was most often done by women. They also saw that men tended to have higher status, higher paid jobs and about one-fifth of the boys retained the idea that the man should be the main bread winner. Cameron, Moss et al. (1999) found that over half of the women they interviewed in children's centres had grown up with the idea that they would work with children. They had decided either while still at school and were encouraged to do so, or when their own children were growing up. None of the men they interviewed grew up with the idea or had opportunities to do childcare courses. They came to it later, some from related areas, some for a career change and some from unemployment. Cameron, Moss et al. (1999) reported that even if they were interested at school they may have been discouraged or found that girls filled the courses.

Browne (2004) says that early childhood practitioners can be either female or male, providing the practitioners are sensitive to the needs of the children and aware of what is required to promote gender equity within the setting. There is evidence of a convergence of younger men's and women's values. However,

caring for other people's children is still seen by some men as women's work.

Cameron et al. (1999) found that:

...the work of childcare is not only gendered by virtue of the distribution in the workforce, but the ideas on which the work is based are also infused with gendered understandings of the roles. In other words it is not just that the workers are nearly all women, but that through the experiences of men workers compared with those of women, we can see that the work is threaded with ideas about caring as substitute motherhood. (Cameron et al. 1999 p.158)

Moss (2003) suggests that women have become so used to being in a female dominated profession that they sometimes find it difficult to work along side men sharing the work equally. He suggests that women do not treat men as equals in the work place:

The early years workforce is overwhelmingly female. Women, it is assumed, have natural capacity for caring. It is seen as mothering. Women are more likely to be content and men talk of ambition. Women believe the jobs are shared equally in nurseries, between the sexes, but men know they are given the practical jobs. (Moss, 2003 p.3)

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) point out that traditional theories from such people as Piaget, Erikson and Bowlby are still prominent in the work of childcare workers today. They suggest that some have a clear gender bias and are directly

mother-oriented. Many of the nursery nurses I interviewed saw their role as a substitute mother, caring, stimulating and keeping the children happy and secure. The nursery nurses in my research saw themselves as trained professionals and would not expect to be chosen because of their appearance. As one nursery nurse explained:

'We are here for every single need of theirs whereas teachers are solely for educational purposes; we have to incorporate that into the day as well. As months go by that gets heavier and heavier the educational side but we still have to incorporate it. We also have to ensure that they are happy and safe and getting a lot out of their day.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 15/11/03.

My study covered three nurseries. There were no men nursery nurses at any of them. In each case the only male worker was the caretaker. I also noted that in two nurseries the nursery nurses swept the floor, washed aprons and cloths in the washing machine, cleaned toilets, served lunch and washed up drinking mugs. This included the nursery nurse in charge of the room. These, of course, are menial tasks linked to a mother's role in the home.

There is some evidence that some women do not always welcome men into childcare. Owen (2003a) found that male workers were excluded by the female workers from certain jobs, such as talking to parents. Skelton and Hall (2001) suggest that the absence of men in the early years work transmits the message that it is only women who are involved in the emotional, social and intellectual

development of young children. They also suggest that men are seen as a threat to female workers because they may obtain higher status positions by just being male. Owen also found that when men have entered early years occupations, there have been concerns that they take all the top jobs, still leaving women at the bottom. In my research I found that women were content with their positions and had little ambition. Of the nine nursery nurses I interviewed only one had any real ambition to be a nursery supervisor; two talked about teacher training but with no real understanding of what was required or apparent serious intentions. Others were quite happy to stay as they were. According to Owen (2003b), men who want to work with children are being held back by sexist women. Just as women found it hard to break into male dominated professions men complained of being patronised by female colleagues and excluded from some tasks and expected to do others such as rough play and fixing broken toys. As previously mentioned, there were no male nursery nurses in the day nurseries where I did my observations. Browne (2004), by contrast, suggests that men are failing to adapt. Domestic labour is still very unequally shared. Most men still expect to be the breadwinners. Others react badly against their declining status and pay, particularly at the bottom of the labour market.

There is still another reason for men not to be welcomed into the childcare profession. Concerns about sexual abuse may also be perceived, by some, as a potential threat to young children. The issue of child abuse can discourage men from working with young children and also disturbs parents and female workers in early years. While estimated prevalence figures are not high, men are seen as being more likely to be involved than women. Jordon (1990) suggests that there

is a certain amount of evidence to suggest that those who sexually abuse children often seek jobs which allow free access to their victims. Therefore, many authorities have improved their screening of employees and taken steps to protect male workers from malicious allegations of abuse. Cameron, et al, (1999) found no doubt that abuse, particularly sexual abuse, and the risk of such abuse, were highly charged, sensitive subjects. In addition, questions of truth were very complex and sometimes never unravelled due to the privacy in which abuse takes place and the young age of the children concerned. Skelton (1994) notes that a student nursery nurse, Jason Dabbs, was sentenced in April 1993 to 7 years imprisonment for sexually abusing young children. During the course of two nursery placements he abused at least 60 children. Examples such as this make it more difficult for men to be welcomed into early years work. It is important that policies are in place for witnessing intimate care of children, by adults of both sexes, to avoid opportunities for abuse. This might help to reassure parents and encourage more men to work in nurseries.

It would seem that there is still much to do to encourage men into childcare. Moss (2003) suggests that to encourage men into early years care the 'image' has to be changed. He suggests that recruitment literature should emphasise that childcare is work for both genders. Photographs etc which are used in schools and careers offices must include men. There has to be a strategy for training, he argues, because boys are unlikely to go straight from school into the caring profession so attitudes of job centres must change. He also suggests that schools need a strategy to encourage boys into childcare courses and nurseries, and schools need to do more than have books showing both men and women taking

on the same roles. He suggests that nurseries need to have a definite policy of encouraging all children to see themselves as capable of doing any job they are interested in and they must not allow one's sex to dominate any particular area. One way to attract boys to take a childcare apprenticeship was tried by one nursery provider (EOC, 2005a). They encouraged boys, who had completed their childcare apprenticeship, to talk to other boys at careers fairs and careers events, which proved to be successful. Thornton and Bricheno (2006) suggest that the low status of teaching, suspicion of male motives and the predominance of women are the main factors that deter men from working in this field. They also point out that there is no gender advantage for men in the caring profession. Harker from the Daycare Trust says that until the 'natural' skills associated with working with children are better recognised through qualifications and rewards, there is little chance of achieving greater gender equity:

'Preventing men from entering care work is the perception it is something women 'naturally' know how to do.' (Harker, 2005 p.15)

Taylor, a nursery assistant, interviewed by Stephenson (2005) said:

'I do not think many blokes would see looking after children as an area to try. I enjoyed it and had no problem with being the only male member of staff.' (Children Now, 2005 p.11)

A report from the EOC (Rolfe, 2005) suggests that, in order to recruit more men into childcare, it is necessary to improve low pay and conditions, target

recruitment more closely to men in local labour markets, provide appropriate careers advice for boys and young people, encourage employers to widen their recruitment pool and increase their support to men working in female dominated settings.

Conclusion

Nursery nursing does have a working-class female image. Since the 19th century childcare has been seen as the responsibility of women. Domestic subjects were taught to girls to prepare them for looking after the home and children. There was, and still is in some people, a belief in the natural transference of the maternal instinct to the care of other people's children. Many people thought men were not suited to working with children and therefore it was obviously better for women to take childcare jobs. Caring qualities were seen as inherent in a person, not something to be taught. People believed that all women had a maternal instinct and were therefore suitable to work with young children. For instance, Newsom (1948) put forward the same argument as in the nineteenth century, that men and women were physiologically and psychologically different and that they had different roles in society, which were complimentary and equally valuable. He suggested that women's role was in homemaking and the early nurture of children. Middle-class women were able to get a higher standard of education; some went to university while others, because they were better educated, found suitable husbands, but working-class girls were not encouraged or given the opportunity. This resulted in many working-class girls going into childcare jobs.

Working-class girls become nursery nurses for several reasons. In the past many working-class girls were denied access to subjects such as science, mathematics and foreign languages, that are required for university and higher paid jobs. Even though the National Curriculum made sciences and mathematics compulsory for all children, girls are still often encouraged to choose 'female' subjects at sixteen or, where there is choice, earlier. The stereotype image of male and female still persists especially in working-class children. Children learn gender from an early age. Many schools try to encourage sexual equality but boys often dominate. Boys continue to take subjects seen as masculine and girls choose subjects seen as female. It would seem that these choices are very important for their image with their peers. Some schools continue to encourage stereotypical gender attitudes to careers even though the social order is rapidly changing. Working-class women continue to dominate the workforce in early years. The pay is low, status is equally low and many of the workforce are not qualified, or have minimum qualifications.

Efforts to encourage men into childcare have been disappointing. Men are aware of the low pay and status and are also reluctant to enter an all female domain. Women also look them upon with suspicion and question their motives. Men are seen as wanting the top jobs and as possible child abusers. More work has to be done in schools and nurseries to encourage sexual equality and make childcare more attractive to men. Pay and status has to be raised and better safeguards in place for all staff when dealing with the intimate aspects of caring for children.

With some women moving into more powerful jobs, and men still not showing a desire to move into child care, there is a serious shortage of trained staff in child care. The number of childcare places required has risen but the number of women entering the profession has fallen. To fill these positions much more effort is required to encourage men to become nursery nurses.

3. Methods

In this chapter I explain the methods I used to find out how day nursery staff actually interpret the Early Learning Goals. When I started, I intended to look particularly at language and literacy and numeracy. One reason for this emphasis was an Ofsted report looking at the quality of provision for three-and four-year-olds which stressed -

... there is much still to do to improve further the quality of provision for language and literacy and for mathematics to enable three-and four-year-old children to get the best possible foundation before they start school. Improvement is needed in many settings, but especially in playgroups and pre-schools. (Ofsted, 2000 p.3)

The Government was therefore expecting staff to put emphasis on these subjects in their planning for three-and four-year-old children. The purpose of my study was to show how government policy was affecting nursery nurses in day nurseries, especially as most day nurseries do not employ trained teachers.

In order to get a detailed picture of the situation, I chose a small scale study and decided that the theories to be tested would arise in the data as it accumulated and patterns began to emerge. I also tried to collect naturalistic data. The approach was intensive rather than extensive. I knew that this small study would

not necessarily represent the whole picture but would be an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character and organisation of day nursery culture. According to Silverman (1993), qualitative research is fundamental to understanding another culture and understanding participants' categories:

The aim of qualitative research is to gather first-hand information about social processes in a 'natural occurring' context. (Silverman, 1993 p11)

Mason (1996) suggests

Qualitative research should produce social explanations to intellectual puzzles.

(Mason, 1996 p.6)

I decided to use a naturalistic approach. I was influenced by Buchbinder et al. 2006, who saw ethnography, similar to a naturalistic approach, as especially appropriate for childcare sites when studying everyday practices, government policies and practice theories.

The use of ethnography to study child care offers researchers a unique opportunity to understand simultaneously micro- and macro-levels of child care practice. The child care centre is a site for everyday practice theories, cultural values, government policies, family systems and practice theories are integrally combined. (Buchbinder, et al. 2006 p.46)

Ethnography or a naturalistic approach can be used to find out what people actually do. According to Woods (1986), people working within schools have been particularly interested in examining the following by using ethnography -

What people actually do, the strategies they employ, and the meanings behind them.

The attitudes, views and beliefs of people.

How particular situations influence views and behaviour, and how they are constituted. (Woods, 1986 p.11)

Richards (2005) suggests that two questions at least must be asked at the beginning –

What are you asking?

What data will you need to provide a good answer? (Richards, 2005 p.15)

The question I was asking was ‘How do nursery nurses, working in day nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals?’ To answer this question I needed data collected by coming into close contact with the lives of the nursery nurses while they were working in day nurseries, to learn what their work involved and observe them while they were working. I wanted to gain access to the nursery nurses’ real feelings and ideas.

David (1998) suggests that ethnographic techniques are used to enter into the meanings shared by children and adults in a particular setting. To take an ethnological approach, I would have needed to work with the children. I was not insured to do this. I also felt that it would be difficult to observe them if I was working in the nursery. As I was unable to completely enter the nursery nurses' world and work along side them, my approach was naturalistic. I decided to collect the data I required from observations, interviews and documentation, to provide a full picture of the meanings of nursery nurses. The techniques chosen for data collection were direct observation, semi-structured interviews and the reading of planning and assessment documentation, both those produced by the Government and those used by the nursery staff. I felt that these three methods should provide sufficient data to provide an answer to my question.

Mason (1996) suggests that qualitative research is:

Research grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced. It is based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced. It is based on methods of analysis and explanation building, which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context. Qualitative research aims to produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data. (Mason, 1996 p.4)

I started the research looking for answers to a question but at no time was I trying to find one particular answer and I do not think I was biased in any way. Denscombe (2002) suggests that the researcher should be able to adopt a position that is impartial and where there is no vested interest in the outcome of the investigation. As a research student, I had no sponsors who were expecting a certain answer and I was quite free to choose the research question. There was no pressure from anyone to interpret my results in any particular way. I should say at this point that the results were a surprise to me and not what I expected. I had not expected nursery nurses to be following their own professional judgement as much as they did. However I realized that as a retired Ofsted Inspector I might be considered biased in my views. As an Inspector I was expected to look for strengths and weaknesses in language and literacy and numeracy. I had to judge these according to the requirements of the Early Learning Goals. As a researcher I took great care to keep an open mind and to observe everything I saw.

Cambell, Freedman et al. (2003) suggest that qualitative research should be systematically and rigorously conducted. This type of research should involve critical self-scrutiny by the researcher. Researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same scrutiny as the rest of their 'data'. They base this on the belief that a researchers cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence they are generating. I continually checked to make sure my research methods were rigorous, my observations were as unbiased as possible and that I conducted the interviews in a professional manner.

To ensure my study would be reliable and valid I followed the advice given by Cambell, Freedman et al. (2003) and Denscombe (2002)

Cambell, Freedman et al. (2003) suggest:

Qualitative research needs to be valid and reliable. Put simply, 'valid' research should in fact measure what it sets out to measure, and 'reliable' research should yield a similar result if it is repeated. (Cambell, Freedman et al. 2003 p.5)

Denscombe (2002) says:

Reliability relates to the methods of data collection and the concern that they should be consistent and not distort the findings (Denscombe, 2002 p100)

I took a number of steps to make my findings more reliable. First, I conducted my observations and interviews in three very different types of day nursery. I felt that this would give me a broader spread of practices as well as access to staff with varying experiences and approaches to their work. Second, I spent about four weeks in each nursery just observing, before conducting interviews, to ensure that the supervisors and nursery nurses were more relaxed in my presence. I felt this produced more reliable information. Third, I used the same method of observing in each nursery (described below), and found that the staff

quickly got used to my presence and continued as usual. As an experienced observer, I do think my observation skills were probably better than average. However, my training to observe was from an Inspector's point of view, where I was trained to look for achievements and omissions; I had to change my emphasis. However my training and experience enabled me to observe many details and activities that a less experienced observer may have missed.

Denscombe argues that

Validity concerns the accuracy of the questions asked, the data collected and the explanations offered. (Denscombe, 2002 p100)

I made detailed observations of how the nursery nurses coped with language and literacy and numeracy aspects of the Early Learning Goals and tried to observe what they really did. I asked questions about these aspects and tried very hard not to intimidate them but to allow them to give their real ideas and opinions. I used my thorough knowledge of the Early Learning Goals to ensure that my questions were appropriate to the required knowledge of the nursery nurses and supervisors. Having observed their practice and the discussions they had with each other about their work, I tried to use language which they understood and to speak in a relaxed manner to avoid them feeling threatened. Although my findings show a new slant on how nursery nurses interpret the Early Learning Goals, they fit in with existing knowledge which shows that nursery nurses still emphasise caring in their work with children (Anning and Edwards, 1999) and (Bruce, 2004).

Day Nurseries

I chose to look at day nurseries because these were the pre-school provision which seldom employed teachers and yet were assessed by the Ofsted Inspectors on the same basis as nursery school and classes which employed teachers. A day nursery usually takes children aged from four months to five years. They open for 48 – 50 weeks in a year and are open Monday to Friday from about 8.00am – 6.30.pm. They are staffed by nursery nurses trained to the level of NVQ Child Care level 3 and care assistants trained to the level of NVQ Child Care level 2. Occasionally they have a trained teacher on the staff. They are mainly used by working parents or for children recommended by social services who have specific needs.

According to Clare Walters, writing on the BBC Parenting web site:

A day nursery can care for your child all day, either full-time or part-time. It's usually open from around 8am to around 7pm and provides both care and education for your child in suitable surroundings. (Waters, 2005 p.1)

A day nursery has to be registered with the Government regulatory bodies and is inspected regularly. At least half the staff must be qualified in an early years discipline to at least NVQ Level 3 in Child Care and there must be some input from a qualified teacher in an advisory capacity, but the day nursery is not

required to employ one. Children are usually grouped together according to age and will follow the Government approved curriculum.

Different types of day nurseries.

Privately owned Nurseries

These are independent businesses providing full day care. They are usually owned by one person, often run in a converted private house, but sometimes in a purpose-built property. The owner is responsible for the day to day running of the nursery, although sometimes they employ a manager or supervisor. They are responsible for developing all assessment and planning material.

Community Day Nurseries

These provide full day care and run on a not-for-profit basis for local families. Fees are generally lower than private nurseries. Some may operate a sliding scale fee scheme whereby parents pay differing rates according to their circumstances. Parents sometimes have to live in the catchment area and many also have social need criteria. Community nurseries also sell a proportion of places to working parents who can afford the full fees. These nurseries are also responsible for developing assessment and planning documentation.

Council or Local Authority Day Nurseries

These nurseries are usually for the children of families in 'crisis'. Social workers and health visitors refer children to fill these places. Many of these nurseries also offer places to the children of working mothers. Planning and assessment

material is used by all the day nurseries within the boundaries of the local authority.

Group or Chain of Day Nurseries

These day nurseries are usually run by a business, sometimes nationwide. They are expected to make a profit and are usually used by working mothers. They are run centrally and usually all policy, assessment and planning material is produced centrally and used by all the nurseries in the Chain or Group.

Workplace Day Nurseries

These are linked to specific employers who offer places to their staff. Sometimes employers buy places in other nurseries for their employees' children. (Waters, 2005).

When choosing the day nurseries for my study, I decided to choose three different types. My aim was to choose a private day nursery, a local authority day nursery and a day nursery belonging to a chain of nurseries as I thought this would give me an insight into very different worlds. I looked on the Ofsted web site and read previous Ofsted reports. I tried to choose nurseries which had good reports, but not excellent or poor, because I was looking for 'average' nurseries. I then had to find nurseries which were easily accessible but not too close to my home. The reason for this was that I intended to visit the first nursery about twice a week for six months and the other two once a week for four months. When at the nurseries I intended to observe the staff and the children. This meant that, in order to get there at the beginning of the day, transport was

essential. I did not want a nursery too near to my home as there was also a real likelihood of meeting people I knew socially.

Once I had found a nursery which fitted my criteria, I wrote to the supervisor explaining who I was and what I wanted to do. I indicated that I would telephone her to explain in more detail. One supervisor said that I might try again in a year because she had just taken on several new staff. One said that it was the policy of the nursery chain owners not to take any more students and one had not received my letter because the supervisor had changed and the letter had followed her to another placement. I could not find a privately-run nursery which fitted my criteria, but found a community-run day nursery which fitted the same criteria as a private day nursery. I eventually chose a community-run nursery, a local authority-run nursery and one belonging to a chain of nurseries. These are three of the main types of day nurseries.

Once I had made contact and received a satisfactory reply, I made an appointment to visit the nursery and sent them a letter confirming I was a Goldsmith's College student. This introductory visit was very valuable because I was able to explain more easily what I needed to do, decide which rooms I should use for my observations and which staff to interview. Once I had managed to get an interview with the supervisor, I had no trouble obtaining permission to use the day nursery for my research and to obtain useful information. The supervisors were very willing to explain nursery policy, give me nursery information and documents and explain to the staff what I would be doing in the coming weeks. I also mentioned in my letter that I was a retired

Nursery Ofsted Inspector (RgNI) and would be happy to give any help or advice for their next Ofsted inspection. The first nursery took me up on my offer and I made several suggestions to the supervisor towards the end of my time with them. I explained that in no instance would the name of the nursery be used in the final written work and that I would be as discreet as possible when observing and interviewing.

Sampling Strategy

Community Nursery

For this day nursery I allowed 6 months for data collection. This was the first day nursery to be used and I felt I needed time to learn about research techniques and methods. This was particularly important as I needed to clarify the role of a researcher in a 'naturalistic' study. I started the study in October 2002 and finished at the end of March 2003.

There were two rooms for three-and four-year-old children and I observed in both on alternate visits. Mainly I observed in the mornings, arriving at 9.30 am and leaving at 12 noon, but occasionally I arrived at 1.15 pm and left at 4.30 pm in order to see children arriving for the afternoon session and observe them during the afternoon. I also occasionally stayed until 1.15 pm to observe the children during the lunch break. For two weeks I did not visit at all. This was because of my holiday and once because the nursery nurse was ill. Times of

arrival and departure were arranged with the Supervisor. After about four weeks I arranged to interview the staff. This had to be fitted in when the nursery nurses could get someone to take their place in the nursery room or had preparation time. I also interviewed the supervisor.

DATE	TIME and ROOM	INTERVIEWS and SPECIAL OBSERVATIONS
Thur October 10 th 2002	10 am	Organisational visit
Mon October 14 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 1	
Fri October 18 th	9.30 am - 12 noon Room 2	
Mon October 21 st	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 1	
Thur October 24 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 2	
Mon October 28 th	9.30 am - 12 noon Room 1	
Wed October 30 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 2	

Wed November 13 th	1.15 pm – 4.00 pm Room 1	Interviewed Supervisor 1
Fri November 15 th	1.15 pm - 4.00 pm Room 2	
Wed November 20 th	1.15 pm - 4.00 pm Room 1	
Thur November 21 st	1.15 pm – 4.00 pm Room 2	
Mon December 2 nd	9.30 am – 12 noon Room1	Observed one child
Tues December 3 rd	9.30 am - 12 noon Room2	Observed one child
Tues December 10 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 1	
Thur December 12 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 2	
Tues December 17 th	9.30 am – 1.15 pm Room 1	Interviewed both nursery nurses
Thur December 19 th	9.30 am – 1.15 pm Room 2	
Tues January 7 th 2003	9.30 am – 12 noon Room1	

Wed January 15 th	9.30 am – 12 noon Room 2	
Thur January 16 th	9.30 am – 12. noon Room 1	
Mon January 20 th	9. 30 am – 12 noon Room 2	Interview 2 – Supervisor 1
Wed January 22 nd	9. 30 am – 12 noon Room 1	
Tues January 30 th	9. 30 am – 12 noon Room 2	
Tues February 18 th	1.15 pm – 4.00 pm Room 1	Interview NN 2
Wed February 19 th	1.15 pm – 4.00 pm Room 2	Interview NN 1
Fri March 14 th	9.00 am – 12. noon Room 1	
Tues March 18 th	9.00 am – 12 noon Room 2	
Thur March 20 th	9.00 am – 12 noon Room 1	
Mon March 31 st	9.00 am – 12 noon Room 2	Staff meeting 5.30 pm

L.E.A. Day Nursery

For this nursery I allowed 4 months as I felt more confident in the role of naturalistic researcher. I started the study in September and finished in December 2003.

There were two rooms for three and four-year-old children and three nursery nurses working in each room. The rooms were larger than the Community Nursery with more children. I therefore decided to observe in one room. Mainly I observed in the mornings, arriving at 9.00 am and leaving at 12 noon but once I stayed until 1.15 pm to observe lunchtime break and sometimes I arrived at 1.00 pm to observe the afternoon session. When interviewing the staff, I had to stay during their lunch hour as this was the only time they were available.

Again, my times of arrival were arranged with the Supervisor.

DATE	TIME	INTERVIEWS AND SPECIAL OBSERVATIONS
Tues September 16 th 2003	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Wed September 24 th	1.00 pm – 4.00 pm	

Thur October 2 nd	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Fri October 10 th	9.00 am – 1.00 pm	Interview Supervisor 2
Wed October 15 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	Nursery Photographer present
Mon October 20 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Thur November 13 th	9.00 am – 2.30 pm	Interview NN 3
Thur November 20 th	9.00 am – 2.30 pm	Interview NN4
Thur November 27 th	9.00 am – 2.30 pm	Interview NN5
Fri December 5 th	9.00 am – 1.00 pm	Coffee morning Sure Start
Wed December 8 th	9.00 am – 1.00 pm	
Thur December 16 th	9.00 am – 1.00 pm	Admissions meeting

Chain Nursery

For this day nursery I also allowed 4 months. There was only one room for three and four-year-old children and there were three nursery nurses working in the room. One was the room leader. I followed the same pattern as I did in the other nurseries; I mainly observed in the mornings but sometimes stayed longer to

observe lunch break and some times I arrived in the afternoon to observe the afternoon session. I started the study in April 2004 and finished in July. My times of arrival and departure were arranged with the manager and with the room leader. It was difficult to fit in the interviews as the nursery nurses liked to go out during their lunch breaks. Fortunately I was able to arrange for them to have cover during the session.

DATE	TIME	INTERVIEWS AND SPECIAL OBSERVATION
Tues January 27 th 2004	10.30 am	Initial interview with manager 3
Thur April 15 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Thur April 22 nd	1.00 pm – 4.00 pm	
Wed April 28 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Thur May 6 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Thur May 13 th	9.00 am – 1.30 pm	Interview NN 7 and NN 8
Fri May 21 st	9.00 am - 1.30 pm	Interview NN6
Tues May 25 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	Interview Manager
Tues June 8 th	9.00 am – 12noon	
Wed June 16 th	1.00pm – 4.00 pm	Second interview

		NN6
Tues June 22 nd	9.00 am -12 noon	
Tues June 29 th	9.00 am – 12noon	Second Interview NN8
Wed July 7 th	9.00 am – 12noon	
Mon July 12 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	
Mon July 26 th	9.00 am – 12 noon	

Details of the three day nurseries used in my study.

First nursery - Community Day Nursery

The first day nursery was a Community Day Nursery situated in a large Victorian building. The nursery was situated in a medium-sized town in South East England. It was run by a voluntary committee. It took children whose parents needed respite, children whose parents paid the full cost and had some places used by social services for children with special needs. It took children from one year to five-years-old. There were two rooms for children from three to five years of age. One room could take 10 children and the other, 16 children, as there was an additional playroom attached. A qualified nursery nurse, NNEB, BTEC National Diploma in Child Care or NVQ 3 in Child Care, and an assistant with the NVQ 2 in Child Care, were responsible for each room. There were also some experienced but untrained staff, who helped during coffee breaks and

lunch times. I spent two sessions a week for six months, gathering data by observing in the two relevant nursery rooms.

I tried to get to know the staff by observing them in their nursery rooms with the children, having coffee breaks with them and then, when they were more relaxed in my presence, carrying out semi-structured interviews with the nursery nurse in charge of the room and the nursery supervisor. The observations and interviews helped me to build up a picture of the complex roles and tasks of these staff. I interviewed both the nursery nurses who were in charge of the two rooms for three and four-year-old children.

Second Nursery – Local Education Authority Day Nursery

The second day nursery was a Local Authority Day Nursery. It was managed by a Local Education Authority (LEA) on the outskirts of London. The day nursery was based in a converted old brick building which was once a school. The children from three to four-years of age had the use of two large rooms on the ground floor. Each room had small areas for quiet activities and areas for wet and messy play. There were two outdoor areas. One had a large climbing frame and slide permanently fixed. The other area could be shut off from the other larger, tarmacked playing area. This area had two small play houses and a shed where they kept wheeled toys and other outdoor apparatus. The day nursery was open from 8.00am until 5.30pm. It mainly provided for local children who reflected the diversity of the area. The nursery had places for any children in the local community and also priority places for children referred by

the local health visitor for language delay and other concerns. These children attended from 9.00am until 3.00pm. There were also some children who were learning to speak English as a second language. The nursery was open for 50 weeks in a year.

The aim of the day nursery was to lead and develop a comprehensive education service in partnership with the community to help combat educational disadvantage and promote high levels of educational achievement for all. They also aimed to offer every child the opportunity to reach their individual potential. They offered children experiencing difficulties, the opportunity to learn and develop new skills. The nursery also had links with other agencies such as speech therapists, consultants and educational psychologists. All the planning and record keeping material was sent from the LEA Early Years Department. The supervisor explained to me that all the LEA Early Years Nurseries were the same. They all used the same planning and record-keeping materials. The only difference was the type of building. I decided that, as I only had four months in this nursery, it was better to concentrate my observations in just one of the rooms for children from three to four-years of age. The nursery nurses were all qualified to NVQ level 3 standards. The observations and interviews were carried out in the same manner as those in the first day nursery. Once again I waited until I had visited the nursery several times and the nursery nurses had accepted me and then I interviewed the three nursery nurses involved with one of the rooms for three and four-year-old children. I also interviewed the supervisor. This time I interviewed the nursery nurses only once but the interviews were ten minutes longer than those with the other nursery nurses.

Third Nursery – Large Chain Nursery

The third nursery was part of a nationwide chain of nurseries. The aim of this nursery was to offer a curriculum that followed a holistic approach embracing all aspects of a child's life, an intrinsic part of which was a partnership with parents. The day nursery was held in a converted primary school, in a small market town, close to the railway station which had a fast train to London. Several parents worked in London. There was a small safe outside tarmacked play area. There was one room for children from three to four-years of age. This room had a nursery nurse in charge, who was BTEC National Diploma trained (NN6), and two other nursery nurses working with her. One had a degree in Early Childhood (NN7) and the other was a mature student working for the NVQ level 2 in Child Care (NN8). The supervisor met regularly with supervisors from other nurseries in the chain. All training was organised from head office and all the paperwork for assessment, planning and the curriculum was also sent from the head office. I interviewed the manager and all three staff involved with the children from three to four-years of age. I was only able to interview nursery nurse 7 once because she went on holiday. The interviews and observations were carried out in the same manner as the previous two nurseries.

Inspector to Researcher

In order to understand my role as a researcher in the nursery, I decided to compare my experiences as an Ofsted Inspector to those of a researcher in my

first research nursery. As an Inspector, I visited over 100 different types of pre-school settings including day nurseries. My role was to observe what was happening in the settings, speak to the staff and read all the documentation. In some ways this was very similar to what was required for my research. I realised however, that my position was very different.

As an Inspector visiting a nursery, I was given VIP treatment. There was usually a parking place for me. Staff went out of their way to welcome me. They had prepared many items for me to look at, such as children's work, plans, assessments and meeting notes. I had the right to sit in the lessons and observe, to talk to the staff and the supervisor. Any items not available, I could ask for. Usually I was offered cups of tea and given somewhere to write my notes in private. People were nervous of me and I had to work hard to get them to relax.

As a research student I had to get a letter of introduction, make an appointment with the supervisor and carefully ask to be allowed to observe in the classrooms. I had to explain why I wanted to come, what I would be looking at and be careful not to ask for too much. I was given the introductory literature given to all students working in the nursery and asked to fill in a form saying where I was studying. The information told me what to wear and how to talk to the children.

On my first visit to the first day nursery, I tried to remember every thing that was sent out in the letter; dress the same as the staff, blend in and not to be a nuisance to the staff. On arrival, I remembered not to park in someone else's

space. I ended up parking on the street. I then had to ring the entry buzzer and worry if anyone would remember that I was coming. The supervisor had remembered and was friendly, but casually took me to the correct room and left me. Her parting shout was 'Don't forget to sign in and out'. The nursery nurses looked slightly uncomfortable at my presence but then just got on with the routine. No one offered to show me anything or expected to answer questions. I tried to remember my own instructions to students many years ago. Be polite, don't get in the way, ask before doing any thing; remember the rules of the nursery and which gates must be kept closed. In the staff room never sit on the best seat; pay for your drinks and don't take someone else's favourite mug. I tried to put all this into practice and found it worked quite well. One of the staff asked me if I would like some coffee and took me to the staff room. She showed me where everything was and made me a drink. I realised that the next time I must remember where everything was kept and to wash up my cup! However it was quite difficult in the staff room on the first day and I sat and read a magazine. The nursery nurses were off duty and talking about their other lives. It was very difficult not to ask questions, but I felt that they might feel threatened or resent my interference. I realised that getting information from them would take much longer than I had first thought and that I would have to work hard to join their group. As an Inspector, by contrast, I had a right to ask questions and they were expected to answer as best they could. When in the nursery room, I tried to sit as unobtrusively as possible and write my notes. Children occasionally asked me who I was or what my name was, but otherwise ignored me. This is quite similar to working as an Inspector, although we were

encouraged to talk to the children and find out if they knew what they were doing.

My experiences as a researcher

Observations

According to Mason (1996), you should begin by asking yourself why you might want to use observational methods. She then goes on to point out that you should not expect your answer to be easy or simple. However, as well as needing to think through the intellectual logic behind the use of observation, it is also crucial to recognise that conducting observational research can be very time and resource consuming. Mason suggests that it is important to decide if you want to be a participant, an observer, or a participant observer. She says you should ask yourself how far it is possible to be a complete observer, in the sense that you have no influence on the setting, or that your observations remain 'untainted' by experiencing what the setting is like. For many enthusiasts of the method, this notion of research distance or neutrality is not only impossible, but completely defeats the epistemological purpose of immersing yourself in a setting. In other words, you are, according to this view, supposed to know what it feels like, rather than simply to act as a detached witness. There are likely to be various answers to this depending in part, on what you understand by 'participation'. If you try to be non-participative or neutral in your expressed

views or actions, this may be interpreted in a whole range of ways by those involved – the point being that it will be interpreted and responded to.

Your attempts at lack of involvement in what ever is going on in the setting will have some effects and cannot be judged to be the same as if you were simply absent from the setting altogether. This does not mean that you should remain undecided about your participant or observer status, instead, they mean that you should keep it constantly in focus. (Mason, 1996 p.64)

I thought very hard about the types of observing which Mason describes and tried to decide which method was best for me. I preferred the non-participating observation approach while in the nursery room but realised the difficulties. I was not insured to work in the nursery so could only take the role of a parent helper. I decided it would be difficult to observe in any depth if I was also helping children. Although I was not participating in the running of the nursery room, the nursery nurses often chatted to me and told me where they were going if they took the children to another room. I tried to make my observations objective and wrote any opinions separately. I had also to decide what identity, status or role I wished to adopt and what impression I wished to create. I decided that just like King (1984) I intended to be an interested, non judgemental observer. There were still difficulties, in the sense that I realised that I might be unable to control the ways in which my identity, status or role was perceived as the nursery nurses knew I had been an Ofsted Inspector. To avoid looking like an Inspector, I dressed informally and never asked questions

which might have been seen as threatening or embarrassing by the nursery nurses. I found that until the staff were relaxed with me in the room and trusted me, I could not get the data I required. King describes how he used non-participating observation, although this is usually applied to covert observing:

I did allow the children to approach me to start with, but I soon found that they treated me as a teacher-surrogate as they did other non-teacher adults, showing pictures, asking for spellings, which I sensed Mrs Pink (the teacher) was not happy with and which prevented me from observing clearly and researching effectively. I politely refused requests for help, referring the child to the teacher, and met requests for approval only with smiles. To begin with I kept standing so that physical height maintained social distance. Most importantly, I avoided eye contact; if you do not look, you will not be seen. These measures led to my being, for the most part, ignored by the children. I usually asked if my presence had changed things, and sometimes without my asking, they usually said, by a second visit, that they had forgotten I was there. It seemed to me that a few times I was given a special performance, and it was not unusual for a private remark explaining an activity to be made to me in the classroom. My intended relationship with the teacher was that of an interested, non-judgemental observer. (King, 1984 p.123)

I tried to behave very much as King describes. From my experience as an Inspector, I had learnt how to sit quietly and take notes. I would smile at children from time to time, but not encourage interaction. The most difficult

thing in a nursery room is to keep out of the way of the staff as the rooms are often small. I had the same reactions as King had experienced. To begin with, I felt that the nursery nurses were putting on a show, but by the second or third visit they reverted to their usual behaviour. They made remarks occasionally explaining what they were doing, but most of the time I sat quietly taking notes and nobody took any notice of me. The children took very little notice of me. The children occasionally asked questions such as who I was or what my name was. If this happened I was careful to answer their questions, but only very briefly and not get into conversation with them. Like King, I tried not to get into eye contact with them and soon found they ignored me. My role as an Inspector had trained me not to interfere or intervene in any aspect of the nursery; the only exception was if a child was in danger. I only remember intervening once. When observing in the playground at the second nursery, I saw a small three-year-old boy about to hit a three-year-old girl. He had already been in trouble for this behaviour and had hit her very hard. There were no staff watching and I found it impossible to allow him to hit her again. I decided to distract him by asking him to show me something the other side of the playground. Thinking of the situation afterwards, I decided that I would have done the same thing if I had been there as an Inspector.

I had to decide what to wear during my time at the nurseries. Denscombe (1998) suggests that a researcher should adapt his/her appearance to fit in with those being observed and interviewed and not to stand out or antagonize or upset those with whom they would be working. I tried to wear clothes that were sensible for working in a nursery. I wore nothing which would not wash if paint was spilt on

it and always tried to look clean and tidy. I tried not to look intimidating or underdressed, but wore clothes which enabled me to melt into the background.

Rolfe (2001) points out that high quality observation comes from reliable observational records. Behaviour must be recorded in a non-judgemental manner. Rolfe also stresses the importance of avoiding evaluations, judgements, impressions and personal speculations to increase objectivity. Inspectors are trained to observe what they see and not to write judgements in their observations but write them in their reports. I continued to follow my training as an Inspector and worked hard to observe what I saw and keep any comments or judgements separate.

Denscombe states that:

The whole point is to observe things as they normally happen, rather than as they happen under artificially created conditions such as laboratory experiments. There is a major concern to avoid disturbing the naturalness of the setting when undertaking the research. (Denscombe, 1998 p.140)

In order to avoid any disruption Denscombe suggests that the observer should try to be as unobtrusive as possible and yet be able to see all the action. I tried to keep away from the area where the staff were working, not to interact with the children and only speak to the staff if they spoke to me. This seemed to work as gradually after about four or five sessions, hardly anyone took any notice of me. I really felt that the nursery room was operating as it usually did and that my

presence was not changing anything. Of course it is not possible to be certain, but the staff and children all seemed quite relaxed. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) suggest that training helps an observer to become better observers. The more you do it the better you become. As I had worked as an Inspector for five years, I had had plenty of experience at observing.

On my introductory visit to each supervisor/manager I explained that I wanted to do some research by collecting data in her day nursery. I explained that I wished to observe in the pre-school rooms and interview the nursery nurses and her. I also wished to look at some of their documents. When I arrived I also tried to explain to the nursery nurses exactly what I intended to do. On the first morning at the first nursery, I realised that I may have still looked like an Inspector however hard I tried to avoid this. I tried very hard not to get in the way and not to look conspicuous but that was very difficult in a small room, especially as the nursery nurses were constantly moving the furniture around for different activities. On my second visit to the first nursery, the nursery nurse in one nursery room asked if she would be allowed to see what I was writing. I explained that I was just writing every thing that I saw happen, but I realised the nursery nurses were still more conscious of my scribbling than I thought. On my third visit to the other nursery room, the nursery nurse asked me how well she was doing. This worried me and I tried to explain that I was not judging her. She explained that she was interested in becoming a teacher and wanted to have my opinion. I explained that I was only observing activities and not judging her, but decided the staff needed to see some of my observations. On the next visit I tracked one child's activities through out the session. I explained to the staff

what I was doing and they seemed more relaxed. I also took the written notes from my first four visits, gave them to the Supervisor to read and then to the nursery nurses. This proved to be very successful and the atmosphere became much more relaxed. I repeated this at both the other nurseries.

Silverman (1963) stresses the danger of an observer trying to observe everything. He says it puts an impossible burden on the observer. He suggests that at the beginning, it is likely that the observer will use broad descriptive categories. I tried to follow his suggestions; general observations at first, then more specific ones. I decided to track one child for a session, a three-year-old and then a four-year-old to find out what activities they chose. I observed each nursery nurse in turn and then did observations on numeracy and literacy topics. Silverman also stresses how important it is to avoid the temptation of favouring some children or staff rather than others, for example, the underdog. He says that:

One should have doubts about a study which fails to deal even-handedly with the people it describes or to recognise the interactive character of social life. (Silverman, 1993 p.45)

I do not think I was guilty of this, although there were some children and staff who were easier to respond to than others. For example, in one nursery there were some black nursery nurses who were slightly older than the white nursery nurses in the other nurseries and seemed, outwardly, much friendlier. The younger nursery nurses soon stopped treating me like an Inspector and began to

discuss their work with me, even though I was much older than they were. They were all easy to work with but in different ways.

In each nursery it took about a month for me to feel that the staff were relaxed with me and prepared to answer questions and for them to show me their files and folders. By this time I often got included in conversations in the staff room and they discussed activities which did not go well. One morning when I was observing and went to ask the nursery nurse a question, her reaction was '*Oh I'm so sorry I forgot you were here*'. I assured her that was how it should be. I used the staff room for coffee and the staff appeared more relaxed, although I still felt that I must be careful not to interrupt their personal time. One morning I found one of the nursery nurses alone in the staff room writing up her records. She seemed very happy to explain how she was cross-referencing the yellow stickers (comments on the children's achievements) and putting the comments into their individual records. She said that she understood the reason for it and that it was the evidence of their achievements, but that it was quite time-consuming.

I observed, using a small note book, and wrote down almost everything that I saw. My training as an Inspector helped with this. As an Inspector, when I first arrived in a nursery room, I looked round to see how it was organised. I also looked at the walls to see if they were decorated with children's work or adult work. I sought evidence of projects and noted how long pictures had been on the walls. I searched for evidence of the six areas of learning: interest tables, where the children's books and belongings were kept and where children sat for quiet

time. I continued with this practice in the three day nurseries. I tried to get to the nursery early in the morning and stayed until lunch time. I usually stayed until the children had finished lunch. Sometimes I would vary this and go in the afternoon immediately after lunch, because sometimes different children came in the afternoon and other children left. I found the afternoon session was usually different from the morning session, although there were some new children.

I observed the nursery nurses, what they did and how they interacted with the children. I also looked at their plans for the week and tried to see if they were being followed. I tried not to let the nursery nurses see that I was observing them. I always tried to look as if I was observing the activity to avoid them being embarrassed or changing what they were doing. I observed different aspects of the curriculum at different sessions, and went with the children to outdoor play. If they were divided up for story or other activities, I tried to observe both groups. I always told the nursery nurses if there was anything I particularly wanted to observe. When I gave the nursery nurses copies of my notes they all read them and the only comment that I received was from the nursery officer in the third nursery, who reminded me that the 'Wendy' house was now called a 'Play' house! She reminded me that there was no gender differentiation these days. She was also cross with me on one occasion for changing my time of arrival and not letting her know. This was not in fact true. I had rung up the nursery and was only able to speak to the deputy supervisor. I explained to her that I had been forced to change the time and she assured me

she would pass on the message but had forgotten. After that episode the nursery nurse seemed to relax and we had a good working relationship.

Interviews

To investigate the best ways to interview the nursery nurses and supervisors/manager, I read several other people's comments and suggestions.

McCracken (1988) suggests:

The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter. In other words, qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in its objectives.

The selection of respondents must be made accordingly. The first principle is that "less is more." It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them.

(McCracken, 1988 p.17)

Following McCracken's advice I decided to interview only the supervisor and the qualified staff in each nursery room. I did not interview the assistants who had NVQ Level 2 qualifications or the untrained helpers, unless they were in a position of authority.

I wanted to have a semi-structured conversation with the nursery nurses to elicit their point of view on the Early Learning Goals and the work they did.

Denscombe (1998) suggests that the semi-structured interviewer has a clear list of issues to be addressed, and questions to be asked, but is prepared to be flexible about the order the topics are considered and to let the interviewee develop ideas raised by the interviewer. He also says that the questions should be open-ended, and I took pains to ensure that this applied to my own questions.

As Cannold says –

..... research interviews are structured 'conversations' between researcher and participant in which the researcher seeks to elicit the participant's subjective point of view on a topic of interest to the researcher. Researchers frequently employ an interview guide to provide the structure necessary to ensure such conversational interviews are concise and productive structures. (Cannold, 2001 p 179)

In order to get an answer to my research question, I had to think hard about what I asked the nursery nurses. My questions needed to be related to the Early Learning Goals and not about personal or private matters or matters which the interviewees might not wish to discuss. I also had to think about how I asked the questions. Was I using trick questions to catch the interviewees out, to confuse them? Was my style of questioning making my interviewees uncomfortable?

Before compiling my questions for my interviews with staff, I did a fairly extensive literature review to enable me to ask informed questions. As I had also worked in a similar field I had some background knowledge of the questions I was intending to ask. I had previously read the literature relating to the 'Desirable Learning Outcomes' and the 'Early Learning Goals'. The information I collected from the nursery nurses explained how they covered aspects of language and literacy and mathematics, although they were not trained teachers. I asked them about the Early Learning Goals and how they planned to cover the areas of learning, especially mathematics and language and literacy. In their daily planning sheets they had a section marked 'differentiation'. I asked them how they covered this aspect with the children. I also asked them if they had been trained to teach some of the Early Learning Goals and what they hoped the children would have learnt by the time they started school.

By the time I interviewed them they knew me quite well and were more relaxed with me. I respected their knowledge of young children and tried to show this. I did find, in some cases, my knowledge was greater than that of the staff and I had to take care not to sound too knowledgeable and make the staff feel inadequate or take away their confidence. I also found that sometimes the nursery nurses did not understand the jargon from the Early Learning Goals language and literature area of learning and I had to repeat the question in a different way. I ensured the interviews were relaxed and the staff felt able to talk freely and openly. At no time did I ask questions about personal or private matters or matters I thought that the interviewees would not wish to discuss,

such as what they thought about the supervisor or their colleagues. If this had happened inadvertently I would have changed the subject quickly trying not to upset or embarrass them. I tried to ask questions which were straightforward. I realised that the more relaxed the interviewees were, the more likely they were to take me into their confidence. I realised that interviewing was not an easy option and I must be careful to ask only questions which were relevant for my research.

Mason says:

This kind of interviewing is not an easy option, contrary to the view that such interviews are little more than everyday conversations which 'anyone could do'. Although interviewing can be rewarding and fascinating, I have also wanted to make clear that qualitative interviewing is difficult intellectually, practically, socially and ethically, and that any researcher should be aware of the kind of challenge they are taking on in choosing to use this method. ... this means that the decision to use qualitative interviewing should not be made lightly. (Mason, 1996 p.56)

Blenkin and Kelly also had opinions on interviewing and the use of a tape-recorder:

The use of interviews to gain deeper insight into the realities of particular situations and, especially, the views and values of the actors within those situations is a well established research technique. It is a technique,

however, which has its dangers and pitfalls, since the personal skills will vary from one interviewer to another, and since the interpersonal dynamics of every interactive situation will be unique, there are dangers that what seems to emerge as data will be valueless. One device was to use a tape-recorder every interview. A disadvantage here is the inhibiting effect that this may have on the person being interviewed. This we found, however, was not as great as the inhibition which almost always accompanies the taking of extensive notes by the interviewer. (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997 p.3)

For my interviews, I used a small tape-recorder about the size of a spectacle case. It proved to be very successful and the interviewees did not appear to be inhibited by it at all. I was more anxious about it at the beginning than they were, because I was not sure when it reached the end of the tape and if the battery was working. The more I used it, the more relaxed I became. At the end of one interview, a supervisor remarked on the tape-recorder and said that it would be very useful for appraisal meetings, to ensure everything was recorded.

In the first nursery, once the nursery nurses were relaxed, I judged that it was time to ask if I might interview the supervisor and two nursery nurses. The supervisor was very obliging and was prepared to arrange a time when she was free and also when the two nursery nurses could have some cover. This was the difficult part as there had to be someone to take the place of the nursery nurse if I took them from the nursery room. I then spoke to the nursery nurses and explained what I intended to do. I explained about the tape recorder and that

their name would not be used. Each nursery nurse said that they understood, but looked a little apprehensive.

Denscombe says that:

An agreement to be interviewed generally means there is informed consent. The interview will not be done by secret recording of discussion or the use of casual conversation as research data. (Denscombe, 1998 p.110)

At no time did I do anything in secret or use casual conversations. They were all given transcriptions of their interviews and I stressed that no one else in the nursery would see them unless they wished to show them to other people. They were also given an opportunity to alter or correct any aspect of the interview. No one did. I assured the supervisor and the nursery nurses that their identities would be removed from my research and this was done.

McCracken (1988) suggests that one of the important differences between most qualitative and quantitative research is that the former demands a much more complex relationship between investigator and respondent. This raises several issues:

The first of these is simple: Who does the respondent think the investigator is? In my own experience, the best manner in which to manipulate the presentation of self for interview purposes is to strike a balance between

formality and informality for each of the media in question. A certain formality of dress, demeanour, and speech is useful because it helps the respondent cast the investigator in the role of a "scientist," someone who asks very personal questions out of not personal but professional curiosity. This formality also helps to reassure the respondent that the investigator can be trusted to maintain the confidentiality which has been promised to the respondent. (McCracken, 1988 p.25)

I tried to take the advice given by McCracken and make sure the nursery nurses were quite clear who I was and why I was interviewing them. I also followed her advice and dressed neatly and in a manner to give confidence, without looking too smart and intimidating. I stressed the confidentiality of the interviews, especially stressing that nothing would be passed to the supervisor or other staff.

Most of my interviews took about 30 minutes. That was as long as the nursery nurses could spare. I had to find a quiet room to do the interview, which was always very difficult. Once we sat amongst the jumble for the forthcoming Jumble Sale and once we sat in a 'soft play' room because the children were playing outdoors. During each interview someone would burst in and ask for something, not realising that there was a taped interview taking place. This was a little off-putting but we managed to complete them. Once the battery of the tape recorder ran out, although I had put a new one in, so after that I carried a spare one even if I thought the batteries were good.

At the beginning of the interview, I explained to the member of staff what I was going to talk to her about and had several written questions to ask, to ensure that I covered the areas which were most relevant. I then made sure that the tape recorder was working and began. I tried to make the interview as relaxed as possible by smiling and asking some easy questions at the beginning. I found that the nursery nurses were very ready to talk but that they did not always understand what I was asking. For those questions, I tried to rephrase them, give examples or changed the question. There was a danger then that I asked leading questions. I tried not to stick too rigidly to my questions, especially if the member of staff was telling me something relevant. One concern of the staff of one nursery, for the forthcoming Ofsted inspection, was that they were not using the correct language.

McCracken also points out that the 'respondent' in a qualitative interview is subject to several risks:

Participation in qualitative interviews can be time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding in ways that quantitative interviews rarely are. To make matters worse, it is difficult for many respondents to anticipate these dangers at the outset of the interview. Investigators must take pains to see that the respondent is not overtly or subtly victimized by the interview process. (McCracken, 1988 p.25)

I was very aware of these dangers. I made every effort to prevent the staff from feeling that the interviews were too demanding; one interviewee remarked at the end of the interview that she had found it very helpful and that it made her more aware of what she was doing.

The two most important aspects which changed the nursery nurses' attitude towards me were showing them the written copies of my first four days' observations and interviewing them. Their attitude seemed to change after the interviews. We became closer as if we shared some intimacy. After the interviews they were much more open, showed me more documents and pointed out other aspects of their work to me. They were generally more relaxed and behaved as if they knew me better.

Denscombe says:

Research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions. (Denscombe, 1998 p.116)

He suggests that the social status, educational qualifications and professional expertise of the people to be interviewed may, if different from the interviewer, affect the interviewer-interviewee relationship in a positive or negative way.

There was no doubt that my educational qualifications and professional expertise were greater than those of the nursery nurses, although they were more knowledgeable in nursery routine and dealing with small children. However

they seemed relaxed with me and implied that the questions were important for them.

I was surprised how well the interviews went. The staff answered my questions in a relaxed manner and several times made comments such as

'I have never thought of that before' or 'Now you mention it, I realise we don't do that'.

One of the nursery nurses said she would like to do some Special Needs training and was delighted to tell me a few weeks later that she had been offered some. I realised afterwards however, that I was quite nervous about the early interviews and did not get as much detail from them as I would have liked. I hoped that the next interviews would be more meaningful and this proved to be the case.

It was difficult to know what effect my interviews and questions were having on the staff, but it generally seemed positive. One morning in January I went in to observe at the first nursery and discovered that the two nursery nurses were not in their rooms but had been given time to complete their long term planning. I asked the supervisor if it was possible to join them for a few minutes just to see the long term planning. No objection was raised, so I found them in a small office. They were very welcoming and quickly explained what they were doing. They were behind schedule on the planning for 2003 and were trying to complete it. Since they were quite relaxed with me being present, I asked if they would find it helpful to talk me through the plans, as if they were explaining the

plans to an Inspector. They were keen to do this. As soon as they began explaining the plans, it was clear that I would need to see another file. One of them immediately jumped up and went to fetch it (up two flights of stairs). This happened twice but the nursery nurse was suddenly very anxious that I should see everything and understand their planning. We went through it all and found a few discrepancies. One of them said 'What is your opinion about the idea of splitting the children into two groups for 'Show and Tell'? I was very surprised at this complete turn around, especially from this particular nursery nurse who was less communicative than the other.

I interviewed all three supervisors/manager who were very cooperative and who said that they were pleased that someone was interested in day nurseries because they sometimes felt neglected as it seemed to them that all research took place in nursery schools and nursery classes. One supervisor found the transcript helpful and said that it showed her areas the nursery still needed to improve.

Planning and Assessment Documentation.

During the time I was visiting the nurseries, I tried to look at all the planning documentation and work out how the nursery nurses used it. When the nursery nurses were relaxed in my company, I asked them questions about how the planning material worked and where it came from. In the community nursery, the staff had to make up the planning themselves, but the other two day nurseries were given the planning outline and could then add their own ideas for

the details. They all had 'long term' plans, 'medium term' plans and 'weekly' plans. I also looked to see if the nursery nurses followed the plans, or if they changed them to fit in with what they were doing, especially the weekly plans. The weekly plans were usually pinned to the wall in the nursery room and were easy to follow, but the other plans were in a folder and had to be found for me to look at them. There were other plans for activities and these included evaluations. I watched to see if these were filled in and asked if they were useful. I analysed the long term plans to see if they included the six areas of learning and I then looked to see if the weekly plans linked with the long term plans and were also linked with the six areas of learning. I also checked to see if the emphasis was on language and literacy and numeracy.

I also looked at the assessment documents. The community nursery had devised its own assessment material, whereas the other two nurseries were following material sent to them by either the Local Education Authority or by the parent company that ran the nursery. I looked to see if the files were being filled in regularly and how the nursery nurses obtained the information. I also spoke to the nursery nurses to try to discover if they found filling in the assessment forms difficult or time consuming. I also questioned the nursery nurses on their use of these documents to discover if they felt they were important, a waste of time or too time consuming.

When looking at children's files I always asked for the name to be removed or covered and stressed that I was not interested in a particular child but in how the files were kept and what was written in them. This is a reflection on my training

as an Inspector. I had also been trained to act in a professional manner and only to observe what I actually saw. My judgements were written only in the report.

When I left the day nurseries, I made a point of thanking all the staff for allowing me to observe and interview them and always left a small box of chocolates for the staff. I had agreed to help the supervisor in the first nursery, with her imminent Ofsted inspection and brought in various new documents from the Ofsted web page and made a few suggestions from my observations. She seemed very grateful.

Research Ethics

Have the rights and interests of those affected by the research been taken into consideration? (Denscombe, 2003 p.174)

I made a conscious effort to ensure ethical issues were addressed. I was aware that day nurseries were used to having many visitors during sessions and this did not usually upset the children. I made every effort to blend in to the background. To keep any upset to a minimum I dressed discreetly and sat quietly in the corner so as not to interfere with the day to day activities and after the first few weeks the nursery nurses appeared quite relaxed and continued with their usual activities.

Before I started at each day nursery I explained to the Supervisors exactly what I intended to do and how I intended to carry it out. I also tried to explain to the

nursery nurses what I was doing and why. At first the nursery nurses found it difficult to really understand what I was doing but after I had explained again, before I interviewed them, they became interested and cooperative.

Mason (1996) asks what justifications I can offer for the ethics of my interview practice. I asked the supervisors for permission to observe in the day nurseries and they gave me oral consent. They then told the nursery nurses I would be observing in the nursery rooms. However, when I arrived I asked the nursery nurses permission to observe and to interview them. They gave oral consent for this. Each supervisor/manager put a notice on the parent notice board to inform parents that I was a student and would be observing activities in the nursery. They did not consider it necessary to ask parents permission as I was observing the nursery nurses and activities, not the children.

I tried to avoid misrepresentation or deception and after reading my observations the nursery nurses became uninterested. However, I felt some observations were better not shown to them because they were describing what the nursery nurses were doing. These were the only things which they did not see. If they had asked I would have shown them. I gave the nursery nurses codes, such as NN1 and NN2 and only wrote the first names of the children and sometimes only code names. I always asked permission before looking at any files or before joining a separated group to observe activities. I always asked if I might sit in the staff room and if I might talk to other members of staff.

I tried to avoid any intrusion into the lives of those involved especially during their free time. For example, when sitting in the staff room I avoided interfering with private discussions and felt that the nursery nurses were relaxed with my presence. Several were quite willing to give up part of their lunch hour to take part in interviews but were never forced to do so.

I realised that having someone observing in the nursery rooms could be quite stressful for the nursery nurses. They knew I had been an Inspector which could have added to their discomfort. I endeavoured to blend into the background and never appeared threatening or superior. I tried to avoid situations where the nursery nurses might become stressed, especially during the interviews. For most of them this was the first interview they had taken part in and I avoided any questions which they might feel was an intrusion or stressful. I maintained confidentiality of information and protected their anonymity. To ensure the data was secure I kept it in a secure filing cabinet at my home.

Qualitative analysis of the data

Qualitative data is a concern with meanings and the way people understand things. (Denscombe, 1998 p207)

I described earlier in this chapter the situation which was being investigated. Denscombe (2003) describes this as the 'descriptive account' of the situation. When I had completed my observations and interviews I then had to organise my data. I transcribed all my material onto the computer in similar format and

was careful to date and head each item clearly. I allowed a wide margin on each side to enable me to add notes next to relevant words or comments. I gave each nursery nurse a number to enable me to identify each interviewee without giving the name of the individual. I then made a backup copy of my data on a memory stick to ensure nothing was lost. I then printed two copies of all data to enable me to code and categorize it.

Coding and categorizing the data

Denscombe also suggests breaking down the data into units for analysis (analytic coding). Sometimes this is called ‘unitizing’ the data. It can be words but more often it will be ideas or specific topics. This initial stage of coding has been termed ‘open coding’.

The reason for open coding is to make it easier to find deviant cases or to extract small but significant pieces of information buried within a large mass of material.

(Denscombe, 2003 p.276)

I looked at the data from all the interviews with the nursery nurses and the supervisors and the observations from all three day nurseries. I then coded units of speech or small units of observations into codes such as ‘numeracy’, ‘behaviour’, ‘planning’ and ‘assessment’. These codes arose from the data. I then grouped together the codes into five categories or topics. These topics arose from my research question:

1. Issues relating to professionalism and training

This topic contained Ofsted's view of professional nursery nurses; nursery nurses views on professional nursery nurses and supervisors' views on professional nursery nurses. There was conflict between the different views.

2. Policy, power and decision making

This topic included codes on policies made by Ofsted and which nursery nurses and supervisors were expected to follow. I found differences between the supervisors' ideas and the nursery nurses' views. This topic also contained nursery nurses' views on the Early Learning Goals.

3. Nursery nurses' views about themselves

This topic contained codes about nursery nurses' views on their own role and how they were confident in their work. There were also the nursery nurses' views about too much written work.

4. Nursery nurses' views on how children learn

I found that this topic merged with the fifth topic and contained nursery nurses' views on how they decided if a child knew aspects of the curriculum and how they thought children learn through play.

5. Nursery nurses; curriculum, planning and assessment.

There were many codes in this category and I noticed many significant comments about the Early learning Goals, how important nursery nurses thought

some form of planning was and how time consuming assessment had become. I also found a conflict between what nursery nurses said in the interview data and what I found in the observation data.

I looked again through all the interviews and observations and picked out any comments which I thought were relevant to the above topics. I used colour coding to identify each topic. I also made comments in the right-hand margin. I looked through the data many times to look for recurring themes or interconnections that were emerging. I then decided to look at all the interview material and observations and refine the units and categories by looking at these recurring themes. I continued to add comments and reflections in the margins alongside the raw data. I also made notes to myself to show how my thinking was progressing. Many times I reread the original data to ensure I had not lost sight of the original context. I then formed concepts or ideas which were developing from the topics and formulated some hypotheses or suggested ideas from the data. When using the check list in Denscombe (2002) I found that I had identified themes and relationships in the units of data. I checked my findings with all the codes and felt there was sufficient evidence to justify my findings. I looked back at the original observations and interviews to ensure that the analysis did not decontextualize the meaning of the data and did not over simplify issues.

I followed Denscombe (2007) and developed a coding map. The coding map for my analysis can be seen below (fig.1).

QUALITATIVE DATA

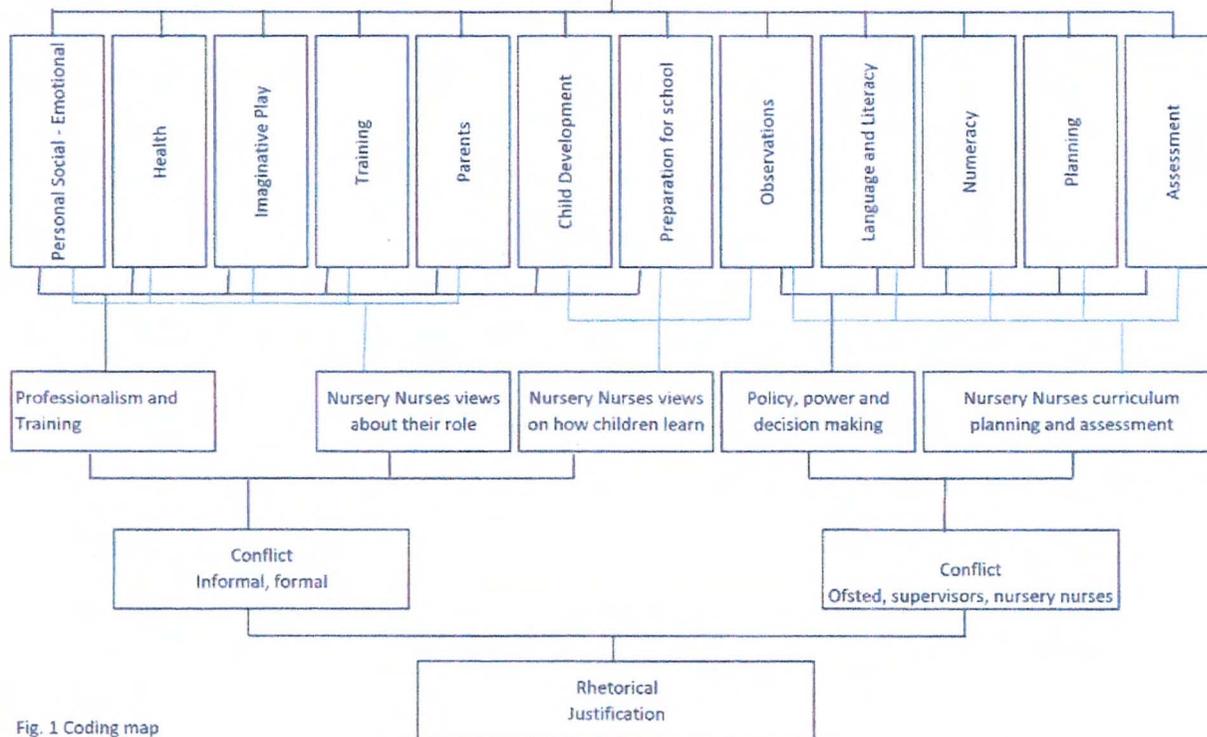


Fig. 1 Coding map

I discovered two areas of conflict both leading to rhetorical justification. These will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

Smith (1995) suggests that:

Purposes of qualitative coding include -

To ask questions about how the category relates to other ideas from the data and construct theories about those relations. (Smith, 1995 p.20)

Richards (2005) suggests that coding is:

To search for blends or combinations of categories, to find patterns in attitudes on this subject, seeing the categories from a different view point (Richards, 2005 p.87)

I then looked more closely at each topic and identified themes which occurred. I noticed the number of interactions concerned with discipline, toileting and hygiene, conversation, reading, literacy, numeracy and small upsets between children. I found the results quite surprising. A pattern began to appear which helped me come to my conclusions. In some topics I noticed conflicts arising.

Conclusion

The qualitative methods used for my study produced some useful results. The three day nurseries that I chose turned out to be very different in many ways; the children were from different backgrounds and yet the nursery nurses had similar training and similar views. The qualitative research methods I chose, enabled me to obtain useful data about nursery nurses in day nurseries, which eventually led to my conclusions. My training as an Inspector helped when I did the observations. I knew how to sit quietly and write about relevant actions or activities. I also think my time spent training students for work experience helped me to understand the difficulties of entering the professionals' world as a student. However, my background as an Inspector was always present and I had to work hard to prevent it altering my relationship with the nursery nurses. The observations went particularly well. I found that the nursery nurses very quickly stopped thinking of me as an observer and treated me as a visiting mother or took no notice of me at all. This worked well until they suddenly began to treat me as one of them and I felt it was time to finish. The supervisors/manager were helpful and at no time did I feel that I was in the way. Although both the supervisors/manager and the nursery nurses were very busy they tried to give me all the help they could, especially allowing me access to documentation which proved to be particularly interesting and enlightening.

The interviews produced useful data and the nursery nurses answered my questions very willingly. The nursery nurses soon relaxed and they soon ignored the small tape-recorder. I did get some useful material, although I did wish afterwards that I had asked a few different questions, such as 'Why did you

choose to become a nursery nurse?' Unfortunately it was impossible to return to the nurseries as one had closed down for rebuilding.

The transcribing took a long time but was interesting and I made sure that I wrote up my observation notes as soon as I arrived home. In this way anything which was unclear I could verify on my next visit. However the coding was more difficult. Although I found many themes running through the data, it was difficult to see where it was leading me. The background reading about qualitative research was helpful. I saw a common theme and phrase running through my interview data. This led me to look more closely at the NNEB, BTEC National Diploma in child care and NVQ level 3 in child care and education training manuals with which the nursery nurses in my study would have been familiar. There was a close correlation between the ideas of the nursery nurses' and their training.

In order for my data to be trustworthy, I kept all my notes and transcripts. I showed all the interviewees transcripts of the interviews and no one asked for any changes to be made. By showing the nursery nurses and supervisors/manager some of the observations, I helped them to understand what I was doing. I tried to think of other explanations for my findings but was unable to find any. In my observations I tried to reflect the real situation and not just look at particular areas which concerned me. For example I observed at all times of the day, including lunch time, to give myself a better picture of what the nursery nurses really did and how they did it.

By using qualitative research and a naturalistic approach and being a non-participant, but interested observer, I obtained sufficient data from observations, interviews and documents to complete my research. From the analysis of this data I came to my conclusions.

4. The Changing Curriculum for Early Years since 1945

This chapter sets out to show the aspects of child development and informal curriculum which nursery nurses were taught when the NNEB was formed in 1945. It shows how ideas and requirements for the early years have changed over the years. It also sets out explain how these changes have affected nursery nurses, both in the knowledge they are expected to have, and the aspects of childcare they are expected to perform. It will show how the introduction of the National Curriculum increased the change and how many of the ideas of researchers, who stressed child development and the importance of play, have been replaced by a discourse of standards, inspection and formality.

Informal curriculum

Formation of the Nursery Nursing Examination Board

Partly in response to the post-war expansion of nurseries to allow women to continue to stay as part of the workforce, and partly to support families in deprived situations, it was considered necessary to train young women to work with young children from 0- 7 years of age. In 1945 The National Nursery Examination Board was formed, conferring a nationally recognised qualification (NNEB Certificate) which prepared women to work with young children up to the age of five years. This was later extended to seven years.

When the NNEB certificate was introduced, the curriculum was influenced by early educationalists such as Froebel, Margaret McMillan and Isaacs, who put an emphasis on child development and the importance of play. Friedrich Froebel (Leibschner, 1992) thought that the teacher should be watchful of the individual child, have knowledge of child nature in general and have supplies of child materials in such order and such quantity as he or she could use. The NNEB syllabus, as late as 1989, was still emphasising child development and observation of individual children. Froebel thought that play was the highest phase of child development and was a serious and deeply significant activity. Susan Isaacs, writing in 1929 stated that:

It is important to know that the larger movements ripen first, and the finer skills only much later; the coarser movements of the hand as a whole before the finer combinations of the fingers. To give children things to use or ask them to do things which reverse this order is to make them tired or bad tempered. (Isaacs, 1929 p.69)

These ideas were stressed by the NNEB as were Margaret McMillan's ideas. Margaret McMillan (1930) emphasised the importance of the first few years of life in children's development. She also argued that love and security were as important for a child's overall progress as material well-being. She said there was a need to foster development and adapt methods of teaching to keep pace with the child's progress. Like Froebel she saw play as a vehicle for education. She also argued for progression and continuity in the curriculum as she found

some of her children regressed when they entered infant school.

There was an emphasis on encouraging play to increase learning. Most early educationalists felt children should be free to discover the world for themselves. McMillan stressed the importance of love and security and all emphasised the importance of keeping the child's interest. Isaacs stressed the need to study the development of the child and not expect the child to do things for which the child was developmentally not ready. These were the ideas and understanding about child development and play that the NNEB nursery nurses would have been taught. In a text book written for this qualification in 1980, play was described as:

A child's work; in fact it is the business of childhood. Through play, the child will develop in body and mind. He will come to see some order in the confusing world around him. Because play seems to come naturally to children, and their enjoyment of it is so self-evident and spontaneous, it surely must be a natural way of integrating and exercising their curiosity, energy, vitality and capacity for learning in the widest sense. (Brain and Martin, 1980 p.205)

They suggested that children who were self-confident and had a good grounding in learning skills and a positive approach to learning would have a head start when they began the next stage of their education. They said that children who were insecure, felt conflict and tensions, were afraid of making mistakes or felt discriminated against, would not learn so quickly; children needed to feel relaxed, happy and secure to welcome intellectual challenges. They also said

that play could be entirely undirected or structured according to the child's developing needs, and there should be provision for progression in all forms of play. They considered that knowledge of child development enabled staff to ensure the child was always moving forward. They also set out their ideas for preparing children for reading and writing, which they assumed would be taught at school.

Influence of Developmental Psychology and Psychoanalytic Theory

The attitudes towards play and child development on the NNEB course were also influenced by some developmental psychologists, such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky and psychoanalysts such as Freud and Bowlby.

Piaget saw play as the means by which the child unified experience, knowledge and understanding. He suggested that children control these through play, which generally involves using what is already known (assimilation), rather than adjusting to what is not known (accommodation), through the process he called 'equilibration'. He stressed the importance of free-flow play for young children and demonstrated that children were active in their learning, using play to further their development in cognitive, as well as effective ways (Piaget, 1962). Piaget's theory of cognitive development placed action and self-directed problem solving at the heart of learning and development. Brain and Martin (1980) in their text book for NNEB students mentioned Piaget's four stages through which children pass in the development of their mental capacities: the sensory-motor stage from birth to two, the pre-operational stage

from three to eight, the concrete operational stage from eight to eleven and the formal operational stage from eleven to adulthood.

Freud believed play to be a cathartic experience for children. It took them into and out of reality and helped them to feel mastery and control, so they coped with anxieties and conflicts and also reflected on positive experiences. In this way, play interpreted experience and made the child whole (Bruce, 1991).

Vygotsky in 1978 referred to the 'zone of proximal development' which looked at a child's current stage of development and at the level of potential development that could be achieved with appropriate guidance and support from adults. He saw the value of play being related to both cognitive and effective development through the fulfilment of the child's needs. He believed that children needed to learn in order to be motivated (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bowlby (1989), a psychoanalytically orientated psychiatrist, well known for his work on 'attachment theory' and the 'maternal deprivation' hypothesis, also hypothesised that infants had a predisposition to explore the world around them. This need to explore and play took the child away from the primary care giver and counteracted the need for proximity.

However Bruner (1960) believed that the learning process could be accelerated by providing material in a context that was within the child's level of understanding. He thought that the role of the teacher was to provide

'scaffolding' to enable the child to acquire the skills, knowledge and concepts of a particular culture. He argued that:

...any subject can be taught effectively in some, intellectual, honest form to any child at any stage of development. (Bruner, 1960 p.33)

Unlike Piaget, Bruner believed that language was a tool to be used in the course of operational thinking. He felt that language and logical thinking were inseparable. Unlike Piaget, he felt that it should be possible to speed up cognitive development by training children in the use of symbols, but Piaget believed such training would have no effect. Bruner felt that teachers should try to find ways to stimulate children, particularly from deprived backgrounds. Like Vygotsky, Bruner saw the role of the teacher as an 'interventionist' (McIlveen and Gross, 1997).

Most of these ideas and theories stressed the importance of play and the knowledge of child development for people working with young children. They also stressed that physical dexterity was important and larger physical movements developed first. They also argued that it was important to build on what children already knew and not force them or make them feel insecure. These theories were major influences from the 1930s to the 1980s. The Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) continued to support these ideas with recurring themes such as individual learning, the centrality of play in children's learning and the use of the environment for discovery. The report supported the Piagetian theory of development. There was considerable consensus from the more child-centred

theories that play is 'a good thing' and this consensus still persists in many areas today. These ideas and theories were very much part of the nursery nurses training. In the 'Overview' for the NNEB Certificate (NNEB, 1989) a large area of time was set aside for students to learn about child development. Students were expected to accurately observe the behaviour of children. One seventh of the syllabus was devoted to cognitive development and learning through play. Language development was also seen as very important.

However, during the 1980s the Government was becoming dissatisfied with many aspects of the teaching in schools and was planning big changes to the curriculum. They felt that schools and Local Authorities had too much power and politicians wanted to take greater control of the school curriculum.

The National Curriculum

In the middle 1980s the Government began to intervene increasingly in curriculum matters. There was concern about how children were taught and the standard of learning by children in schools, especially in literacy and mathematics. Until then, local authorities had had a great deal of autonomy over how teachers taught and which subjects they taught. The 1988 Education Reform Act (DfEE, 1988) introduced the 'National Curriculum' for school age children from 5 to 16 years of age. One aim of the act was to ensure all pupils studied a broad and balanced range of subjects throughout their time at school and another was to set clear objectives for what children should be able to

achieve. This involved checking on their progress towards these objectives.

Woodhead (1996) says that:

The National Curriculum and its assessment arrangements lie at the heart of the drive to raise standards of educational achievement. (Woodhead, 1996 p.86)

According to Maclure (1988), the Act was intended to mark a radical shift in direction. It increased the powers of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. It restored to the central government powers over the curriculum, which had been surrendered between the wars, and set up formal machinery for exercising and enforcing these responsibilities. Not only did it strengthen the central government's role in education, it introduced important limitations on the functions of local education authorities, who had to give greater autonomy to schools and governing bodies. The Education Reform Act required all maintained schools to provide for all pupils, within the years of compulsory schooling, a basic curriculum to be known as 'The National Curriculum'. The National Curriculum was based originally on three core subjects and six foundation subjects. The core subjects were mathematics, English and science; the foundation subjects were history, geography, music, art, physical education and design and technology. The act also required children to be assessed at the age of 7, 11, 13 and 16 years.

The Government also decided that the National Curriculum, its assessments and informing the public of the outcomes of those assessments, would provide

an important set of checks and balances on the system (Tomlinson, 1994). A particular issue, therefore, became that of school inspection. In 1991 the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted), was established.

Writers such as Hurst (1994), Edgington (2002) and Kelly (1994) who were involved with pre-school children were concerned about the introduction of a National Curriculum for school age children. They were concerned that there would be pressure from parents and politicians for a curriculum for the Early Years. The idea of a subject curriculum for early years seemed to be the opposite of long-established methods of integrated, topic-based approaches used in many early years settings and primary schools. A subject curriculum seemed to promote approaches to teaching which appeared to be at odds with teachers' understandings and theories (Wood and Attfield, 1996).

Hurst (1994) said that the National Curriculum exerted pressure for basic instruction in the early years:

The National Curriculum exerts pressure towards basic instruction in subjects through its emphasis on simplistic assessment in a way which can easily undermine established good practice in nursery schools. (Hurst, 1994 p.51)

Edgington (2002) is against the subject-centred approach:

Pedagogy in the early years has been a casualty of the overwhelmingly subject-centred approach to the curriculum over the past decade. Since the introduction of the National Curriculum for older children, effective ways

of helping younger children to learn have been ignored in the education debate. (Edgington, 2002 p.77)

In 1989 a group called 'The Early Years Curriculum Group', made up of a group of experts in early childhood education and the Under Fives Unit at the National Children's Bureau, produced a paper about the implications of the National Curriculum and assessment at seven for the early years curriculum (Early Years Education, 1989). It was intended to inform the deliberations of the National Curriculum Council, SEAC, and the Department of Education and Science:

It is important that the principles of early years education, particularly those which relate to the ways in which young children learn, form the basis for considering how the National Curriculum can be implemented. (Early Years Curriculum Group, 1989 p.4)

Kelly states:

The advent of the National Curriculum had the effect of turning early years education on its head. The direction of its development has been reversed; the advances it had made towards establishing a new and sophisticated form of curriculum have been discounted and arrested. (Kelly, 1994 p.1)

People were concerned that the introduction of a National Curriculum would result in a subject curriculum for the under fives. They saw the established practices of integrated learning having to give way to parent pressure for some evidence of subject learning.

A report published by the DES (1989) looked at the implications of the National Curriculum for children under five. It emphasised the importance of play but indicated that play was not a free or unstructured activity. The report recommended the adoption of the nine areas of learning and experience as a framework for planning. The nine areas were aesthetic and creative, human and social, linguistic and literacy, mathematical, moral, physical, scientific, spiritual and technological (DES, 1989).

The introduction of the National Curriculum slowly began to have an impact on the curriculum for the early years. In 1989 the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Angela Rumbold, was asked by Kenneth Baker to chair a Committee of enquiry into the quality of the educational experience offered to 3 and 4-year-olds. This report was completed in 1990. The terms of reference were 'To consider the quality of the educational experience which should be offered to 3 and 4-year-olds, with particular reference to content, continuity and progression in learning, having regard to the requirements of the National Curriculum and taking account of the Government's expenditure plans' (DES, 1990). The report stated:

'We believe that there is a need, made the more urgent by the rapid pace of current change and development within the educational system as a whole, to raise the quality of a good deal of existing provision.' (DES, 1990 p.1)

The report also stated that in fulfilling their task for the under fives, educators should guard against pressures which might lead them to over-concentrate on formal teaching and upon the attainment of a specific set of targets. The report set out the curriculum under the following headings, aesthetic and creative, human and social, language and literacy, mathematics, physical, science, spiritual and moral and technology. The report also pointed out that the introduction of the National Curriculum for children of statutory school age may affect considerably the perceptions of parents about the purposes of pre-school provision. It stated that the educator's task was to provide experiences which supported, stimulated and structured a child's learning and brought out a progression of understanding appropriate to a child's needs and abilities:

For the early years educator, therefore, the process of education – how children are encouraged to learn – is as important as, and inseparable from, the content – what they learn. We believe that this principle must underlie all curriculum planning. (DES, 1990 p.9)

The report described the curriculum as comprising of the concepts, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills that a child needs to develop. It also sets out

aims for under fives which should be the same as those for any age group except that very young children need:

...a considerable additional amount of care. Care and education for the under fives are complimentary and inseparable. (DES, 1990 p.8)

The report set out a series of propositions about the curriculum for the under fives. They included:

Play is an essential and rich part of the learning process.

Learning should be a pleasurable and rewarding experience.

Learning should be primarily first hand, experiential and active. Young children need opportunities to explore and discover.

Young children need a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

The process of learning is as important as the content.

The child should feel valued and a positive self-concept should be promoted which acknowledges the value of each child's cultural and religious life. (DES, 1990 p.36)

The report stated that a curriculum for children under five should consider the skills, concepts and attitudes, which enable a child to make sense of what he or she knows about the world. It also suggested that children benefit from activities which bring together several areas of learning at the same time.

An Early Years Curriculum

With the 'National Curriculum' and the Rumbold Report, a curriculum for children of four years became even more inevitable. Many educationalists, such as Blenkin (1994), Nutbrown (1994) and Kelly (1994), had different views on what type of curriculum was suitable. Many continued to support the developmental theory. Bruce (1987) thought the content of the curriculum should relate to the stage of development of the child. Curtis (1986) thought the nursery curriculum should be based on a process of growth and experience. The context of learning is as important as what children learn. Nutbrown (1994) saw play as having a prominent place in children's learning and development. She encouraged the use of themes or topics as being a good way of ensuring that a wide range of experiences which had a curricular balance, were linked. She said that children were active learners who needed to learn with and through interaction and knowledgeable educators. Blenkin (1994) said that, in the Western cultures, there was a long history of viewing the earliest stages of schooling with more care and sensitivity. She felt that this was because young children, certainly up to the age of 8 years, were:

Not only dependent and vulnerable but are also highly impressionable and learn more rapidly during this stage than any other period of their lives.

(Blenkin, 1994 p.27)

She described four main themes which recurred in appropriate curriculum for this age group. First the child is dependent on adults and new to institutional

life. Second, the child learns very rapidly at this age and is highly susceptible to environmental constraints or advantages and needs to be stimulated by a wide range of experiences. Thirdly, the child requires social interaction in order to make sense of experiences and learns through talking through their experiences with an interested adult. Fourthly, early education must nurture the playfulness of children because it is through play that the child is able to test out informally and personally what is being learnt. Pascal (1996) argued that providing young children with appropriate and well-planned learning experiences was a worthwhile goal. These must be tailored to the developmental and cultural needs of the child. The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990) stated that the context of learning and the process of learning were as important as what children learnt.

There was also a concern that pre-school settings were preparing children for the National Curriculum. People such as Curtis (1986), Blenkin and Kelly (1996) and Nutbrown (1994) felt that the child should be an active learner and the adult should provide the appropriate experiences to allow the child to develop skills and knowledge. Curtis (1986) indicated that few children of nursery age would make a start on reading but most would be developing some elementary concept of print, learning that books have exciting contents and that what we say can be written down and read. The NNEB continued to stress the importance of pre-reading and writing skills, learning through play and the importance of a sound knowledge of child development:

Educationalists over the years have been able to analyse the skills required for mastery of the three R,s – and there are a great many of them.

Visual and auditory perception and discrimination are two obvious examples. Spotting small differences and similarities between items or symbols is another. Matching, sorting, grouping ordering, grading, cultivating a left-to-right eye movement across a page, are still more. None of these skills will be attainable unless the child has developed reasonable co-ordination between hand and eye, control of the working of his body and accurate small manipulative movements. (Brain and Martin, 1980 p.157)

Kelly (1994) felt that the advent of the National Curriculum turned early years education on its head. Advances in developing a new and sophisticated curriculum had been stopped. There were growing concerns that the introduction of the National Curriculum was pressurising staff to formalise early years education. Blenkin (1994) looked at the problem of what children should be able to do, should know and what understanding they should have. She points out that there was opposition between those who would define this in terms of the child's own growing independence as a social and thinking person, and those who saw children in subject terms and as beginners. Children needed supportive relationships, for play, for exploration and a curriculum that was developed by their practitioners to match their present levels of understanding. She also felt that the reductionist view of the curriculum as shown in the National Curriculum, which saw it as a transmission of subject knowledge, ran counter to the interactive pedagogy of the developmental curriculum.

Nutbrown suggests:

Breadth and balance in the curriculum are not just about content but about processes of learning. There must be space, time and value for children to play, talk, imitate, reflect and question and reason as they develop their understanding of things they meet with. (Nutbrown, 1994 p.121)

Nutbrown also suggests that if educationalists watch children closely, and identify what they are paying attention to, they could match the curriculum content to the children's overriding interest. She says it is possible to facilitate learning through play and build on children's individual needs and experiences. She is concerned that there is too much anxiety about preparing children under 5 years of age, for the National Curriculum:

The best way to help children to get ready to be 5-year-olds is to allow them to be 3 when they are 3 and 4 when they are 4. The early experiences which children thrive on, are the best nourishment they can have and the best preparation for the next phase of life they encounter. (Nutbrown, 1994 p.126)

Nutbrown was against pouring in quantities of subject knowledge into the young child. She saw the implication that the child was a passive and non-participating being in the process of learning as an insult to children's capabilities. She noted that many early childhood practitioners were working to ensure children had a broad and rich range of early learning experiences. She said it was important

that those in the field realised the need to tailor this to the developmental and cultural needs of the children. She also said that flexibility was essential in any framework.

Kelly (1994), Blenkin (1994), Nutbrown (1994), Curtis (1986) and Bruce (1987) wanted a curriculum for the early years that was built on what children already know, they said that the curriculum should relate to child development and play was important. Other ideas included free flow play and the importance of teaching content linked with the child-in-context. Some stressed the importance of supportive relationships and teaching through themes and topics. They saw children as active learners and providing children with appropriate and well planned experiences as important. All were against too formalised education in the early years. They felt that few children of nursery age would make a start on reading or writing. They emphasised the importance of the environment and felt that children absorbed information from direct experiences. Several were concerned that pressure would lead to over concentration on formal teaching and children would be pushed into National Curriculum subjects too early. Most stressed that the way children are encouraged to learn is as important as what they learn and it is important to move them forward at their own pace.

Desirable Outcomes

Partly in response to the desire for a pre-school curriculum, partly because the Government wanted more four-year-olds in nursery education and because the

Government wanted to improve educational standards, the 'Desirable Outcomes' were introduced along with the 'Nursery Voucher' Scheme. In 1995 the government introduced a new education initiative. Gillian Shephard, Secretary of State for Education and Employment said:

There is now widespread recognition of the benefits that accrue from good quality education before compulsory school age. The time is now right to ensure more four-year-olds can benefit from nursery education and in doing so to focus on parental choice and the quality of the educational provision. (DfEE, 1996 p.2)

The Government introduced Nursery Vouchers in 1996. These were to enable all four-year-old children, whose parents wished them to, to get five sessions of pre-school time free. The parents were given vouchers worth £1000 and could use them at any approved pre-school setting. Some of the money for this scheme came from local education authorities. To offset this loss, many schools lowered their age of intake and this resulted in hundreds of four-year-olds in reception classes.

At the same time the 'Desirable Outcomes', specific goals for children's learning on entering compulsory education in the term after their fifth birthday, were introduced (DfEE, 1996). They provided a foundation for learning across the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education in Key Stage 1. They emphasised early literacy, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills and contributed to the understanding and skills in other areas.

The outcomes are organised into six areas:

Personal and social development

Language and literacy

Mathematics

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Physical development

Creative development

The Desirable Outcomes were not supposed to be a curriculum, but were to be used as a guide when planning a curriculum. Settings were expected to offer a curriculum which was comprised of a full range of experiences, opportunities and activities planned to promote children's learning. Emphasis was put on good planning. Plans were expected to show what children were expected to learn and to take account of how teaching and learning would take place. Settings had to decide on the detail of its planning and it was suggested that long term, medium term and short term plans were appropriate. Plans were expected to build on children's prior experiences and their skills and knowledge. They were also expected to place an emphasis on children's language, literacy, mathematics and personal and social skills and staff were required to assess the children on their progress (QCA, 1998b). Staff were expected to have a sound knowledge of the Desirable Outcomes.

The Desirable Outcomes document (DfEE, 1996) stated that any provider who can demonstrate they are following a specified curriculum, which leads to the desirable achievements for children's learning covering the areas of language, mathematics and cooperating with others, will be regarded by the Government as offering 'pre-school education' and will be treated in the same way as nursery education. Ofsted Registered Nursery Inspectors (RgNIs) were trained to judge whether or not settings receiving Government funding were following the guidelines laid out in this document. This ensured that all settings would follow the Government requirements if they were receiving funding

Some early years educationalists were against the voucher system, mainly because part of the funding was taken from the local education authorities. They also felt the introduction of the Desirable Outcomes confirmed their fears for formal education for pre-school children and were convinced that the Labour Government, if they won the General election in 1997, would scrap the vouchers and the desirable outcomes. This proved to be a false assumption. The method of funding was changed but the Desirable Outcomes remained. They had a very mixed reception from researchers and early years workers.

Writers such as Siraj-Blatchford (1998), Hurst and Joseph (1998), Hurst (1995) and Drummond (1996) felt they were useful to raise the standard in some nurseries but were concerned that they might be forcing early years educators to become more formal in their teaching and rely more on giving information.

Below are some of their comments:

This proposal is in fact a pre-National Curriculum, with a curriculum's specified aims and outcomes to be tested. It makes no difference that little detail is given – the testing and the vouchers will ensure that a certain curriculum is taught. (Hurst, 1995 p.8)

The rationale behind the Desirable Outcomes is to set a 'base-line' educational standard. In principle this should be applauded and it is hoped that settings, where training opportunities and resources have been poor, will begin to raise their standards. It is essential that we hold on to the wider picture of curriculum quality and see the 'desirable outcomes' for what they are – an instrument and limited base-line. (Siraj-Blatchford, 1998 p.6)

The educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s jettisoned acknowledging how children learn as a precondition for curriculum proposals. The programmes of study of The National Curriculum, and the subject area statements of the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (SCAA, 1996a), gave the impression that the content to be learned could be separated from the methods by which it is taught. This is not the case. In every decision about education, there is a model of teaching and learning involved. (Hurst and Joseph, 1998 p.2)

The 'Desirable Learning Outcomes for Children's Learning', marks a turning point for early years education. The precious territory of

children's lives and learning before compulsory school age has been invaded; the people who gave us the National Curriculum are staking out their claims on new ground, where their writ has never run before.

(Drummond, 1996 p.1)

These writers felt that very little detail was given but the testing and inspections would ensure a certain curriculum was taught. Some were pleased that some settings with poor standards would have to improve, but were concerned that Desirable Outcomes were seen only as an instrument, not a curriculum. Others were concerned that the content to be learnt was being separated from the methods by which it is taught.

The National Curriculum was beginning to invade the territory of pre-school settings. Nursery nurses were expected to take on the role of teacher, emphasising literacy and numeracy, leaving less time for important, caring aspects of their work. However the NNEB syllabus had not changed. The overview (NNEB, 1991) still stressed that the nursery nurse should be concerned for the whole child and should enable each child to develop to his/her full potential. The syllabus still emphasised the importance of the stages of development, child observations and learning through play. There was a small section on the development of concepts.

Nursery nurses were also required to plan in detail, to cover the six areas of learning and to assess children's attainment in these areas. The plans were expected to build on the children's prior experience and their skills and

knowledge. They had to write an outline of what was to be taught in each area of learning and how the intended teaching and learning would take place. The plans were to put an emphasis on the development of children's language, literacy, mathematics and personal and social skills. The aspects of literacy that were emphasised were, recognising their own names and familiar words, recognising letters of the alphabet by shape and sound, and using pictures, symbols, familiar words and letters to communicate meaning. In their writings children should use correct upper and lower case letters. In mathematics, the requirement included mathematical language, compare sort and count, solve practical problems and show awareness of number operations, such as addition and subtraction. Many of the settings had not included any emphasis on literacy and mathematics and nursery nurses were suddenly being expected to change their whole way of caring for young children. At the beginning, these requirements were for four-year-old children but funding for three-year-olds was gradually phased in. Many staff had not been trained to put these requirements into practice but were inspected in just the same way as those who had.

The Desirable Outcomes did not concentrate on child development or on play but instead emphasised content, particularly literacy and numeracy. They also focussed on assessment rather than learning. The Rumbold Report 'Starting with Quality' stated that:

'There should be no suggestion of a 'National Curriculum' for children under five'. It is the educators' task to provide experiences which support, stimulate and structure a child's learning and to bring about a

progression of understanding appropriate to the child's needs' (DES, 1990 p.8, 9)

In 1998 the Government introduced the 'National Literacy Strategy' and the following year introduced the 'National Numeracy Strategy' (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 1999). Early years settings were also required to emphasise literacy and numeracy. In 1998, Baseline Assessment for all children, within seven weeks of arrival in a Reception class, was introduced (QCA, 1998a). The introduction of Baseline Assessment in language, mathematics and social skills, prioritised standards in early literacy and numeracy, with less attention paid to scores in social and emotional development. It also put more stress on assessment. The inspections of all settings receiving government funding, also emphasised the importance of children's early learning experiences in literacy and numeracy. This resulted in practitioners putting much more emphasis on these aspects of the curriculum. Parents became anxious and also pressurised settings to become more formal in their approach. There was much concern over the impact of 'too formal too soon' both in nurseries and reception classes. This also had an effect on the work of nursery nurses in day nurseries.

Most adults make distinctions between work and play. Whitehead (1999) suggests that the national curriculum does not have a view of play or a policy for it. She says that the traditional view of play tends to describe and explain what purpose it might serve; whereas modern approaches look more closely at the individual who is playing and what it feels like to be playing and not just what purpose it has. She believes in the importance of play in infant communication

skills. The effect of the Desirable Outcomes has sometimes narrowed down the early years curriculum and forced staff to make judgements about children's learning in terms of the final product or the outcome. Whitehead suggests that there is a clear intention that the goals must dovetail into Level 1 of the National Curriculum. She states that the list of goals for literacy is a mixture of good sense and excessive and insensitive detail. Settings felt obliged to teach the goals because they were the criteria on which the inspections of early years settings were based.

The introduction of the Desirable Outcomes required all pre-school settings who received government funding to accept a curriculum based on planning and assessment. It seemed that the goal was to give children information and then to check that they had remembered or understood the information. The emphasis on learning was very different from the idea of children growing in mind and body, recommended by Brain and Martin, (1980). Play became less important and not a rich part of the learning process and the emphasis was put on giving information. There was less time to help children adjust to new environments and increase their personal, emotional and social skills. Staff felt it was important to perform well and to show they were following the Desirable Outcomes because Inspectors checked on their performance. If they were given a bad report, many parents might take their children away and the setting might have to close. This was particularly true of private day nurseries and pre-school settings. Nursery schools and classes with teachers on the staff were much more likely to perform well in literacy and numeracy skills as teachers were trained to teach these subjects. As they had the children for a session of only two and half

hours, they did not always feel it necessary to spend as much time on emotional, social and social skills.

An Ofsted report for a pre-school in 1998 stated:

In order to improve the quality and standards of the education provision, the setting should:

Enhance the provision for language and literacy by increasing children's opportunities to use emergent writing skills and, for the younger children to recognise and record their names independently. (Ofsted report, 580518)

In 1997 the Government white paper 'Excellence in Schools', published in June 1997, set out the intention that the Desirable Outcomes should be reviewed along side the review of the National Curriculum. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was asked to undertake both reviews and to ensure continuity as children move from their early years settings into primary schooling. There was pressure for an alternative approach, from some educationalists and organisations working with young children, especially the Early Childhood Education Forum. In 1998 they produced a document 'Quality in Diversity in Early Learning' (Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998) a framework for early childhood practitioners. This was an alternative model. It stated that the project members did not work together to specify an early years curriculum for all; no one in the early years community wanted the curriculum of every early years setting to be identical. Diversity was a necessary condition of quality in services for young children. The document presented a framework,

which was designed to help all educators understand, support and extend the learning of young children from birth to eight years. It also stated that the word 'curriculum' was used to refer to all experiences, activities, interactions and opportunities made available to children. They saw children as active learners – belonging, thinking, contributing, expressing, connecting, participating, living and learning. They saw learning through play as the fundamental principle and suggest that play was central to all young children's learning. In this document the Forum stated that they were:

....committed to the importance of high quality educational provision in settings for young children. The principle of quality, rooted in commitment to equality, is not negotiable. ---Young children learn best through play, first-hand experience and talk. (Early Childhood Education Forum, 1998 p.36)

The Quality in Diversity document welcomed the recognition of the importance of early care and education but felt that the needs of young children and their families had been overlooked. They were also concerned about curriculum, assessment and inspection and felt these had not been built on an understanding of how children learn. The document was written to offer guidance before the 'Early Learning Goals' were developed. It sets out five foundations for young children's learning:

Belonging and Connecting

Being and Becoming

Contributing and Participating
Being Active and Expressing
Thinking, Imagining and Understanding. (Early Childhood Education
Forum, 1998 p.12)

This document was not used by the QCA when they reviewed the Desirable Outcomes.

Anning and Edwards (2003) suggest that the review of the Desirable Outcomes (QCA, 1999) was designed to lead a four-year-old into a subject-based National Curriculum framework when they entered school. They found that, for staff with education backgrounds, the goals were easy to absorb, but care sector staff found them intimidating. Some staff were concerned as they did not have GCE mathematics and did not want to teach mathematics.

We found that some experienced staff from care settings were apologetic about their perceived lack of knowledge about educational practice and their unfamiliarity with words like curriculum and topics; others said they did not want to be teachers. (Anning and Edwards, 2003 p.127)

The Foundation Stage and Early Learning Goals.

In 1999 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) proposed a major initiative with implications for early childhood services: a new proposal called 'The Foundation Stage' which included children from the age of three to the end of the reception year. In September 2000, the 'Early Learning Goals' (QCA,

1999) were introduced outlining goals for children to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage. These were to be implemented in settings for children between three years and to the end of the reception year in primary school. There was an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, but the Early Learning Goals also acknowledge the importance of informal play-based learning in promoting young children's communication and social skills. The document set out the goals across six areas of learning, and what most children were expected to achieve by the end of the Foundation Stage. All Government funded settings were required to deliver a curriculum consistent with this guidance. The Early Learning Goals replaced the age-related Desirable Outcomes for children's learning on entering compulsory education (DfEE, 1996). The six areas of learning were: personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. With the introduction of the foundation stage the baseline assessment was changed to the Foundation Stage Profile (QCA, 2003) and was described as an assessment that would provide continuous assessment, where teachers could gather knowledge about individual children. The new assessment should summarise what each child knows, understands and can do in relation to the Early Learning Goals. The assessment would take place at the end of the reception year.

This document appeared to put more emphasis on play. However there were still many interpretations of this curriculum. Some practitioners were concerned that without supporting guidance, those working with young children might see goals only for three and four-year-old children, or a curriculum or both. In 2000

'Curriculum Guidance for The Foundation Stage' (QCA, 2000b) was published to address these concerns and stated that:

'This guidance is intended to help practitioners plan to meet the diverse needs of all children, so that most will achieve and some, where appropriate, will go beyond the Early Learning Goals by the end of the foundation stage. (QCA, 2000b p.5)

The Curriculum Guidance stated that the Foundation Stage is a significant landmark in funded education in England. For the first time it gives the important stage for children aged three to the end of the reception year, a distinct identity. The Curriculum Guidance sets out 'stepping stones' towards the Early Learning Goals. The 'stepping stones' show the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need to learn during the Foundation Stage.

The Curriculum Guidance also stated that the term curriculum describes everything children do, see, hear or feel in their setting, both planned and unplanned. Children should feel included, secure and valued.

There was more emphasis on play in the Curriculum Guidance. It stresses that:

Children do not make a distinction between 'play' and 'work' and neither should practitioners. Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which children learn with enjoyment and challenge. (QCA, 2000b p.11)

Anning and Edwards were pleased to see an emphasis on informal play-based learning but noted the emphasis on literacy and numeracy:

There was an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, in line with the government drive to raise standards in 'the basics', but the goals also emphasised the importance of informal, play-based learning in promoting young children's communication and social skills. (Anning and Edwards, 1999 p.136)

The importance of play was being recognised but practitioners were still required to understand fully the significance of the 'stepping stones' and how to facilitate high quality play. Miller (2002) saw the principles as being dependent on practitioners who understand how children develop, who understand well-planned play and do not make a distinction between work and play.

Nursery nurses' training did not include the Early Learning Goals or the significance of the 'stepping stones'. In a text book for NVQ level 3 in childcare and education, re-printed in 2000 (Jennings, Ward et al. 1996), there is no mention of the Early Learning Goals or any guidance for teaching the beginnings of reading and writing. The emphasis is still on caring and child development.

The Curriculum Guidance also stated that to be effective, an early years curriculum should be carefully structured to provide:

Provision for different starting points from which children develop their learning, building on what they can already do

Relevant and appropriate content that matches the different levels of young children's needs

Planned and purposeful activities that provides opportunities for teaching and learning, both indoors and outdoors. (p.11)

It is interesting to note that the word 'activity' is now often used instead of 'play'. The word seems to have a more work emphasis than the word 'play'.

Margaret Hodge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities, in her forward for the 'Curriculum Guidance for The Foundation Stage' said:

I am particularly proud of this guidance because it is not simply a product of government. It is something you have asked for and it has been developed drawing on the extensive expertise of a group of early education specialists, representing a broad band of interests. (QCA, 2000b p.2)

The early learning goals set high expectations for the end of the foundation stage, but expectations that are achievable for most children who have followed a relevant curriculum. (QCA, 2000b p.3)

The document also states that the QCA worked closely with early years practitioners and experts. However, it also states that they worked particularly

with national literacy and numeracy strategies and Ofsted. These are likely to be opposing voices. The document was developed by a consortium formed by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and Birmingham Education Service. There is a profile of people from all aspects of early years including the Pre-school Learning Alliance, Dr Gillian Pugh, Professor Kathy Sylva, but no mention of any representative from day nurseries. The same is true of the practitioner panel, which includes many nursery schools and primary schools, but no mention of any day nurseries. Most of the settings used would have employed trained teachers. This has resulted in documentation being written for settings which have children for two and a half hour sessions and are mainly geared to education. The day nurseries often have children from 8.30 am until 6.30 pm or at least much of this time. They are responsible for the child's health and welfare, as well as being expected to emphasise the education aspect of learning.

The introduction of a more 'formal, standards inspection curriculum' instead of a more 'informal, caring curriculum' caused differing opinions from influential educationalists.

Anning and Edwards (1999) describe day care staff as being traditionally focused on the development of children's competencies in spoken language and having a strong tradition of supporting the needs of the families of the children in their care. Until the onset of the voucher scheme in 1995 they were not expected to offer an explicitly educational component to the care of children. Miller (2000) urges early years practitioners not to let go of the fact that neither

in the curriculum guide lines nor in the inspection framework does it suggest that settings have to follow a particular curriculum for the Early Learning Goals and Miller (2000) is concerned that pressure to perform will set them up to fail:

By putting pressure on children to demonstrate their knowledge through 'write and tell' activities, we are in danger of setting them up to fail and turning them off literacy. (Miller, 2000 p.15)

Pugh (2001) draws attention to the concerns that the introduction of the National Curriculum and the national literacy and numeracy strategies are leading to pressure to formalise education at the earliest opportunity. She endorses the Rumbold report (DES, 1990) and the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance (QCA, 2000b). She says that it was written by a working party of experts and provides a clear and unambiguous statement of the principles which should underpin both learning and teaching. According to Pugh, effective early education requires a relevant curriculum, one that builds on what children can already do and which includes opportunities for children to engage in activities planned by adults, as well as those initiated by them:

Children are innately curious and eager to learn. They learn best through play, through talk and through direct experience; and they learn when they feel confident and secure.

Effective early education requires practitioners, who understand how young children learn and develop; who can observe children and respond appropriately, planning for children's learning, both as individuals and

groups; who can create a stimulating and well-organised learning environment, and can work in partnership with parents. (Pugh, 2001 p.21)

She is anxious that children are given opportunities to be curious and that they are confident and feel secure. She also wants a strong partnership with parents.

The longitudinal study funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) called 'The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project (Sylva, Melhuish et al. 1999) did look at day nurseries but appeared not to take account of the completely different environment, different time-table and the requirements placed on nursery nurses in day nurseries. They were looking for both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen instructive play activities. They found that day-care establishment results were near the bottom of the list of providers.

They found that:

'Considering type of provision, the Local Education Authority (LEA) Centres (nursery schools, nursery classes and nursery combined with care) had scores in the good-to-excellent range. Social services day-care were next, nearing the good range. However, the playgroups and private day nurseries were consistently found to have scores in the 'minimal/adequate' range.' '----- the most effective settings provide both teacher initiated group work and freely chosen, yet potentially instructive, play activities'. (Sylva, Melhuish et al. 1999 p. i)

An Ofsted report on variation in the quality of pre-school provision for three- and four-year-olds in the private, voluntary and independent day nurseries found that there was much improvement needed in the provision for language and literacy and mathematics. The big difference was between those that had teachers on the staff and those that had staff with only childcare qualifications. There was a difference between settings in the grading for communication language and literacy, mathematics, planning and teaching. In these areas Ofsted were looking for more teacher input.

Almost all children have experience of counting games and number songs and can use mathematical language fluently. However, weaknesses persist in developing children's mathematical skills and understanding, with only three-quarters of settings requiring children to undertake practical activities designed to help them solve problems and develop their awareness of basic numerical operations such as addition and subtraction. Out of the 224 settings in the 1-2 year category for two consecutive inspections, 171 of them are playgroups and pre-school settings and 27 are private day nurseries. (Ofsted, 2000 p.11)

They appear concerned that many day nurseries do not reach the required standard in literacy and mathematics:

The second main finding is that there is much still to do to improve further the quality of provision for language and literacy and for mathematics to enable three and four-year-old children to get the best foundation before

they start school. Pre-schools, play groups and private day nurseries are the least effective. Literacy and mathematics continue to need attention to help children make a good start on the National Curriculum. These are worrying weaknesses in promoting early reading and writing skills in about one-third of nursery settings inspected. (Ofsted, 2000 p.3)

The shift to a curriculum, emphasising language and literacy and numeracy, also gave rise to the expectation that teachers were required to work with early years children. To successfully implement the curriculum, some educationalists believed that there had to be a trained teacher on the staff (Moss, 2003).

The above examples highlight the differences in early years settings and the apparent difficulties faced by many day nurseries which did not employ a trained teacher. There are still many thousands of children who attend day nurseries. According to the report 'Children's Nurseries' (Blackburn, 2005), there are about 630,525 children attending day nurseries every day and the industry employs 168,000 members of staff. About three quarters of staff members are qualified in childcare.

Dowling (2000) reminds us that Dearing stated in 1993 that the principal task of the Key Stage 1 teacher was to ensure that pupils mastered the basic skills of reading, writing and numbers, and this has remained the major aim for children from five years upwards. This does not fit with the Early Learning Goals which require much younger children to start mastering these skills.

Another study 'Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva et al. 2002) was commissioned by the DfEE to look at 'effective' Foundation Stage settings. They found that effective pedagogy in the early years involves both the kind of interaction traditionally associated with the term 'teaching' and the provision of instructive learning environments and routines:

'Good outcomes for children are linked to:

- *Adult interactions that involve 'sustained shared thinking' and open-ended questioning to extend children's thinking.*
- *Practitioners having good curriculum knowledge as well as knowledge and understanding of child development.*
- *Shared educational aims with parents.*
- *Formative feedback to children during activities.*

The most effective settings provide both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities.

Trained teachers were most effective in their interactions with children, using the most sustained shared thinking interactions. (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva et al. 2002 p.1)

They suggest that the most effective settings have trained teachers on the staff.

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) write that pre-school children should have access to high quality programmes that supports their cultural and linguistic development:

In the early years setting, the daily curriculum provides a balance between regular routines, activities and spontaneous child-adult and child-child interactions. (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000 p.74)

They point out that it cannot be assumed that all children learn at the same pace and staff have an important role in encouraging children's development and maximising the learning environment. They say children need the opportunity:

To observe and listen to others

To try to make sense of what they see and hear

To practise what they know and can do

To experiment with language – both their first language and English

To interact with others and share experiences. (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000, p.74)

They stress many aspects which day nurseries see as important and are not able to spend sufficient time on because of the emphasis on literacy and numeracy.

In 2003, statutory assessment, in the form of a 'Foundation Profile' to be completed at the end of the Foundation Stage, was introduced to replace statutory baseline assessment on entry to primary school (QCA, 2003). This helped to take away the pressure on nursery staff, from parents who were anxious for their children to do well in literacy and mathematics on the base-line assessment when starting school.

Ofsted nursery reports show a difference in the findings for different types of settings. Day nurseries were often required to improve their programme for literacy and mathematics. One Ofsted report for a day nursery stated that:

In order to improve the quality and standards of the education provision, the setting should:

Improve the programme for mathematics by providing more opportunities for the children to solve simple problems, using addition and subtraction and include these activities and pattern making in planning. (Ofsted report 582276, 2000)

Ofsted appeared to be expecting children to be adding and taking away numbers and solving simple mathematical problems.

There are different opinions amongst educationalists as to how much structured teaching in language and literacy and mathematics young children, under five years old, should receive.

Nurse (1999) stresses learning through play:

Play, or playful approaches to learning have a number of advantages.

These include:

The self-posed 'questions' of play activity are meaningful and relevant to the child (or children) involved.

There are usually many possibilities in play, rather than a 'right answer' to be sought, so play is non-threatening, although it is often challenging.
(Nurse, 1999 p.173)

Edgington (2002) is concerned that encouraging children to read at an early age will take away the pleasure of reading:

'An approach which over-emphasizes letter and word recognition at the expense of developing positive attitudes to reading is one which will doom many children to a life where they can read but gain no pleasure from doing so.' (Edgington, 2002 p.33)

Moyles, Adams et al. (2002) are concerned about the Language of teaching:

The language of 'teaching' engenders concern in early years practitioners who feel that they support children's development within an enabling, facilitating and observing role rather than directly as teachers. (Moyles, Adams et al. 2002 p.1)

Browne (1999), comments on the change of meaning to the words 'Early Years'. They used to cover the first seven or eight years of a child's life, but they have now been changed and in 1994 they meant the 'under fives'. She also sees the Early Learning Goals as trying to reduce vitality, richness, diversity, complexity and sheer breadth and depth of young children's learning reduced to

63 goals and notes that the majority of those have little to do with approaches to, and processes of, learning. She describes the Early Learning Goals as being:

A content or objectives-led model of the early years curriculum with the 'early learning goals' establishing expectations of attainment at the end of the 'foundation stage'. (Browne, 1999 p.2)

She says that this model does not exist comfortably with a developmentally appropriate curriculum. It may also lead to a tick list approach to the assessment of children's learning. She also thinks that a curriculum, based upon Early Learning Goals, is unlikely to take sufficient account of the important processes of learning through spontaneous or child-initiated investigations and play.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education, (EPPE) project revealed that:

Key terms such as 'assessment', 'teaching', 'play', 'work', and 'learning' are interpreted as meaning different things. This constitutes a serious problem and the interpretation of many of these concepts affects perceptions of quality and affects perceptions of and reactions to current policy initiatives. (EPPE, Tec. Paper 3. Sylva, 2003, p.iv)

Bruce (2004) introduces a note of caution about turning a child's interest and pleasure of learning into formal lessons at an early age. A child may well resist or lose interest in learning. She also tries to clarify the concept of play. She rejects the idea that play involves only imaginative play and is relevant only to

some areas of the curriculum. She sees play as taking huge energy and concentration. She says it is not relaxing or recreation and often children need to relax after playing. Play is not just a way of burning off excess energy although several school playgrounds still assume this. In order to play, children must have real experiences. Children in Romanian orphanages who were deprived of normal experience were unable to play.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education, (EPPE) also found that:

In the most effective settings, the importance of staff members extending child-initiated interactions is clearly identified. Open-ended questioning is also associated with better cognitive achievement. However, open-ended questions made up only 5.1% of the questioning used in even the 'effective' settings.

We found that qualified staff (teaching) in the most effective settings provide children with more experience of academic experiences. (Sylva et al. 2003, p.iv)

They stress that qualified teaching staff provide children with more quantifiable learning experiences but many people feel that young children need much more caring experiences to grow in real stature and confidence. Edgington (2004) writes that the most important components of an appropriate curriculum for young children include encouraging security, self-esteem, self-discipline and positive social interaction.

Conclusion

When the NNEB was founded in 1945, educationalists and developmental psychologists were influencing the curriculum for the early years. They stressed the importance of play and development. There was an emphasis on encouraging play to increase learning and the importance of love and security. Many educationalists today still support their ideas. They felt that dexterity was important and that it was important to build on what children already knew. In the middle 1980s, there was a move to develop a curriculum for the early years. This coincided with the introduction of the 'National Curriculum' which introduced more emphasis on subject teaching, especially English and mathematics. Gradually pressure from parents and politicians encouraged a subject curriculum for the under fives. Many early years educationalists were concerned that a subject curriculum was at odds with teachers' understandings and theories. The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990), although dividing learning into seven headings, still emphasised the importance of play as well as education. The report also stressed the importance of how children are encouraged to learn and warned against the dangers of over-concentrating on formal teaching. Nursery nurse training still emphasised the importance of child development, play and observation and emphasised that a nursery nurse should be looking after the needs of the whole child. There was very little emphasis on reading, writing and numeracy skills.

When the 'Desirable Outcomes' were introduced (DfEE, 1996) they appeared to ignore most of the educationalists ideas. The Desirable Outcomes were not a

curriculum in themselves, but a series of goals for children to reach, by the time children were five. The outcomes put emphasis on language and literacy, numeracy and social and emotional development. Settings receiving government funding were required to follow the outcomes and Ofsted Registered Nursery Inspectors (RgNIs) were sent to all settings to ensure that the standard was good. Many educationalists were horrified and felt that the model could not exist alongside a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Many were concerned that formal teaching was being introduced. They felt that children, who are self-confident and have good grounding in learning skills, have a head start when they start school. Self-confidence does not come by forcing children to learn in a formal manner. They stressed that it was important to identify children's needs before deciding what was to be taught. Settings were also required to plan all activities and assess the children's skills and achievements. The nursery nurse training did not change and therefore did not train nursery nurses to plan and assess the children's achievements. Dividing the curriculum into subject areas encouraged teaching by subject and encouraged children to learn facts, instead of the integrated project style teaching preferred by staff in early years settings.

With the review of the Desirable Outcomes and the subsequent introduction of the Early Learning Goals some of the educationalists worries were removed. However, although the Early Learning Goals reintroduced an emphasis on play, many settings still put emphasis on more formal ways of learning, as they felt that this is what the Inspectors were looking for. Rumbold (DES, 1990) emphasise the importance of care for the under fives, but the emphasis on literacy and numeracy makes it difficult for staff to concentrate on this area as

much as they would like. There is considerable pressure to formalize early years education against the wishes of many experts, theorists and practitioners.

Nursery nurses are still required to look after the whole child in day nurseries but also incorporate the requirements of the Early Learning Goals to satisfy the Inspectors in order to receive Government funding.

5. Nursery Nurse training during a period of curriculum change

This chapter sets out to look at the origins of nursery nurse training and shows how this training has developed over the years. It shows how the training has always concentrated more on the caring aspect of childcare than the educational aspect and continues to do so. It shows how the curriculum has changed with the introduction of the 'Desirable Outcomes' and then the 'Early learning Goals' but the training has not changed at the same pace.

This chapter also looks at the introduction of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). It sets out to show that they did not raise the status of staff working in childcare, as they were meant to do, and questions how effective the NVQs in childcare really are. Staff are still seen as of low status and many education experts are now asking for an all teacher profession.

The nursery nursing award run by the NNEB (Nursery Nursing Examination Board) was one of the first recognised qualifications for private nannies and nursery workers. Other childcare qualifications were; NAMCW also leading to a nursery nurse qualification run by the NAMCW (National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare) and the BTEC National Diploma in Nursery Nursing. None of these qualifications were regulated by the state, although they were delivered mainly through state-supported institutions, especially Further Education Colleges. A wide variety of assessment methods were used, with some 'awarding bodies' such as NNEB and NAMCW using written exams and

practical tests, while BTEC used entirely teacher assessments. The NNEB, NAMCW and BTEC qualifications were vocational training for the purpose of looking after young children up to the age of seven years. They all required the student to have practical experience in childcare settings as part of the course. The NNEB Diploma in Nursery Nursing was administered by the National Nursery Examining Board. Bessie Wright, writing a foreword for Brain and Martin (1980), a training text, widely used as a standard text book on the NNEB course, describes how the responsibility for the care and education of young children was increasingly being shared between parents and people trained in this field. The nursery nurse is one of those people. Although there were a few Independent Colleges; the majority of the training formed part of the state system. The Norland College, however, was a privately run, residential college and students did an extra year's training to be awarded the NNEB and the Norland certificate. This training was very expensive. The students, however, were able to obtain very well-paid jobs, mainly as nannies. Students usually trained for two years and, at the end of the course, they took the national examination. The NNEB did not dictate an academic entry qualification but competence in written English was an advantage. Subjects covered on the course included the development of the child from birth to seven years, caring for the child including basic needs and caring for a sick child, intellectual growth and development, language and communication, social and emotional development and play. The training approach was that children who are self-confident and have good grounding in learning skills and a positive approach to learning will have a head start when they begin the next stage of their education. However children, who are insecure, feel conflict and tensions, are afraid of

making mistakes or feel discriminated against, will not learn so readily. Children need to feel relaxed, happy and secure, to welcome intellectual challenges (Brain and Martin, 1980).

In 1989 an overview for the Certificate in Nursery Nursing was published by The National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB). This stated that the scheme provided a curriculum for the education and training for students intending to work as fully qualified nursery nurses. The aim of the curriculum was to equip the student with the knowledge, skills and competencies to work in a variety of settings. One of those was the day nursery. The scheme also stressed the need for a solid base of knowledge and skill in mainstream child development. The curriculum contained an area on child development, observations and cognitive development and learning through play, but the major part was concerned with the health, physical and emotional development of the child. Speech and language and the development of concepts were seen as important. At least 140 days of the two year course had to be spent in practical placements, usually a nursery and an infant school (NNEB, 1989). The NAMCW and BTEC followed a similar curriculum with an emphasis on child development. The BTEC did not have an exam and courses often required students to have an A level on entry to the course. There was very little emphasis put on teaching children literacy or numeracy in any of these courses although Brain and Martin (1980), in their chapter on intellectual growth and development, refer to literacy and numeracy skills. The authors try to help students answer parents concerns about helping children to get ahead in formal education:

Parents look only for superficial evidence such as counting out loud and writing names. Our preparation goes much wider and deeper. (Brain and Martin, 1980 p.157)

Generally this was true until the government introduced testing for five-year-olds (QCA, 1998) and parents became much more concerned about their child's literacy and numeracy skills.

Introduction of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

In 1986 a Government-sponsored working party saw the need to reduce the confusion in the existing qualifications, relate the qualifications to the competencies needed, bridge the gap between academic and vocational qualifications and produce more people with better qualifications. As a result of this, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established. Their aim was to produce a framework of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The idea was that students could achieve units of competence which employers could recognise. The NCVQ was established with a remit to create a complete system of nationally recognised, transparent qualifications, with hierarchical levels, into which the 'jungle' of existing awards could be organised. All NVQs must be 'competence-based' which involves an emphasis on outcomes and the decoupling of assessment from particular institutions or learning programmes. Anyone who can present the relevant evidence should be able to present themselves for assessment and obtain the relevant award:

The intention was that NVQs should be authentic reflections of workplace practice, but should encapsulate a national standard, so any employer knew exactly what a particular award-holder could do. (Wolf, 1999 p.193)

The Child Care Consortium was set up to establish competence-based assessment qualifications in Child Care. The 'Working with Under Sevens' Project was part of the scheme. In 1992 the Council for Early Years Awards (CEYA) launched the NVQ in Childcare and Education. In 1992 Maureen O'Hagan, seconded from NNEB to the Council for Early Years Awards, writing in the Nursery World (O'Hagan, 1992), explained what the new NVQs were and how they would be implemented.

It is important to remember that National Vocational Qualifications are competence based. This means that candidates are assessed on competence in performing in real work situations where they are able to show their knowledge and understanding of the work concerned. NVQs are independent of any specific course of study or training, and the achievement of competence can be arrived at through formal training, informal learning, and experience. (O'Hagan, 1992 p.12)

She described CEYA as having an important role to play in the administration of the new qualifications. She said that CEYA accepted that training programmes may be helpful for some candidates, but they must not be a requirement for access to assessment. She said that with the new NVQs there

would be many more qualified people attaining nationally recognised qualifications in child care and this would result in high quality care and education. In 1994 the NNEB merged with CEYA to become CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education). In 2001 NAMCW also merged with CACHE. The aim of CACHE was:

To enable everyone involved in the care, education and development of children to gain access to appropriate training and vocational qualifications so that they can provide the highest quality service to children and families. (CACHE, 2001 p.1)

According to Smith (1992), the new NVQs were likely to affect everyone wishing to work in childcare. Training would be very different and the confusion in the existing qualifications would be reduced. The qualifications would relate clearly to the competence needed to the work situations and they would bridge the gap between 'academic' and 'vocational' qualifications. It was also hoped that they would raise the standard of childcare workers through recognition of the skills involved and improve the quality of care given to children and families. The NVQs were seen as an opportunity to enable experienced but unqualified staff to gain a qualification. Eventually all training for nursery nurses became competence based, both for experienced workers and young people leaving school. At the beginning only NVQ Levels 2 and 3 were established but later NVQ Level 1 was included. These competence qualifications gradually took the place of the NNEB.

In 1993 the NNEB produced a Modular Scheme Overview for the Diploma and Preliminary Diploma in Nursery Nursing. The Director of the NNEB, Robert Chantry-Price, wrote in the *Nursery World* (Chantry-Price, 1992) that there was to be a new structure to the NNEB and it would be available at two levels. Although they both contain the same number of modules and number of hours, some modules are less demanding for the students with less academic backgrounds. The students taking the less demanding units would achieve the Preliminary Diploma. The last written exam for the traditional NNEB would be held at the end of the summer term 1996. The new format of the NNEB would link with the NVQs. Robert Chantry-Price also stated that previous experience and learning by candidates would be assessed and accredited. The modular NNEB would be equivalent to NVQ Level 3 and the BTEC in Nursery Nursing would also fit with NVQ Level 3. It is interesting to note that the modular NNEB still stressed the importance of caring for the whole child, and emphasised the integrated nature of the work. For the Diploma there were 21 modules and only one included the early years curriculum and one which included cognitive and language development.

O'Hagan, Griffin et al. (1998) argue that early years work requires a broad range of complex skills and an extensive knowledge base and that all training and all qualifications for early years workers must reflect this requirement for skills and knowledge. They also argue that the competence-based NVQs represent a radical change in the way that candidates are able to achieve qualifications. No longer do they have to stop work in order to take a college-based course. However there is insufficient government funding for all those

who require training to get grants, and in some cases they can only get funding for NVQ level 2. The student in my study is an example of this.

NVQs are based on the 'occupational standards' derived from occupations by lead bodies. For childcare that is mainly CACHE and City and Guilds. Government funding for this express purpose supports them. No longer do all childcare courses have to be taken at college or school but students can be assessed in their work place. Employer-led organisations are the 'lead bodies' which have been established and funded by the Employment Department and the process of developing standards is generally carried out by the lead body and consultants (funded by the government):

The NVQ approach to competence was designed to be accessible to those who were outside the mainstream qualification system and, at the same time, to meet employers' immediate job-related training needs. (Spours, 1997 p.57)

There are no formal entry requirements for entry to an NVQ course and students are admitted if likely to benefit and judged able to achieve the level of the NVQ they are working towards. NVQs are designed to be work based and do not necessarily involve FE colleges. Access to the NVQ framework is a high priority for the Awarding bodies and the NVQ in Childcare is written in the language of outcomes related to employment. This means that:

1 Students and tutors can see more precisely what must be achieved.

- 2 *Students can relate this to what they have already achieved at college, at work or through other experience.*
- 3 *Learning programmes can be designed to build on experience in the most effective way.*
- 4 *Clearly defined outcomes make it easier to discuss needs with students and employers, plan work placements and relate programmes to what is learnt at work.*

Assessment is not tied to learning programmes. It draws on evidence from past experience or achievement, from the workplace, from assignments or projects, or from any activity where relevant achievement is demonstrated.

---Students play a major role in their own assessments. (Pursaill and Potter, 1994)

According to O'Hagan et al (1998), NVQs in the early years have brought a more accurate picture of the complexity of early years work; and given practitioners recognition of the skills and knowledge they have already acquired through previous experience. They have also encouraged practitioners to reflect on their work and have contributed to the development of quality in early years services. The Under Sevens Project of 1989-90 looked at the real work carried out by early years workers in work situations. This project was used to develop the National occupational standards for working with young children and their

families (Care Sector Consortium, 1991). It used processes known as 'functional analyses and 'occupational mapping'. The functional analysis involved asking those involved in childcare to describe what they do in their work. The occupational mapping consisted of clustering functions into groups, which reflected customary work patterns at various levels of work. By doing this they assert that the National Occupational Standards are an accurate reflection of the complexity and high level skills and knowledge necessary in early years work.

O'Hagan et al. (1998) concede that there have been several problems concerning insufficient rigour and consistency in some assessments. They found that the most important way of dealing with these problems is to have assessors with recent relevant occupational experience, and a level of underpinning knowledge and understanding, greater than the candidate they are assessing. They also found that some local authorities were failing to recognise the NVQ qualifications for employment and registration purposes and, even when NVQs were recognised, there was confusion over the level of responsibility for the level of NVQ. There was also doubt about the recognition of NVQs by higher education. Very few higher education establishments, at that time, would accept NVQs as entry qualifications for degrees in related subjects.

The existing examination boards, although willing to cooperate with the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), were very unwilling to give up their courses and in 2007 it is still possible to train for the BTEC National Diploma in Early Years or to obtain the CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Child Care and Education. These qualifications are, however, all linked to the

NVQs which enable candidates with experience in child care to get accreditation for prior learning. These include 'Diploma in Child Care and Education', 'Diploma in Playwork', 'Certificate for Teaching Assistant', and Diploma in Early Years Practice' (DCE, which is widely recognised as the new NNEB). Many of these qualifications also have specialist endorsements from which the candidate has to choose. This reflects the move to make NVQs more job-specific. This may be a good idea in theory but, as can be seen in my data, many nursery nurses move frequently from one job to another, often changing from care of babies to pre-school children or from class-room assistants to working in day nurseries. In order to do this they are not required to take any more training, although they may be encouraged to do so.

The concept of a 'climbing frame' of opportunities for training and qualifications was developed in an attempt to acknowledge the range of levels at which students would both gain access to and then exit from training opportunities (QCA, 2001). According to Abbott and Pugh (1998), the 'climbing frame' reflects the growth of modular courses and the growth of integrated early childhood degrees. In 1997 the NCVQ merged with the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to become the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). In September 2001, QCA published Early Years, Child Care and Playwork: a framework of nationally accredited qualifications, which drew the range of qualifications and training courses into a meaningful structure, or 'ladder', of qualifications.

The NVQ Framework

- *NVQ level 1 in Early Years Care and Education*

Recognises basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning with guidance and supervision.

- *NVQ level 2 in Early Years Care and Education (GCSE equivalent)*

Recognises ability to gain good knowledge and understanding of a subject or area of work and to perform varied tasks with some guidance or supervision.

- *NVQ level 3 in Early Years Care and Education (A level equivalent)*

Recognises the ability to gain, and, where relevant, apply a range of knowledge, skill and understanding. Appropriate for people working independently or supervising and training others in their field.

- *NVQ level 4 in Early Years Care and Education (Certificate of Higher Education equivalent)*

Appropriate training for managers and supervisors and for people managing and developing others. (QCA, 2001 p.4)

Not every one was in favour of the new NVQs. Holland (1988) saw them as a

means of dealing with long-term, structural, youth unemployment. He saw them as a means of deflecting attention from the causes and nature of youth unemployment by blaming the young people as deficient in the skills and capabilities required in the workplace and lowering expectations of the young people. Wolf (1989) said that it was difficult to make correct inferences without large amounts of evidence and that direct measures of competence were themselves highly contextualised. She thought that it would be difficult to acquire adequate evidence using competencies alone. She was concerned with the role of 'knowledge' in competency-based education and training. She saw vocational programmes as being occupied with objectives of direct and limited vocational relevance. She saw this as being opposite to the general concerns of 'educational' programmes and asks if competence and knowledge could mix. However, she suggested that competency-based programmes were not just for manual skills and experience was just as relevant and practical when dealing with predominantly cognitive skills.

Moss (1996) suggests that both the NNEB and NVQ Level 3 courses are at a basic level and the theoretical coverage is cursory by conventional academic standards. He also suggests that, because of the low status of childcare, those who have achieved an NVQ see it as a qualification which is the end of the road and not as the beginning. There are several reservations from experts about the competence-based qualifications. Wolf (1995) says that one concern is the extent to which NVQs neglect the teaching of the theory of child development and encourage a narrow approach to both teaching and assessment. Wolf also points out that another problem may well be differences that relate to

fundamental views of society and people, as well as job demarcations and future trends.

According to Pursaill and Potter (1994), early NVQs were often:

...based on a narrow concept of competence and focused on limited work tasks and skills at the expense of broader competences. (Pursaill and Potter, 1994 p.10)

Steps were taken to try and correct these problems. NVQ units and elements are related to broad occupational functions, rather than narrow job tasks, and range statements have been introduced to define a range of different situations and age range in childcare. Spours (1997) points out that the cultural perception that vocational equals second best is very strong. A-level grades at upper levels are more highly regarded because they provide a clear progression route to higher education. Vocational qualifications now provide an alternative route but only to the new universities. He recommends the following causal relationship be encouraged:

Assessment mode ---- motivation----learning----achievement (Spours, 1997 p.146)

The NVQs are task and skills driven. Students are encouraged to read extra material to gain background knowledge but lack of time makes it unlikely that assessors will check. The information in the students' portfolios is often not sufficient to check their background knowledge. Another concern is people's

opinion about what competency ought to mean. According to Wolf (1995), it is almost impossible to get genuine agreement from all parts of the sector on the competencies involved in work in children's nurseries. Another problem is the way in which NVQs have generated ever more assessment requirements to be provided in authentic work place environments or the closest possible simulated equivalent. Further Education staff say they spend a high proportion of their time on assessment rather than teaching the students and it is actually impossible to do all the required assessments in the time available. The assessment and quality assurance approach is dominated by paperwork for both the candidate and assessor. The result of this has been the use of portfolios. NVQs in Child Care involve over a thousand separate assessment decisions all of which must be documented. The NVQ in Child Care has many tick boxes and charts. Students find these confusing and many are filled in superficially. Another difficulty is of actually observing NVQ assessment. Ideally, it should be integrated with natural workplace performance but this is not always possible as there are other constraints and arrangements to consider in the workplace (Wolf, 1995). In spite of many problems, and the evidence that the NVQs have not achieved many of the aspirations of those who saw them as raising the quality of childcare and simplifying the training path to working in the early years field, NVQs are the main training for nursery nurses today.

Pugh. (2001) notes that NVQs are now the most common qualification aims amongst those working/studying towards a qualification while in work and are increasingly widely accepted as qualifications for work in early years or in playwork. However she also notes that the early years is a sector widely

perceived as under- trained and under-valued. She suggests that this is because most of the training is short term, setting specific and below NVQ Level 3 or 'A' Level equivalent. The percentage of staff with professional level qualifications is small and the low basic level of education and training creates problems for progression to higher-level, high -status qualifications. Many settings reported that a lack of resources significantly restricted the availability of training opportunities. Whereas education and training for 16-19 years old is free, training for adult workers is largely assumed by the state to be the responsibility of employers.

The nursery nurse I interviewed doing NVQ 2 training, whilst working at the nursery, was a mature student in her middle twenties. Funding was a problem. She had to do NVQ 2 first, although she was capable of starting with NVQ 3, in order to qualify for any funding. She told me that her assessor had been in twice and observed her reading a story. When asked if she had a workbook she replied:

'Yes they do it in booklets in stages. Once you have finished one you go through it with the assessor and they give you the next one and so far so good. I think they said that you were allowed a year, but if it carries on the way its going then I should finish before that.'

When asked if the nursery gave her any time for study she replied:

'They do give me a little bit of time out actually. When my assessor comes they do give me some time to talk to her. The last two times she has been in the room, so it wasn't necessary, but if we want to go through the booklet or any thing then I can have some time.' Nursery nurse 8. Chain Nursery, 13.5.04.

She had bought an expensive book but had not used it and had not taken up the offer by the local further education college to use a workshop. She did not feel it was necessary. Another nursery nurse taking NVQ 3 had the same arrangement at another college but spent one day a month in college. These arrangements make it difficult for these students to acquire the:

'... .. complex skills and extensive knowledge base' required. (O'Hagan et al.1998, p.90)

Desirable Outcomes

The Desirable Outcomes of learning (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority 1997) were produced in response to the proposed expansion of nursery provision and outlined the expected achievements of English children by the time they entered compulsory schooling. There were six areas of learning - personal and social, language and literacy, mathematics, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development, and creativity. At least three of these demonstrate a concern with academic learning and reflect the move to develop formal skills in the pre-school years. (Aubrey, David et al. 2000) quote

the Ofsted report (1998), drawn from evidence on the early education of four-year-olds in a range of settings, which leaves no doubt that the so-called Desirable Outcomes of Learning are:

'intended to help providers design a curriculum which is both well suited to four-year-olds and relates effectively to the earliest stages of the curriculum.' (Ofsted, 1998 p.4).

They point out that the 'key indicator of successes for the inspections was the progress made by four-year-olds towards the desirable outcomes,

These institutions, then, were being judged by inspectors on their effectiveness to introduce formal scholastic learning to four-year-olds.
(Aubrey, David et al. 2000 p.191)

The 'Looking at Children's Learning' booklet introducing the Desirable Outcomes (DfEE, 1997b) acknowledges the many staff and children who contributed to the book. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of any day nurseries being consulted.

Kelly (1996) attempts to show how insights from educational research into how children make sense of written language, have informed practice in Early Years settings. She describes children as active participants in their own learning. She indicates that many early years workers are frustrated by the imposition of explicit, systematic instruction on children, in the form of reading

and writing programmes. Such methods ignore children's individuality and prevent them from using their problem-solving astuteness:

Many Early Years teachers feel they are under pressure to teach in ways that do not accord with what they know about children's learning. Clearly there is a need to continue to develop innovatory practice and debate its theoretical basis, despite constraints from such a narrow curriculum. Early years professionals need to become stronger in asserting their own professionalism if they are going to have the confidence to continue working in ways that they know are successful in supporting young children in becoming fully literate. (Kelly, 1996 p. 149)

With the competence emphasis in training, less time was given to studying child development and more emphasis on practical skills needed to care for children. At the same time, as we saw in chapter 4, in 1995 the Government introduced Nursery Vouchers to enable four-year-old children to have free part-time nursery education. They introduced 'Desirable Outcomes' for children's learning by the time they entered full-time schooling and also introduced inspections for all settings receiving vouchers. Once literacy and mathematical development were set down as specific areas, nursery staff were encouraged to concentrate more on these aspects and therefore had less time for child development. The Rumbold Report (DES, 1990) had recommended a curriculum for under fives and suggested eight areas of learning including literacy and numeracy but they emphasised the importance of play and warned against pressures which might lead to over-concentration on formal teaching and

specific sets of targets.

Although the Desirable Outcomes were introduced in 1996 the workbook for NVQ/SVQ level 3 Child Care and Education (Jennings, Ward et al. 1996), reprinted in 2000, does not mention the Desirable Outcomes or the emphasis now required on literacy and numeracy. The majority of students would have followed this book. This would explain the comments from nursery nurses that they had not been trained to follow the Desirable Outcomes. The text book recommended for this training (O'Hagan and Smith, 1993) strongly supports the idea that children learn largely by play and the curriculum should offer a balance between structured and free play. It also emphasises that children learn best through direct experience and solving problems rather than being told.

Can competence and knowledge mix?

Wolf (1999) suggests that, although competency-based programmes are often perceived as occupied with discrete objectives of direct and limited vocational relevance, they are perfectly compatible with the acquisition of generalised knowledge and with broad-based courses. She suggests that, although many people have the impression that 'competencies' refer only to specific practical activities, there are definitions of competence which are concerned with inputs.

The sort of knowledge required for vocational learning or 'competence' is not in some way different from that learned in other parts of life, or education. Conversely, one cannot say that some sorts of knowledge are

generically unsuitable for competency-based learning---any sort of knowledge involves general schemata of some sort. Competency-based learning has been bedevilled by the idea that it only works for manual skills: but experience is just as relevant, and just as practical, when concerned with predominantly cognitive activities. (Wolf, 1999 p.42, 43)

Jessup (1995) also notes that since 1987 with the introduction of NVQs, and the emphasis on outcomes and assessment, there has been widespread belief that the model was not concerned with the process of learning. He denies this:

This is not the case. It is true that the award of an NVQ, quite deliberately, does not specify a particular course or mode of learning. The way in which the outcomes are specified, however, shapes the mode of learning and its content. (Jessup, 1995 p.33)

Jessup sees the NVQs as a qualification system to meet the future needs of occupational and professional training. He sees the concept of the NVQ framework as a design to cover comprehensively all occupations and professions. NVQs were not designed to provide a learning experience for young people although they do contribute to this objective. They are a statement of the competence required for an occupation. They have been deliberately designed to open access for a maximum number of people by defining the requirement for an award in a 'statement of competence'. People are allowed and encouraged to acquire competence through various forms of learning both formal and informal. It is quite in order to practice skills in the workplace as

well as in schools and colleges. Different kinds of evidence can be presented for assessment, providing it is relevant to the units being assessed, and the NVQ model encourages accreditation of prior learning (Jessup, 1995). Unfortunately, although they may not have been designed to provide a learning experience for young people, this is exactly what they are being used for in many cases.

Other general qualifications for child care workers

The BTEC National in Early Years have tried to put skills and learning side by side. In the guidance for Edexcel level 3 BTEC Nationals Early Years (BTEC, 2002) it states:

'The BTEC Nationals in Early Years have been developed to prepare learners to work in early years-related careers, in a professional capacity. They provide the knowledge, skills and understanding required for working in an early years environment and are designed to provide a contribution to the underpinning knowledge for the Level 3 NVQ in Early Years. (Edexcel, 2002 p.6)

It also states that those who gain a BTEC National Diploma in Early Years are qualified to work in the field immediately, as this qualification is universally recognised by employers as meeting the necessary requirements under the guidance of the Children Act 1989. It is interesting that the document states that the qualifications have been developed in consultation with the National Training Office (NTO) and the Sector Skills Council for the Health and Social

Care sector. There is no mention of an education consultation. There is an emphasis on the wider curriculum and a stress on spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural issues. There are 8 core units which are common to the National Certificate and the National Diploma. The Certificate is equivalent to the NVQ Level 2. Unit 7 is called 'Learning in the early years'. It consists of 60 learning hours and is divided into four parts. Part 3 is called 'The role of play' and part 4 is called 'Identify and promote learning opportunities.' One section is likely to take 15-20 hours. There are also 16 specialist units and the student must complete 10 of these making 18 units altogether. The student can choose which to leave out. All units have 60 hours of learning. Only three of these specialist units are directly connected to children's learning: – Play and Learning Activities; Early Years Project; and Literacy and Numeracy Skills. Some are indirectly connected, such as Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences and Environmental Studies, but they are aimed at the students' level to broaden their knowledge. The core units concentrate more on a safe environment, protecting children, and childcare practice. These are areas which the NNEB concentrated on in the past.

The two-year Diploma in Childcare and Education (DCE) was set up after the NVQs were introduced and the NNEB was withdrawn; and is considered by some to be the gold standard of childcare courses (CACHE, 2001). In the first year 8,588 students took the diploma and this had risen to 9,212 in 2004. It is equivalent to 3 A levels and has been awarded 360 UCAS points, giving it Higher Education entry-level status. Qualified tutors run it and students have five different placements. The qualification is highly regarded in the private

sector and seen as the new NNEB (Evans, 2004). The candidate handbook (CACHE, 2001) includes the Early Learning Goals and mentions the implications of the national numeracy and literacy strategies. This is a two-year full-time training but may be undertaken part-time at some centres. It is a level 3 qualification, replacing the NNEB, and gives students a secure basis of knowledge and assesses practical skills. It also enables students to practice in almost every early years childcare and education setting in the United Kingdom and sometimes abroad. The DCE or new NNEB for CACHE would seem to improve on the NVQs – both skills and learning go side by side.

Why do young people choose nursery nurse training?

Many students have had some experience of looking after small children, even if it is only babysitting. Some of them decide on a caring course at an early age, others cannot think of any thing else to do. Some may not have achieved much success at school because of truanting or lack of interest and see the opportunity of a practical training as a way forward. Others are not attracted to university but see a practical training where there appears to be a good opportunity of employment. Some students, who have not achieved high enough grades for teacher training, see the BTEC Diploma course as a route to teaching. Mature students enter training for different reasons. Perhaps their children are at school and they want to do some training; they have brought up children so they feel they have some experience. Others get an unqualified job in childcare and are encouraged to train while at work, taking the NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Child Care whilst continuing to work.

In the third nursery used for my study one nursery nurse came to the nursery from an agency and had no previous training. She was in her early twenties:

'I actually started doing agency work here, having been a health care assistant before hand. The agency sent me here a few times and I really enjoyed it. They had an opening so I asked if I could apply. I did and here I am. I am now doing the NVQ Level 2 in Child Care.' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 13.5.04

Another nursery nurse in the same nursery had come straight from college:

'I have a degree in English with Early Childhood studies. I may want to do teacher training in a couple of years but I want to build up my experience.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 19.5.04

A nursery nurse in the first nursery in my study had taken the NAMCW certificate in Child Care when she was sixteen. This is a one-year course. She liked it and then decided to take the BTEC National Diploma in Child Care, a two year course, equivalent to NVQ Level 3.

According to Skeggs:

The decision to go on a caring course is not so much a positive decision, as an attempt to find something, within constricting cultural and financial limits, which they will be able to do and be good at. Caring is something at which they are unlikely to fail. Skeggs, 1997 p.58)

As illustrated above, people choose nursery nurse training for many reasons and at different ages. Some have very definite goals and others make decisions about training as they proceed.

Conclusion

The original qualifications to become a nursery nurse were college-based courses run by independent bodies including the NNEB, BTEC and NAMCW. The training emphasised the development of children from birth to seven years; caring for the child, including basic needs and the sick child. It also included intellectual growth, language and communication, social and emotional development and play. The training still emphasises these aspects. Nursery nurses are now both male and female but it is still a predominately female workforce. It is a very physically demanding profession and the nursery nurses continue to work long hours for low wages.

The NVQs (NCVQ, 1986) were introduced to raise the standard of those working in child care; to enable mature, experienced, but unqualified staff to gain a recognised qualification and to reduce the confusion about all the

different training available. Unfortunately, these have not been entirely successful. They do allow mature, unqualified staff to get a recognised training, although there is very little funding available for this. Inexperienced young people, straight from school, who do their training while working in a nursery, do not always get sufficient theoretical knowledge from taking these qualifications, and those taking the NVQ Level 3 at college do not always get the depth of teaching about child development and caring for young children or practical experience that they received when taking the knowledge-based qualifications. The introduction of the NVQs has not simplified the confusion of courses as there are now even more different types of training available. Nursery nurses are still low paid and have low status. Child care workers are now seen as less well-qualified. There are still many different child care qualifications which are not compatible with a mobile workforce. For many in the childcare profession NVQs have had a disappointing effect. Although the 'Desirable Outcomes' were introduced in 1996, the training for nursery nurses was slow to change. Nursery nurses continued to be trained for a predominantly caring profession. The introduction of the 'Early Learning Goals' in 2000 was treated in the same way. Some extra units on aspects of the Early Learning Goals were introduced to the training, but many of these units were optional. To improve the status of nursery nurses the training should be seen as thorough, giving in-depth understanding of child development and also helping nursery nurses understand the implication of the Early Learning Goals. The Diploma in Child care and Education (DCE) would seem to fulfil these requirements.

6. How nursery nurses see their role and how this is influenced by their training.

'We are here for every single need of the children.' Nursery nurse 1.

Community Nursery, 17/12/02

This chapter explores how the nursery nurses in my study saw their role and made their professional judgements on how children learn. It shows the influence of the training, received by all the nursery nurses in my study, had on their views. It also explores the informal, caring curriculum, which nursery nurses were trained to put into practice, and how the more formal inspection and standards curriculum of the Early Learning Goals caused conflict and tensions between the nursery nurses and the supervisors/manager, as they tried to prepare the day nursery for Ofsted inspections. I use the topics 'professionalism and training' and 'nursery nurses views about themselves and how children learn' from my coding map, as evidence for my argument. The chapter also shows how the nursery nurses' training prepared them for much of the work, which was a necessary part of working in a day nursery. These findings were common to all three day nurseries.

The nursery nurses in my study became nursery nurses in day nurseries in many different ways and for many different reasons. Several went into Colleges of Further Education and took a variety of childcare courses. One young woman had the NAMCW certificate equivalent to the NVQ level 2 in Child Care; she then took NVQ

level 3 in Child Care and then the B.TEC Diploma in Child Care. Another with the B.TEC Diploma in Child Care had taken a maternity-cover position in a school and then managed to get the job as nursery nurse in the local authority nursery. Some had come straight from college with NVQ level 3 in Child Care. One had come from university, having a degree in English and Early Childhood Studies, and one worked for an agency, worked for the nursery, liked it, got a permanent position and started her training at the nursery. Being a mature student, she started her training with the lower NVQ level 2 in Child Care, to enable her to get funding. She was continuing her training by being assessed in the work place and occasionally attending workshops at the local Further Education College. However, they were all agreed on their role as nursery nurses.

The supervisors/manager training was very similar to the nursery nurses'. The supervisor from the Community nursery had an NAMCW Diploma and had been on several courses, including a training course for Desirable Learning Outcomes. The supervisor from the LEA nursery had the NNEB and the Advanced Diploma in Childcare and Education and the manager from the Chain nursery had the NNEB and had completed some of the training towards the Advanced Diploma in Childcare and Education.

This chapter shows the tensions between the discourses of caring and informality, and standards, inspection and formality. These tensions were common to all three day nurseries in my study. The tensions were played out in different discourses used by the nursery nurses and supervisors/manager. Sometimes the discourse conflict caused

actual conflict, although there was some evidence that the supervisors/manager were torn between the discourses.

How nursery nurses saw their role

The nursery nurses I interviewed were quite clear about their role. They were there to care for all the needs of the children. They were very anxious that the children should be happy and make friends. They wanted the children to be kind to each other and have a good self-image. They also saw their role as preparing children for school by enabling the children to communicate with each other and adults, having social skills, especially toileting and eating skills. They spent a great deal of time teaching these skills.

Below are some of their comments:

We want:

'To enable the children to have a good time; enjoy themselves while they are here; look after themselves with other children and to make friends. We are not here to force the children to do anything; it is their choice and we go at their pace.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

'To prepare them for school, so they have self-help skills, take themselves to the toilet, feed themselves, dress themselves, express their needs, make their mark on their work, listening skills, follow simple instructions and know their sounds.'
Nursery nurse 4 LEA Nursery, 20/11/04

To help them with:

'Socialising, getting on with each other, sharing; I think that is very important; also being kind to each other. They should also recognise their name, start to write it and recognise some of the letters, count up to ten, some can do more and learn their colours. That's what I am aiming for.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

These views were shared by all the nursery nurses I interviewed. They saw their aims as:

'Overall for me - it's really to see they are enjoying themselves and feel comfortable to do what they want to. It is difficult at times because you know you are doing the early learning goals which make all your activities link in and you cover all the five main areas but you have some children who all they really want to do is have a doll, carry it around, cuddle it and sit on the mat. You try to extend that but if that's all they want to do - I do find it quite hard. You try to encourage them but really you are stopping them from doing what they want to do, which is what it is about really isn't it. Just to see that they are happy really.' Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery 6/5/04

This is what the nursery nurses were trained to do. Their training involved caring for children in sickness and health. They were trained to understand child development and to keep children safe and happy. They worked hard to teach children to sit still and concentrate and also to develop good relationships with other children. They saw their role as helping the children to develop the life skills necessary for the world of school. From my days spent observing, I realised how important this was. Many

children found it very hard to share, to eat correctly, to use the toilet by themselves and to play together with other children. The nursery nurses I watched made these aspects a priority. They were confident in what they were doing and, from what I observed, I believe that they mainly achieved their aims. Their ideas were still those of the early theorists and still linked to their NNEB training ideas. This also applied to other forms of nursery nurse training such as the NAMCW and the BTEC National Diploma in Child Care and Education.

Nursery nurses I spoke to saw their role as:

' helping children to develop self-help skills, including toileting, feeding themselves, dressing themselves and to prepare them for school. ' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

This agrees with the findings of Pascal and Bertram, who found from interviews:

Staff saw their role as 'to be there for the children, to prepare a safe and stimulating environment for the children and to allow them to grow not only in body but in mind. (Pascal and Bertram, 1997, p, 116)

What does the job of a nursery nurse involve?

I observed that, as nursery nurses, they were responsible for everything that went on in their room. The rooms I observed were for three and four-year-old children. The

nursery nurses' jobs included planning for activities during the day, arranging the room with the activities and clearing it up afterwards. They had to sweep the floor, when necessary, especially if the children were playing with sand or flour. They were responsible for giving out the snacks, for giving out the lunch, sitting with the children and clearing up afterwards. They had to keep the children's toilets clean during the day and change children who had accidents. Some of them had an hour or so a week to prepare plans or write up observations but, otherwise, they were on duty looking after the children all the time they were in the nursery. All of them worked long hours; some had a short coffee break in the morning and some worked through until their lunch break. They usually worked early or late shifts of eight or nine hours including lunch hour. They were paid low wages and had insufficient recreational space. As one nursery nurse, who had previously been a nurse, told me:

'I started at 7.30 am, and I finish at 4. 30 pm. That is a nine-hour day with an hour for lunch. It is extremely tiring. Doing the nursing - I used to do twelve-hour shifts and I was not as tired. I think it is because it is mentally and physically tiring. There are so many children to interact with and so many things you are trying to think of all the time, like observations and your folders, keeping things up to date and your planning. There is so much to think of all the time - it doesn't leave much time to – well - breathe.' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

Typical day in the life of a nursery nurse

This description was from Community day nursery but the other two were very similar:

8.30 am. Morning session starts. Nursery nurse, helped by assistant, arranges room for free play, craft activity and educational activity. Greets parents and gives breakfast to the early children. Clears away breakfast and wipes tables and sweeps floor. Children choose activities and nursery nurse tries to ensure all children are happy and busy. Some children may not be happy to leave their parents and they have to be comforted. During this session there is usually a craft activity ongoing and an educational activity. The nursery nurse will be involved with one of these activities but is also responsible for the general well-being of all the children. She may have to sort out small upsets, arguments, tears and tempers. She must also ensure that all children use the toilet when necessary and wash their hands afterwards. This is an ongoing job. At no time may the children be left alone in the room and the nursery nurse must alert the helper if she is leaving the room. At a given signal,, the children help to clear the room for snack and circle time. In most day nurseries new activities are put out or physical activities take place.

10.00 am. Snack time. Children are usually encouraged to visit the toilet and wash their hands before the snack. Most nurseries have the children sitting round tables and give out the snack and biscuits. Children usually help to take round the snack. This time is usually used for some counting exercises and informal talking. The nursery nurse is responsible for getting the snack ready, clearing up afterwards and wiping the

tables. This is often followed by Circle time where children talk together, may be 'show and tell' where children show items they have brought from home and talk about them, may be a time to talk about the weather, days of the week or a time to have a story or sing songs. If the nursery nurse is entitled to a coffee break another person will cover for her. Many do not have a break in the morning session but a drink is brought to them. This is then followed by outdoor play or some form of physical activity. The nursery nurse will either accompany the children outside after helping to dress them suitably for the outdoor play or stay behind to get the tables set up for lunch. Occasionally this may be done for the nursery nurses by the catering staff.

11.45 am The nursery nurse helps to sit children for lunch. She then serves out the lunch and supervises the children while they eat their lunch. This involves persuading children to eat, cutting up food for children who can not mange and serving second helpings. The nursery nurse may have her lunch with the children or just supervise them depending on the day nursery. The children will need to wash their hands and clean their teeth after lunch. The tables need to be cleared and cleaned and once again the floor must be swept. By this time the nursery nurse gets a lunch break and someone else takes over from her.

1.15 pm The afternoon session begins. This is usually a repeat of the morning session with some children starting and others staying for the whole day.

4.30pm – approximately - The nursery nurse who started at 8.30 am will finish and the nursery nurse who started later will continue until the end of the session at 6.pm

As can be seen, apart from a possible short coffee break and a lunch break, the nursery nurse was on duty and looking after the children the whole time. The nursery nurse was responsible for every need of the children.

How supervisors/manager saw the role of nursery nurses

The supervisors/manager in my study had all trained as nursery nurses before they became supervisors/manager. They understood how the nursery nurses saw their roles and in many ways agreed with this. They were aware of the needs of the children in the nurseries and the demands of the parents. They knew the routine of the nursery and helped plan the nursery nurses' day. They all spent some time each week visiting each nursery room and saw the children and understood the problems of trying to teach the children to behave kindly to each other, to communicate with each other and have basic hygiene and good eating habits. They knew that these priorities took up much of the nursery nurses' time.

When asked how they saw the role of the nursery nurses in the day nursery, one supervisor replied:

'We are preparing them for school. Here I think it is a very social thing. Yes I think we should be teaching them to recognise their letters, to know their letter names and the letter sounds, but I don't think we should be teaching them to read or write. I think this is the teacher's job; yes we should be doing the grounding of it, the same with maths,

the very practical activities, taking away and adding, using the toys and equipment - I think we should be doing this but the hard core of teaching is for school. I know when they start school they still play, but I think the nursery should be very much play orientated. ' Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

When asked what she thought children should be able to achieve when they left for school another supervisor's reply was similarly couched entirely in the discourse of informal learning:

'I would like to hope that they were confident and sociable and would be comfortable too, for example, if it was circle time and they had something to share, they would be able to speak up and have the confidence to give their opinion, rather than be withdrawn. In my training in the past, I think I believed that was quite important and central to everything.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

Supervisors/managers also have to listen to parents and ensure they are happy with what the nursery offers. Most parents were most concerned that their children were happy and wanted to attend the nursery. Parents, that I observed, were very pleased when their child joined in quickly and seemed content at nursery. A child who cries to stay at home can cause a big problem for a working parent. At one nursery I noticed a parent bringing in a child rather late in the morning. The parent explained to the supervisor that the child had not been well but had revived and insisted that he should be taken to nursery. The parent was obviously delighted about the good relationship between the nursery nurses and the child. I heard only one parent complain that her

child was not learning enough writing and reading. Most parents, when collecting their child, asked if the child had behaved well and how much he/she had eaten.

Tensions between nursery nurses and supervisors/manager

The cause of the tensions and conflicts were the Early Learning Goals and Ofsted nursery inspections. Both the nursery nurses and supervisors/manager had the same basic training and wanted the same basic things for the children. They were all involved in the day nursery and understood what the job entailed. However, the Early Learning Goals had introduced more aspects to the curriculum for the nursery to cover. Ofsted required more emphasis on literacy, numeracy, assessment and planning.

The supervisors /manager had all been on training courses and mostly understood what was required by Ofsted. They were either sent assessment sheets and planning material by the Local Education Authority or Head Office or had devised their own. They had meetings with the nursery nurses and tried to explain what was required. Some of the nursery nurses had in-house training and some went on short courses. The tensions began to arise when the nursery nurses realised how long the new assessment and planning took and how much of their time had to be devoted to literacy and numeracy, when they saw other aspects as more important. The supervisors/manager opinions sometimes conflicted with those of Ofsted who expected the nursery to concentrate more on literacy and numeracy. However, they were aware that the nursery needed a good Ofsted report in order to survive and knew they must follow Ofsted's requirements. They also understood how much time this

took and how much time the nursery nurses spent on caring and stimulating activities. The tension between their professional training and the requirements of Ofsted made it difficult for the supervisors/manager to enforce Ofsted requirements, because they understood the problems and knew how time consuming some of the requirements were.

Each child had a development file and profile. I asked one supervisor if she ever looked through the children's development files to see how the children were progressing.

She replied:

'Yes, although not as often as I should. I just haven't had time recently. I haven't seen them since January.'

When asked how she would expect them to look if she were to look at them now she replied:

'Probably more than is in them! It will depend on how much the child is in. I would expect to see a few stickers on each sheet now and then those cross-referenced to where they are appropriate; and a few stickers and observations which cannot be cross-referenced.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

She did not appear to have complete faith in the nursery nurses' achievements. She knew that they would do other activities first. This was another area of tension

because the development files would be shown to the Inspector and were required to be filled in.

The supervisors/manager often had to check to see if the nursery nurses had actually filled in the plans or completed the assessments. They were often unsure if literacy and numeracy activities had taken place as they were supposed to and, therefore, tried to ensure the nursery nurses followed instructions and not their own professional judgement. This resulted in the nursery nurses being given charts with tick boxes to check if all six areas of learning had been covered in activities during the week

I asked one nursery nurse if the six areas of learning at the top of the sheet were useful:

'It's mainly which equipment we get out because for me – take this morning - I looked back to last Thursday and the Thursday before just so I'm not getting the same toys out every Thursday morning. So I'm really looking at what I have got out - not the knowledge and understanding headings; I don't even really look at that.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 5/3/03

The supervisors/manager were also constantly checking to ensure the nursery nurses were filling in the assessment records for the children.

The content of the nursery nurses training

To try and understand the tensions and conflicts between nursery nurses, supervisors/manager and Ofsted inspections, I look at the different elements in the nursery nurses' training and show how the discourses inherent in the training affected these tensions.

To discover the contents of the training which the nursery nurses I interviewed would have received, I studied three documents. The Diploma in Nursery Nursing – Modular Scheme Overview 1993/94 (NNEB, 1993), Child Care and Education NVQ Level 3 workbook 1996 (Jennings et al., 1996) and Edexcel Level 3 BTEC Nationals in Early Years, June 2002. These training manuals cover the training for the NNEB, NVQ level 3 and BTEC National Diploma (Edexcel, 2002). This was the earliest BTEC manual I was able to find and is very similar to previous manuals and to the syllabus the nursery nurses with the BTEC National Diploma would have used. The NNEB training manual (NNEB, 93) represents the training which the nursery nurses I interviewed with the NNEB, would have received. I chose the units that the nursery nurses said were important and have used my observation notes and interview data to illustrate what the nursery nurses said and the work nursery nurses do.

Aspects of practice around which there was relatively little conflict between discourses

Child Care Practices

Nursery nurses are trained to work safely with children and to give basic care in an appropriate manner. They are trained in the knowledge and practical skills required to work effectively with young children. They are also expected to understand the general health and hygiene requirements of young children and appropriate hygiene routines. This training is important for most of the work required in the day nursery.

The day nurseries are now also inspected by Ofsted (previously by social services) for the National Occupational Standards for working with young children and their families (Department for Employment, 1991). The National Occupational Standards identify the skills, knowledge and understanding required in different sectors. This means that the day nursery and the nursery nurses, who work in the nursery, are required to reach a high standard in basic child care skills. In this respect the discourse of training and standards coincide.

As one supervisor told me:

'I thoroughly believe in and endorse the national standards and they are not that difficult. If you are not doing the minimum then there is something drastically wrong.' Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/10/04

The supervisors/manager agreed with the nursery nurses that the children needed time spent on caring matters.

'I suppose historically we are more for the caring side than the curriculum.'

Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

'I must say that a lot of the children here do need a lot of emotional support and the social aspects.' Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

When asked if she expected to be inspected as a 'special' nursery because they took priority children the supervisor replied:

'They wouldn't see us as a 'special' nursery but I would expect them to take into consideration the number of children with 'special needs' and look at what we provide for them.' Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

Parents sent their children to day nursery usually because they were working parents and wanted somewhere where their children would be safe and kept healthy. If they became sick, they wanted to be sure the carer would know what to do. They wanted their children to be happy and not refuse to attend. They wanted to be sure their child learnt to get along with other children and learn good hygiene and eating habits. There was some evidence that some parents found these aspects of parenting very hard.

For example a new child in the second day nursery has very little idea of how to eat with a fork:

The new boy is at the table with the lady who comes in to cover the lunch period. He does not like the look of his lunch. She tells him to hurry up and eat

his food. He looks very determined not to eat it. He sits quietly and picks off the pieces of salad and hides them under the plate. She sees he is struggling and tries to help him eat the rice. He can't really manage rice with a fork. He picks up a few grains in his fingers and puts them in the palm of his hand and then in his mouth. I don't think he had very much to eat today. LEA Nursery, 5/10/04

Parents were also pleased to hear their child was learning letters and sounds and most were happy to respond to nursery nurses' requests to bring in an item for 'circle time', for example, something which was 'red' or began with 'r' if that was appropriate for that week. Parents were always in a hurry and did not want to stop and chat for very long. They were always anxious to hear if their child had behaved well and what he/she had eaten.

One very important aspect of their training is looking after the health and hygiene of the children in their care. Nursery nurses are responsible for teaching toilet training and hygiene and independence when using the toilet. They are also responsible for teaching them good eating habits and good table manners. This includes eating a reasonable amount of food, using spoons and forks correctly and washing their hands before and after meals.

Nursery nurses are trained to:

Understand the role of food and nutrition as part of an overall healthy lifestyle.

Understand the social and educational role of food, mealtimes and clearing away. (NNEB, 1993 p.37)

Nursery nurses put this into practice in various ways.

Below are some examples from my observations:

One boy says he doesn't like his dinner and is told to eat the potatoes. He refuses and just sits there looking very sad, two tears roll down his face. He also holds out a long time but then suddenly eats all the potatoes and most of the vegetables and smiles happily. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

Children sit on the mat, two children help put the chairs round the tables for tea. While this is happening nursery nurse 8 has a chat time with the other children, reminding them to be nice to their friends and to use their spoons and not their fingers with their soup. The tables are put together this time. Nursery nurse 7 wipes the tables and the children wash their hands and sit where they like at the table. Chain Nursery, 22/4/04

Children are just finishing lunch. Nursery nurse 7 is giving out seconds of tinned peaches and an assistant is giving extra cream if they want it. Nursery nurse 7 fills in a list of what they have eaten. One child, an older one, drops his last piece of peach on the floor and cries. Nursery nurse 7 says she is very sorry but there is no more. 'You have had two bowls full already.' Two children start

drinking the juice from the bowl, they are quickly told not to do this. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 21/5/04

Nursery nurse 2 goes round with the soup, encouraging all the children to try a little. Most of them do, they are given a chance to change their minds and have a little. Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 15/1/03

Toileting and hygiene were seen as important:

The ways in which toilet training and hygiene routines shape attitudes and behaviour. (Jennings et al. 2002 p.7)

Nursery nurses are also responsible for keeping the children and the room clean.

Nursery nurse 7 supervises the children in the toilet and another cleans the tables and puts the chairs away. Children sit in reading corner while waiting for all children to finish in the toilet. Nursery nurse sweeps the floor, which has rice and peaches on it. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 21/5/04

Nursery nurses have to teach the children how to use the toilet and wash their hands afterwards.

'What must we do with our hands first?' 'Wash them' they reply. 'There are always the same ones at the computer' complains a child. 'Yes, but we are going to do our list aren't we?' She then reminds them of the bathroom rules, 'Don't

play in the bathroom or toilet and ask for help if you need it so we don't have any messy accidents. ' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 15/4/04

Nursery nurses always have to think about the health of the children:

The boys who have been playing with the water have to be changed because they are so wet. There are spare trousers and tops available. Chain Nursery, 22/6/04

Nursery nurses are also trained to be aware of signs of sickness or contagious diseases and how to deal with sick children. They are expected to report their observations to the parents.

Symptoms of commonly encountered illnesses and methods of dealing with them.
(NVQ, level 3, p.7)

Here are two observations from my field notes:

A nursery nurse from another room brings a small child into the room and shows nursery nurse 1 his foot. She says that the mother doesn't know what he has done. They discuss this and nursery nurse 11 says that the mother should be told that it needs looking at by the doctor. Chain Nursery, 6/5/04

One child has red eye, Nursery nurse and Supervisor (who has just come in) discuss this and decide to contact the mother to take her to the chemist. Nursery nurse phones mother. Community Nursery, 15/11/02

Many children came to the nurseries knowing very little about toilet training and hygiene. The nursery nurses spent a lot of time on this aspect. They never made the child feel uncomfortable about accidents but tried to teach them good habits. They also tried to give the children good eating habits and encouraged self-reliance. These aspects took up much of the nursery nurses' time but that was what they had been trained to do. As can be seen from the above illustrations, much of the nursery nurses' time is taken up by basic health and hygiene matters relating to the children. That was what they were trained for and how they saw their role.

The supervisors/manager know that parents require the caring side of childcare and that it takes a lot of time and they have to encourage the nursery nurses to keep their standards high. However they must follow the Early Learning Goal requirements which also require much of the nursery nurses time.. This inevitably causes tensions as there is only so much time available.

Knowledge of Child Development

Nursery nurses are taught an in-depth understanding of children's physical intellectual, social and emotional development. They are expected to know children's development from 6 weeks to eight years and how to observe behaviour and measure progress through reference to the norm. Nursery nurses learn about the growth and

development of children and what to expect from children at different ages and stages and to understand their needs. Nursery nurses are there to comfort children when they are upset. This may be because they miss their mother, find it difficult to share with other children, cannot express themselves or have a special need which makes them get upset easily. Some children require a great deal of the nursery nurses' time and patience and this emphasises their caring role. I watched nursery nurses coping with these situations many times.

They are expected to have:

Basic knowledge of children's development 6 weeks to eight years and how provision for their physical needs affects their development. (Jennings et al. 2003 p.1)

Nursery nurses learn:

Physical development; sequence of development, fine and gross motor skills, factors affecting physical development. (Edexcel, 2002 p.98)

The knowledge of child development enabled nursery nurses, whom I interviewed/observed, to adapt activities to suit most of the children. There was always a variety of activities out and different children wanted different things. I watched one child play at the sand pit for nearly an hour. She was very content just pouring and having solitary play. The nursery nurse knew that this was what she needed and allowed her to continue. Another child enjoyed writing his name and was

encouraged to do this. Behaviour problems were often related to the age of the child or by the effect of another child whose behaviour was disturbed and needed help. If a child did not want to sit still and write his name the nursery nurses did not feel that he/she should be forced to do this as they considered he/she was not yet ready for this type of activity.

Below are a few examples which show how nursery nurses' understanding of the development of children and their needs affects their attitude towards the children:

One small boy is lying down on a cushion sucking his thumb and clutching a blanket. He was crying when I arrived, then did some drawing but is now resting. I am told that he only comes once a week and goes to another nursery for the rest of the time. He does not mix, even outside and always wants to sit with a member of staff, on her lap if possible. Mother knows how he is but still sends him. Chain Nursery, 27/6/04

The nursery nurses comfort him the best they can. They try to make him feel secure and do not force him to do things he does not want to do.

Some children do not have sufficient language to make themselves fully understood. One Asian boy came from a family where only the father spoke English. The nursery nurses tried to help him develop his language skills but still he often became frustrated:

One little girl cries. The Asian boy has pushed her. NN3 listens and tries to sort it out. Apparently the girl took a label off the wall and took it into the tent. The Asian boy knew she shouldn't do this so tried to tell her. He couldn't find the language so pushed her. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

The nursery nurses often had behaviour problems to deal with and this was part of their training:

The importance of goals and boundary setting in providing for children and the rationale for the provision of frameworks for behaviour.

Ways in which the nursery nurse can contribute both positively and negatively to children's behaviour. (NNEB, 2003 p.36)

They coped with children who had special needs, and tried to help the other children understand their needs:

One child does something, which I don't see and nursery nurse 7 intervenes. She is quite firm with the child. She is usually quiet and relaxed with the children. It is the child with 'Aspergers Syndrome', who gets very upset if other children over-excite him, who has been provoked. She then takes him to one side and talks quietly to him, and gradually he calms down. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 13/4/04

Nursery nurses are taught to help children who find it difficult to share with other children. They also have to deal with children who rely on force to get their own way.

One new child had to be taught he must not hit or scratch other children:

The new boy scratches another child because he took his insect. He is told not to do it even if the other child upsets him. This time he says sorry and gives the child some of his toys. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

I notice the new boy going over to the Wendy house. A small stocky girl refuses to let him in. There are two other children inside. They say no he can't come in. He hits the little girl around the face. He starts to do it again and is seen by another nursery nurse and spoken to sharply and it is reported to his key worker. He tries to do it to another of the children who were in the Wendy house and this time the key worker, nursery nurse 4, takes him aside, sits him on her lap and talks very quietly but firmly to him. He says that the girl is bad. He is told that they do not allow hitting in the nursery. LEA Nursery 24/9/03

One child cries and Nursery nurse 7 comforts him and tries to sort out the problem. Someone has taken his toy. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 22/4/04

One child gets angry because he won't share the small people for the house. He sits on a chair away from the play and looks furious. Nursery nurse 5 talks to him using figures from the house. He calms down but then sees what the other children have done to the house while he has been away and has another temper. He is four and will go to school in January. Eventually she manages to

calm him down and get him back playing. This is very time consuming and wearing on the staff. LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

I noted that much of the nursery nurses time was taken up by small upset and misunderstandings by children. A sound knowledge of child development and how to deal with behaviour problems helped the nursery nurses to understand and deal with these incidents. Supervisors/manager saw this as important but also had to put in place activities which were linked to the Early Learning Goals and try to ensure all children were progressing towards the goals. Tensions arose about how much time could be spent on 'learning activities' and how much on caring.

Learning through play

The discourse of learning through free play strongly underpins the nursery nurses' training. Nursery nurses are trained to understand the role of play in the development of children. They are taught how to provide and promote a safe and healthy play environment. They are also trained to provide appropriate activities in an attractive and stimulating way and learn about the role of the adult in the promoting of learning through play. Part of their training is to help children to learn through playing with activities and toys. I noticed that the nursery nurses' main aim was to put out a wide selection of interesting and stimulating toys and activities for the children. The nursery nurses I interviewed believed that their role was to put out a range of activities which would interest and stimulate the children. When the children arrived in the morning they would run to an activity which they thought looked interesting. Some activities were oversubscribed and others were left empty. I noticed that the

nursery nurses would try to change that activity to make it more interesting for the children. They believed that children learnt from playing with the activities but wanted them to be free to choose. They rotated the toys so all children were able to have an interesting selection even if they did not attend the nursery every day. They were more interested in this aspect than ensuring all activities were building on what had gone before, or stretching the children's ability in literacy and numeracy.

Their training included:

Curriculum provision: resources and their organisation, e.g. wet and dry sand, water, play and dough, book corner, role-play, large and small construction, puzzles and games and multi-ethnic dolls and equipment. (Edexcel, 2002 p.74)

How children learn, to include the child as an active learner and the role of play in learning. (NNEB, 1993 p.35)

I asked one of the nursery nurses if she believed in learning through play:

'Yes I do, I can see how they learn through play. You don't necessarily have to teach them but provide the equipment. For example, you don't have to say here is the funnel and we are going to fill it to the top and when its full it is all going to run out. You can provide the equipment for them to realise that, just basically by playing, and one day they will say 'Oh look it has all poured out, this one has got more in it than that one'. Nursery nurse 6, Chain nursery, 6/5/04

Learning through play was another example of how their training prepared them for an informal curriculum. They were trained to provide both individual and group play:

Identify and provide for the different types of play both individual and group.

(NNEB, 1993 p.34)

The nursery nurses were seen setting up the following activities to help the children learn from play both individually and in groups:

Three children are at a table with nursery nurse 8. There are empty milk bottles and three brown bottles. They are going to do experiments with water. One child fills up a plastic jug with water and pours it into one of the milk jugs. Another child does the same. 'Is there more or less in your milk bottle?' The other child does the same and again and has to work out who has more and who has less. The children take great care when pouring and seem to be enjoying the activity. 'What is in those bottles?' says one of the children pointing to the brown bottles. They are told it is coloured water and they can add some to their water to see what happens. They seem very interested by this and spend a lot of time pouring coloured water into their milk bottles. Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 15/4/04

At the water tray the children each have a small bowl, a straw and soapy water. They are blowing bubbles – the children enjoy this and get quite excited at the size of the bubbles. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

All the nursery nurses used cooking activities as learning experiences:

NN2 appears with the trolley and ingredients for cooking. There are 12 children this afternoon and they cook in two groups. Although 6 are chosen, nearly all of them come to the table. NN1 sorts it out and the remainder go and play.

NN2 shows children pictures of different shaped biscuits. We are going to sieve the icing sugar. 'Why'? 'Because it has lumps in it.' 'What's a sieve?' 'Its got small holes in it.' One child is given an egg to crack. She needs help and a little goes on the table. She looks worried. NN2 puts icing sugar in the sieve and the children take turns to push it through with a spoon. The butter is passed round for the children to cut. Children appear to concentrate hard on this job. NN2 shows children the sieved icing sugar. 'It's all soft.' They then put a little fat into the bowl. The children all help to mix the eggs with the sugar and fat. NN2 chats to them while they are doing it. One child decides to leave the cooking and do something else. She is told that she cannot come back once she has left the table. They then grease the tins enthusiastically. Now it is coming together the children become much more interested. It is cut up into pieces and they roll out their piece. They use different shaped cutters to cut out the biscuits and put them on the tins. The extra biscuit dough is cut up into pieces for the other children who choose their cutters. Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 15/1/02

Their training also included:

The need to adapt or modify planned activities to suit children's needs and interests and to capitalise on unplanned learning opportunities. (Jennings et al. 1996 p.214)

Support and promote children's learning in 'creativity, 'early science: skills and concepts and social learning through co-operation. (NNEB, 1993 p.49)

The nursery nurses were trained to encourage children's' imaginations. I saw them doing this by encouraging dressing-up, turning the play house into various different places such as an office or travel agents. They were also trained to encourage creativity. They helped children to learn about colour, using paints and craft activities

Nursery nurses gave children an opportunity to experiment with paint:

Two children go to the vegetable printing table. They put on aprons first. One child is seen pouring the paint into two trays and then dipping a piece of carrot into the paint and making patterns on a paper. Chain Nursery, 12/7/04

The nursery nurses were encouraged to use every day material and easily available material such as magazines and reusable waste material:

How to use and adapt existing and readily available resources in an innovative and flexible manner. (Jennings et al. 1996 p.214)

The following are examples of the nursery nurses using reusable material. The children made collages from magazine pages:

I notice paper plates hanging up in the room. The children have made collages of food. On each one is a child's name and written underneath what the child has said, 'spaghetti, pot noodles and lettuce' and 'I love pasta'. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

Children were encouraged to use their imaginations in the play house:

The playhouse is an Office today. There is a table, chair, telephone, calculator, tickets, brochures and a small globe. It is actually a travel agent's. Three children are playing at taking orders for lunch and one child is writing a ticket for another one. NN2 sits at a table with some children and has pens and papers. Nursery nurse 7 goes into the travel agents and encourages the children to play. She talks about flying to China, for how long and how much it would cost. 'Have a lovely time, don't forget your passport?' Several children quickly get involved. . The children are all busy. 'Nursery nurse 7' a child calls. 'I have missed my plane.' 'Oh no, you will have to wait for another one.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 28/4/04

They were also encouraged to use their imaginations and skills by making houses and a globe of the world:

There is also evidence that they have been making houses out of cardboard boxes. There is a large box 2' x 4' painted, with windows cut out and a smaller one with curtains glued to the windows. Nursery nurse 5 is sitting with two children at the doll's house. She is making up a story about the dolls. LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

On the wall is a map of the world. Paper plates have been stuck down each side. They contain collages representing foods from different countries. The children made these.

On the craft table is a large paper lampshade, a miniature globe and sponges for printing. The children have been making their own globe. Chain Nursery, 21/5/04

Nursery nurses are taught to encourage role play and encourage children to use their imaginations:

The home corner, consisting of three units, cooker, sink and cupboards, is set out. There are also two suction cleaners and an ironing board and an iron. The children are busy playing with the pretend fruit and food. They start to clear it all up because someone thinks it is time to clear up. Its not but A thinks it is getting in a mess. One child opens a box full of pretend eggs. They fall out and split in half. He looks worried and then realises they are meant to. He picks them up and A helps him to put them back. One child gets out the ironing board and iron and pretends to iron. Two children start cleaning the floor; one uses

the cleaner and one a brush. They continue to pretend they are cleaning for several minutes. Community Nursery, 2/2/03

Nursery nurses' training also includes helping children to learn through music, movement and physical activity:

Support and promote learning through movement and physical activity. (NNEB, 1993 p.49)

I observed nursery nurses encouraging outdoor physical activity in an imaginative way. They were also expected to keep the children safe at all times and encourage children who found physical activity more difficult.

The following examples illustrate outside play:

Outside, the same apparatus as last time is out but they also have six plastic milk crates. The children fetch these and line them up against a wall and walk along the top of them. They then make spaces so they have to jump across the space. They do this without any suggestions from the staff. They may have seen it done on another day but they make up the game on their own. Eventually one child makes the space too big for a small child to jump and there are a few tears. This is quickly sorted and nursery nurse 8 explains that her legs are not long enough to jump that far. Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 22/4/04

The nursery nurses are involved all the time; one always with the climbing frame and the others where the children are. They help the less able to achieve a somersault. 'Stand back and give G some space' says NN6. G tries to do it and finds it very difficult and has to go back and try again. This time he does manage it but he is very stiff. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 25/4/04

If the weather was unsuitable to play outdoors, the nursery nurses encouraged imaginative physical play inside:

Nursery nurse 2 brings in a small slide – children are very excited. Child whose shoes were wet – puts them back on. 'Why does he have to?' asks nursery nurse 2. One child replies 'to prevent his feet from being trodded on'. She corrects him. A brings in mats and NN tells them why they have to have mats; she also tells them how to go down the slide on their bottoms and not head first. Children play on the slide and also climb underneath through the holes. There is also a tunnel; they go down the slide and through the tunnel. She sends two children to the next-door room to ask for the box of beanbags and soft balls. The children enjoy the activities: they roll the balls down the slide in front of them and also throw the beanbags in the air. One child says 'I wish the beans would grow into a magic beanstalk'. The children keep returning to this story, 'did you water it', 'where's the giant?' and one child says, 'Fee fi foe fum I smell the blood of an English man'. One child kicks another child's ball, 'Why did he do that?' Nursery nurse 2 replies that it was an accident. Another child is reminded not to throw the beanbags at people. He looks ashamed. Another child picks up two balls and says, 'Look at me I'm a clown'. She says 'You're

not very good at juggling', and explains to him what you have to do. The child keeps practising and eventually manages to throw the balls in the air and catch one of them. He looks very pleased with himself. Children visit the toilet when they need to. Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 2/2/03

Some nursery nurses were able to develop physical skills and also include other aspects of the curriculum. They also tried to encourage children, who were reluctant to take part, as this observation shows:

Nursery nurse 6 has half of the class for P.E. The room has been cleared but the cupboards in one corner are a pretend home. The children are all crawling on the floor with the nursery nurse. The children are pretending to be snails, moving very slowly and then ants crawling very quickly. One child gets hurt; 'Never mind it was an accident', she comforts the child. 'When an ant gets hurt all the other ants comfort it.' The children comfort the child. They are now woodlice. She explains how they roll up into a ball when they see danger. Children pretend to be woodlice and curl up for safety. One child then pretends to be a bird. The children quickly curl up. 'Where do they live?' nursery nurse 6 asks the children. 'In the hedge'. 'In the wood' they reply. She reads from a book that they live under stones and wood. One child does not join in and lies on the chairs, which are against the wall and watches. NNI does not force him but does stop children from going into the corner. She talks about caterpillars, 'What do they eat?' 'Leaves' say several children. She talks briefly about the life cycle of the butterfly. Children seem familiar with it and pretend to be butterflies coming out of a chrysalis. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 26/7/04

The nursery nurses tried to make the room interesting and stimulating for the children, especially when they first arrived. All the nursery nurses believed that children should be able to choose which activity they went to, and only made the child wait if the activity was too popular. They did not emphasise literacy and numeracy unless they thought the activity was appropriate for the stage of development of the child. This caused tension with the supervisors, one of whom was called a manager, as these were required by the Inspectors. To try and overcome this reluctance, supervisors implemented 'learning activities', which were to ensure the nursery nurses covered sufficient 'stepping stones' to fill in the child's assessment file.

When asked about the 'Learning Activities' sheets, one supervisor replied:

'Hopefully you have seen them about- they should have them, because they should be out at least once a day,- perhaps a craft activity or out in the garden- wherever they have decided they are going to do an activity on a 'stepping stone' that day. They choose two or three 'stepping stones' and an activity to cover them. They can put stickers in as well, so they can write what the children have done. It also has on the sheet what materials are going to be used and a space for evaluation.' Supervisor Community Nursery, 7/3/03

The other day nurseries had similar 'Learning Activity' sheets.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

This was an area of training which did not conflict with the Early Learning Goals but still caused tensions because the nursery nurses gave language and communication skills priority and spent more time on this area than the supervisors/manager felt was necessary, time which could have been spent on 'learning activities'.

Nursery nurses' training includes the role of the adult in providing appropriate activities to support cognitive and language development. They are taught the stages and sequence of language development such as listening, expressive and receptive language and comprehension skills. Nursery nurses are trained to emphasise the development of language and cognitive development:

Recognition that cognitive and language development are essentially integrated with other aspects of a child's overall development with particular respect to the relationship between language and cognition. (NNEB, 1993 p.35)

The nursery nurses whom I observed/interviewed, were also trained to talk to the children and encourage children to talk about what had happened to them or about their possessions. They saw this as helping children to widen their vocabulary, increase their confidence, enable them to express themselves and develop an interest in the written word. The nursery nurses saw all these skills as important for children when they start school.

The needs and requirements of young children with respect to developing their language and communication skills and how these might be met. The importance of encouraging the child's listening and comprehension skills.

(Jennings et al. 1996 p.119)

There were two aspects to this area of learning; first the nursery nurses were trained to read stories to children. Sometimes this was the whole group, sometimes the group was split into older and younger children, and sometimes a nursery nurse would sit in the book corner and read to an individual or small groups of children. Generally children enjoyed this time very much. It encouraged imagination and language development. The other aspect was circle time when children came together; sometimes this was to share news and talk about what they had done at the weekend and sometimes it was to show the treasure they had brought from home to show other children. Even the quietest child would try to join in and most children enjoyed hearing other children speak. This encouraged communication skills and listening skills. The other circle activity was discussion of the morning's activities, discussion about the weather and the days of the week. This usually introduced words and numbers. This could become a bit repetitive but the children liked it. They appeared to like the routine and wanted to have time to talk.

All the nursery nurses read stories to the children and often read the children's books when they brought them to nursery:

Nursery nurse 7 reads the children a story. A late child arrives and brings a book about animals. She shows the children the pictures. Children say the names of the animals. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 22/4/04

They encouraged the children to talk about their experiences and then to sit still and listen to other children:

Nursery nurse 2 sits on the floor with the children. She asks a child what toy she has from Mc Donald's. She encourages the children to tell her what they have been doing and where they have been. Some times it is difficult to hear what the child is saying as some are quite young and others are shy but each child has a turn. No one is forced to speak. Occasionally she has to remind the other children to listen to the other children and wait their turn. Most seem interested in what the other children are saying. Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 28/11/03

They also talked to the children while they were playing and at 'circle time':

NN1 goes to the sand tray. She talks to the children. They are playing pretend food. 'Shall I eat it or drink it? Shall I put milk in to cool it down?' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 30/10/02

The children are asked what day it is. They are not sure so they sing the 'Days of the Week'. At last they work it out that it is Wednesday. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

Children talk about Christmas trees – ‘Do you have any sparkly things on your tree at home? Shall we put some on our tree? Children sprinkle glitter on the green paint. ‘Put a hand print inside – shall I help?’ She goes round the table and paints the child’s hand red – he prints this inside the card and goes to wash his hands. ‘B, come and put some sparkle on your tree. Put a little glue on the tree and shake on glitter.’ She shows him and he does it for himself. She holds up a large jar of tiny coloured shapes, which the children can stick on their tree. She talks about the shapes, ‘look there are squares, stars, circles and triangles, you can sprinkle them on your tree.’ Community Nursery 7/12/02

Nursery nurse 3 asks them about the weather. ‘Sunny’, says someone – ‘no it isn’t’. They discuss getting wet yesterday and decide it is cloudy. They then sing ‘My name is’ and each child says their name when it is their turn. They then talk about the child who is missing – ‘He’s ill’, ‘He has gone to big school’. They then talk about who is three and who is four. The four-year-old children put up their hands. Nursery nurse 3, LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

While observing, I saw a nursery nurse help the children to enjoy both a story and words:

Nursery nurse 2 gets the story book ‘There is a serious commotion at the bottom of the Ocean’. The book is placed on the table and children are encouraged to look at the pictures and identify animals. One child says ‘that is a mummy dolphin, that is a daddy dolphin and that is a baby dolphin’, all children then

jiggle like a jelly fish and then count the teeth of the shark. Another child watches but does not speak. The children then identify the octopus, say it has eight legs and when asked reply that they have two. All children join in. One child then points out the tusks on the walrus. The children and nursery nurse discuss penguins – and a Penguin chocolate biscuit,. One child is amused by the word cuddly and tickly and tries to tickle everyone, but soon calms down.

Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 30/10/02

The nursery nurses were taught to understand the problems facing children who were unable to communicate:

The possible effect of language delay on overall development. (NNEB, 1993 p.36)

The nursery nurses saw language development as very important. Some children had a wide vocabulary but many were shy or very inarticulate. The nursery nurses encouraged children to talk about every day happenings in their lives, to listen to other children and to widen their vocabulary. They always praised and encouraged however small the child's contribution.

I observed one four year old child who very rarely spoke and the nursery nurses spent time trying to encourage him. His key worker had been on a course to learn 'Picture exchange communication system' (PECS) in order to communicate with him:

The listening area has an easel and on the board are pictures on a strip of Velcro. The heading is PECS (Picture exchange communication system). B tells me she is using this method with one of the children who doesn't speak. The child wants to have a turn on the computer; he won't ask but just sits by it. She tells him to fetch the picture of the computer and then he can have it on. He appears to understand but just sits there. She does not turn it on. Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery 2/10/03

The silent child sits next to B. He is upset by all the commotion earlier and won't use his cards to ask for his lunch. He has a card with Velcro pictures and he is supposed to find the card showing lunch and say 'I want my lunch'. He refuses to do this so his lunch is served and cut but not given to him. He holds out for a long time but eventually he finds the card. LEA Nursery, 2/10/03

Part of this area caused no conflict between discourses. The supervisors/manager were keen to foster this area of learning and the Early Learning Goals also stress the need for language development.

One manager said:

I would hope that when children go to school they would be able to speak up and have confidence in their opinions. Manager Chain nursery, 25/4/04

However supervisors/manager realised that this took up time, which could have been spent on 'learning activities' which would fill the assessment file. The nursery nurses

professional judgement was that children needed communication skills and language development very much; they were very important.

Areas of training which caused particular tensions and conflict between discourses of caring and informality and of standards and inspection

Observations and assessment

Observations and assessment caused many tensions between the supervisors and the nursery nurses. The nursery nurses were trained to accurately observe and record behaviour of individual children and groups of children and make reasoned assessments of children using observations. They were taught how to use their knowledge of child development to observe and to involve parents in their observations and assessments

One of the main modules, in all three different types of nursery nurse training, was related to understanding and observing growth and development of children to the age of eight years. Knowledge of child development was an important part of their training and they were expected to use this knowledge to observe children's behaviour and use their observations to assess the children's needs. Nursery nurses were trained to know and understand the children. When asked about them they were very detailed in their knowledge of what each child could do and where the problems were. Their knowledge of child development and their close contact with each child, particularly their 'key children', meant that they had detailed knowledge of each child's achievements. They had been trained to observe everything that a child did and link that to his/her development. They could do this:

'If the files are not complete I can fill in areas for the parent review because I know the child well'. Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery.

They knew how much he/she could count and which letters he/she knew. Which words he/she knew and what he/she ate.

According to Ofsted (2000), adults working in one out of four nursery settings, needed to improve the quality of their assessment of children's progress and attainment. This was an area where there was conflict between Ofsted and the nursery nurses, as their training did not prepare them for detailed assessments. Ofsted Inspectors (RgNIs) were urged to check if staff made regular assessments to enable them to note if children were secure and participating fully in activities. The Inspectors were required to observe whether nursery nurses identified children's achievements, any learning difficulties and their progress over time. The assessments must be systematic, informative, objective and clearly linked to the Early learning Goals (Ofsted, 2000). This is very different from the nursery nurses' training requirements which were linked to child development, not so detailed and much more informal. The nursery nurses found these detailed assessments very time consuming and difficult to do while they are working with so many children. The supervisors/manager said they presumed the nursery nurses were doing what was required by Ofsted but also said they had to keep checking to make sure, as if they had some doubts. This caused conflict and tension between the nursery nurses and supervisors/manager. A supervisor described what she thought the nursery nurses do and what the child's profile would look like:

'Each child will have its own profile and the staff have their observations. The staff look at those every couple of weeks to see areas where children need more support or things they are not doing and then they incorporate that into the plan to ensure that you meet each child's needs and also the Early learning Goals. You could have two or three children in the room who have the same needs, therefore, you plan activities round that and, therefore, you are meeting the child's needs and also you are making sure that every child is able to reach those goals. So that's how it is done.' Supervisor, LEA Nursery. 10/10/03

I had looked at the children's profiles and observed the nursery nurses and I knew that much of what she said did not actually happen. There is tension and conflict between the supervisors' expectations and the amount of writing the nursery nurses have time to write. The nursery nurses have to be realistic. They do keep records on each child; they do write observations and keep examples of children's work. They were trained to do this but not in the detail which is now expected from them.

However the nursery nurses do what they can, but it still makes a great deal of work for them.

The nursery nurses were taught how to observe, the reasons for observing and the effect on the children. They were also taught how to assess children and the limitations of use:

Structuring observations: reasons for observing, process and technique of observing, learning objectives and effect on children.

Assessment of children: selecting methods of observation, limitations of use, reliability and validity. (Edexcel, 2002 p.99)

The nursery nurses spent much time on observations as illustrated by the following observations.

One nursery nurse was seen writing observations:

The nursery nurses usually chose an activity and sat at the table for a long time, sometimes 30mins. During this time they would talk to the children and write short observations for the file. They still kept an eye on what the other children were doing. Nursery nurse4, LEA Nursery 2/12/03

Nursery nurses are trained to make observations on all aspects of child development:

Make reasoned assessments of all aspects of children's development and behaviour based on observations, and within the limitations of the practical work setting. (NNEB, 1991 p.51)

A nursery nurse tries to make detailed observations as required by Ofsted, by taking a few children to another room:

The nursery nurse takes two children upstairs to do some 1-1 work with them. They are two of her 'Key' children. She tries to take them upstairs for a session once a week. She has seven 'Key' children. She says she feels guilty when she does this as it means the other staff have to cope without her. The children are very pleased to be going upstairs without the other children. One is the quiet child and one is an Asian child.

She shows them pictures and asks them to identify them.

The quiet child answers them all but the other child is hard to understand. He starts many words with the wrong sound – hammer – e hammer

sock - c sock

hair - c hair

The nursery nurse tells me that the quiet child can read some of the words

She asks them if they would like to do some more – 'Yes please'.

They start to talk about the pictures, swing, wing.

The Asian child counts 8 flowers on his own and says six, balloons.

The nursery nurse writes up notes and the children look at pictures. They ask her to identify several pictures. They then return to the nursery room.

nurse 4, LEA nursery 20/11/03

Nursery nurses are trained to make spontaneous observations rather than arranging activities in order to observe what a child can achieve:

The rationale for observing children's spontaneous or naturally occurring behaviour in comparison to that which is contrived for the purpose of assessment. (Jennings et al. 1996 p.167)

Another nursery nurse tells me how difficult it is to find time to write observations:

NN6 is also making some observations. She tells me it is difficult to find time to write them and also time to write them in the children's files. She says there is a blue book for recording the child's next goal. She tells me that they try to organise activities to help a child move to the next goal but because the children are free to choose activities, they do not always want to do it. Sometimes they take the activity to where the child is working. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 28/4/04

In all three nurseries, nursery nurses observed children while they were doing activities. They had been trained to observe children's spontaneous behaviour and compare what they saw to their knowledge of child development. I observed all nursery nurses making notes about children's behaviour and achievements. They usually made quick notes on small pieces of paper or pads and then wrote them up in the child's file later. They were not trained to check detailed skills or assess the child's attainment in detail. Most wrote up their notes during the lunch hour but the new detailed notes were often written up at home and they resented this. The nursery nurses I observed, were all trying to do the observations required by the Early Learning Goals, heavily biased towards skills, but found it very difficult to find the time. This was not part of their training and they were not given time to do this. They were not trained to observe everything the child did and record every skill:

Discriminate significant behaviour and where appropriate record this concisely and accurately.

Understand the reasons why it is important to observe a child's behaviour on a number of occasions and in different situations. (Jennings et al. 1996 p.167)

The observations were generally on skills but sometimes they were longer and on social and emotional areas of children's development. The nursery nurses found it difficult to spend time on long observations as the children always needed their attention. They usually planned general activities and found it difficult to plan for the needs of individuals. They were trained to use their professional experience in observing children's abilities.

Another nursery nurse explained how she decided if a child really understood an aspect of mathematics:

'After a while we get to know what the children can do and can't do. First of all we have a chart with all the numbers; after the child has told me the number three times I tick it off and I know they have done it. If they only tell me once I don't tick it off; it has to be three times.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery,
20/11/03

This nursery nurse used her professional judgement instead of recording every small detail of the child's progress. When asked what she would do if, when looking at her

records, she found a child hadn't done any of the numbers, she replied:

'I would do number work all that week, perhaps some individual work with that child but more group work so as not to single out one child. Group work but aimed at that child.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

This is an example of their professional opinion that children should not be made to feel different or singled out from the group. One nursery nurse explained to me that although a child may be able to count to one hundred it does not automatically mean that his personal, social and emotional development is well developed and he may need more time spent on these skills. (Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery.)

The supervisors expected detailed observations and assessments on each child because Ofsted Inspectors would require them. This requirement was very difficult for the nursery nurses, who are very busy looking after the children, who require a great deal of their time. Supervisors expected written proof that each child could do aspects of the Early Learning Goals. It must not be kept in their heads but written down and a certain amount of proof was required. All the new ideas took time which the nursery nurses did not have. They were with the children all the time. Sometimes, when the children went out doors for play, one nursery nurse might stay behind, but this was usually to reorganise the room or plan the next activity.

Planning

Nursery nurses are trained to plan, implement and evaluate play experiences and to modify plans as a result of modification. They are expected to understand the need for planning to be based on observation and assessment of individual children and the need for a balance in activities and experiences. Nursery nurses are taught the role of the nursery nurse in planning, implementation and evaluation of the early years' curriculum:

The importance of a safe, stimulating, caring, and carefully planned environment to enhance children's learning. (NNEB, 1993 p.56)

Ofsted expected much more detailed planning than the nursery nurses were trained to do and they expected all planning to be focused on the six areas of learning in the Early Learning Goals. This means that all plans, long, medium and short-term plans must link with the six areas of learning.

Nursery nurses are trained to plan activities but in an informal way:

The need for planning to be based on observation and assessment of individual children. (Edexcel, 2002 p.111)

Nursery nurses are trained in the importance of planning different activities each day and keeping a record of what they have done:

Plan and prepare play activities and learning experiences for specific areas of early childhood development. (Edexcel, 2002 p.111)

This area caused more problems than anything else. The nursery nurses were used to planning themes and projects, such as 'Spring' and 'Christmas'. They often had a letter of the week, a colour of the week and sometimes a number of the week, to enable children to learn numbers, letters and colours. They were also trained to plan for each term and week. This enabled them to decide on activities related to their themes and generally what the children would be learning. Weekly plans enabled them to know exactly what to put out, when they arrived in the morning, and helped to avoid putting out the same activities each day, unless they wanted children who came on different days to have the same experiences. They all agreed that planning was essential and made their lives easier and gave the children a much more interesting day.

When I asked one nursery nurse how she used a planning sheet with the six areas of learning at the top of columns, she replied:

In my head I make sure I've got something for maths out; make sure I've got something creative out and something constructive out. So that is in my head from college anyhow, so it's not from looking at those headings, it's just something I do. Then I just tick off according to the headings. Most things can go into any of those columns really; you can just tick them all.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

This informal attitude reflects her training and professional judgement, but does not fit with the requirements of the Early Learning Goals.

Nursery nurses are trained to understand:

The need for a balance in activities and experiences to ensure breadth of experience and learning, progression, continuity and the opportunity to practise skills. (Jennings et al. 1996 p.211)

I observed one nursery nurse:

Nursery nurse 6 is asking a child if she will help her draw the countries on the hand made globe. With a felt pen they look at the real globe and try to mark countries on the paper one. They then write the names of the countries. She explains to me that the globe is not on the plan because she only thought of it last night. It fits in with their theme. Although they try to keep to the plan it does get changed if it feels right. The rice in the sand tray has been kept longer than planned because the children enjoyed it. The rice tray also has a bowl, chop sticks, pot holder with Chinese writing on it and two wooden spatulas. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery 22/6/04

The nursery nurse was using her professional judgement about the needs of the children.

The supervisors were very concerned about planning. They were aware of the nursery nurses' preference for informal planning but knew that more formal, detailed planning was required.

One supervisor told me:

Planning was my main concern. I have had training and we have changed the way they do planning, how they do observations and the children's profile. So we are working on that. We have had the training and its just putting it into practice. Supervisor , LEA Nursery 10/10/03

When I asked the manager how the nursery nurses planned for the Early Learning Goals. She replied:

It is meant to come in their planning. They have been given the training about how the Chain expect them to implement the 'Stepping Stones' and 'Early Learning Goals'. Where on their spider chart they have Aims, they are expected to or they have been told to put an aspect, or choose an aspect from the Foundation stage file and then work towards that aspect. They are then told also that they have to take into account the individual needs of the children in their planning. There is quite a balance there. So, in theory the planning will have, or should have, on the large blown up one, one of those aspects. Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

She appeared to have some doubts as to the nursery nurses actually carrying out the requirements for this planning. Unless she was able to attend their planning meetings she was not confident of the outcome. She realised the nursery nurses had their own agenda. They disliked the more restrictive planning.

Another supervisor realised the problems:

'The present nursery nurses are new and have no experience of the old more flexible plans. The last nursery nurse left because of all the new restrictive planning.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

She also said that:

'Daily activities plans are useful because it stops the nursery nurses from putting out the same activities each day or week. I try to look at them regularly although I haven't had much time since Christmas.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

From my experience the nursery nurses were anxious to put out different activities and I felt the supervisor's comments showed the tension between them. Supervisors required plans but not quite the same as the nursery nurses were prepared to make. The plans must be linked to the six areas of learning in the Early Learning Goals and must show how the activities are building on what has gone before. Again this takes time and time was what nursery nurses did not have. Tension also arises out of a different discourse; one in which nursery nurses are required to plan explicitly for

particular educational outcomes. This conflicted with the more informal discourse of learning through free play that was central to nursery nurses training and practice.

Responding to parents and carers

Nursery nurses are trained to communicate with parents as equals and to have a good relationship with them. Nursery nurses have a lot of contact with parents. They are expected to keep parents informed about day to day happenings in the nursery, what activities they have been involved with, children's behaviour and if they eat their lunch. Those I observed made a special effort to welcome the children and their parents in the morning and when parents collected their children they gave a brief summary of the child's day. For example, the parent was told what, if anything, the child had eaten during the day; if there had been any wet pants or other toileting accidents. Occasionally, parents were informed of their child's behaviour, both good and not so good. It was always done in a caring and understanding way. At least twice a year the nursery nurses were expected to take part in a parents' evening or to meet during the day with parents to explain how their child was progressing. Most parents were very interested but in one nursery the turnout was very low. I witnessed very good relations between the staff and parents. The parents all appeared to feel welcome at the nurseries.

Nursery nurses are trained to respect parents and have an open dialogue with them:

Recognition of the role of parents as the primary carers and educators of their children and the enormous variety of parenting styles and attitudes, family structures and arrangements.

The importance of establishing positive relationships and open communication with parents. (NNEB, 1993 p.46)

One nursery nurse, when asked about the relationship with parents, replied:

'Generally we get co-operation from parents, some of them are anxious and come in to find out as much as they can. We get one mother who comes in and says her child isn't doing this or she's dropping behind. We say when she is ready she will do it. If we push her she may well protest and then not do anything. We used to have a parents' day when parents would come in and look at work and what the children were doing, but very few parents turned up. They are now invited to come in for the review. The majority of the parents look forward to that. They hear about the development of their child, or they will just come in and sit if there is any general concern about their behaviour, or they will come in if they just want a chat.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

They are taught to support parents in every way they can:

Relate in a professional manner to parents and have respect for knowledge and contribution of others. Have support for both children and their families.

(Edexcel, 2002 p.65)

Nursery nurses are also trained to share their observations with parents:

The need for parental involvement and approval in observation and assessment.

(Jennings et al. 1996 p.167)

At another nursery I observed:

The nursery has a 'settling in' policy and there was a mother and her small son visiting for the second time. He was enjoying all the activities while his mother stayed with him. She then went upstairs for a coffee and he was OK. I saw him at the water play. He fetched an apron and said 'mummy!' but when he couldn't find her he asked me to do it up. Mother seemed very relaxed and chatted to me. When it was time for him to leave he was quite upset. LEA Nursery, 16/9/03

Nursery nurses are trained to keep parents informed about activities in the nursery and what the children are learning:

The significance of the central role played by parents in their children's welfare.

How to communicate with parents as equals, and how to listen to parents.

(Jennings et al. 1996 p.38p)

The nursery nurses I interviewed/observed kept parents informed by the use of a notice board. In all three nurseries these were kept updated and informed parents of

daily happenings, themes and letters of the week and time-tables. Also there was usually a menu for lunches for the week. At one nursery I observed:

Outside the room is a parents' notice board. There are copies of the plans, timetable of events during the day, letter of the week, theme for the term and the week and number of the week. There is also a notice informing parents about a college student and also about me. There is a notice saying how parents can help their children and some simple work sheets to take home. Chain Nursery, 22/6/04

The nursery nurses also passed on information about behaviour and skills as shown in this observation:

A granny comes to collect a small boy. Nursery nurse 6 tells her he has eaten well. A couple of times he has had to be spoken to but not a real problem. He is delighted to see his granny but then says he cannot leave before he has finished an activity. (He should have finished it a long time ago) In the end he has to leave grumbling to her. Another granny arrives. The student asks if she can do an observation on the child. Nursery nurse 6 tells granny how the child has been during the morning. The child is quite new and comes two days a week. She says 'She ate well and was quite chatty at news time' Nursery nurse 6 Chain Nursery, 21/4/04

The nursery nurses I observed, had a very good working relationship with the children's parents. Parents were usually in a hurry but still anxious to know how their

child had behaved and if there had been any upsets or problems. The nursery nurses always had time for the parents and carers and they seemed relaxed in the nursery nurses' company.

The nursery nurses' training in this area was very similar to the requirements of the Early learning Goals which state that each setting should seek to develop an effective partnership with parents. (QCA, 2000a) The main difference was the amount of detail required by the Early Learning Goals about the child's progress and future learning needs (QCA, 1999). The supervisors/manager knew this and tried to get the nursery nurses to put more detail in them. The child's profile was sometimes shared with the parents and the supervisors/manager expected these to be detailed and up to date.

Most parents were more concerned about their child's welfare during the day but supervisors/manager realised that the details in the child's profile would be examined by the Inspector and tried to encourage the nursery nurses to keep them very detailed. Parents were invited to a parents' evening or given an opportunity to discuss their child's progress.

One supervisor told me:

'The parents do get involved; but it is mainly the parents who, let's say, who have special needs, the ones who are identified, so we would work with them to plan their IEP's (Individual Educational Plan) which still can be incorporated into the other plans.' Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

Again there is conflict between the nursery nurses' views, the day to day needs of the nursery nurses and the parents and the supervisors/manager requirements.

Conclusion

All the nursery nurses I interviewed were quite clear about their role. They were involved with the children at all times. They wanted the children to be happy, to enjoy themselves and to make good relationships with other children. They saw their role as helping them to develop the life skills necessary for the world of school. Their views were often in conflict with those of Ofsted. They had all received a similar training, which emphasised the discourse of informality and caring. This influenced their views. One of the main emphases of their training was to keep the children healthy and develop the personal, social and emotional aspects of their lives. The training also emphasised children learning to play together and having respect for other children and adults. The nursery nurses tried to emphasise the importance of listening and speaking skills and tried to enrich the children's language. They saw these skills as necessary before a child started school. The supervisors/manager had a different agenda; they needed to put in place all the requirements for the Early Learning Goals which were related to the discourse of formality, inspections and standards.

I noticed that behaviour problems took up a lot of the nursery nurses time as many children were not able to adjust to being with other children, to sharing and caring for others. Many children had very poor eating habits and nursery nurses spent time teaching children how to eat, to eat different foods and to sit quietly while they were eating. The nursery nurses felt these skills were important preparation for life at

school. Physical activity was also seen as important by the nursery nurses. They were trained to help children develop large and small muscles and each nursery had a set time for children to play outside and also respond to music games indoors. They felt it was important for children to recognise their names and if possible to be able to write them. They felt this would be useful when they started school. This is what they had been trained to do. As can be seen from the illustrations in this chapter, the nursery nurses were trained to observe children and assess their needs. They were aware of which child needed help with aspects of their development, such as sharing, speaking, behaviour and writing their names. They were trained to write observations on the children to get a picture of what the child could do and how the child was progressing. They were also trained to plan activities to suit the developmental age of the child.

Their training and professional views were not however always appropriate for the requirements of the Early Learning Goals. Their informal attitude to literacy, numeracy, assessment and planning, conflicted with the requirements imposed by the Early Learning Goals and therefore conflicted with the requirements of the supervisors/manager.

Supervisors were required to prepare the day nursery for Ofsted inspections and ensure parents were happy with the service offered. As mentioned earlier, Ofsted required more formal emphasis on language and literacy and numeracy and a more formal structured approach to planning and assessment. The supervisors had to put the need for a good Ofsted report first, it was essential for the good name of the nursery. However, they knew that parents required the caring side of childcare and that caring took a lot of the nursery nurses time. They have a dilemma; to encourage the nursery

nurses to keep their standards of caring high, and at the same time, widen the curriculum to include the areas required by the Early Learning Goals. This caused conflict between nursery nurses and supervisors/manager. Planning and assessment were the most time consuming and difficult areas for the nursery nurses. 'Learning activities' took time and the nursery nurses were not always sure that they were relevant. The supervisors/manager expected detailed observations and assessments on each child and also expected written proof that each child could do aspects of the Early Learning Goals. Most parents were more concerned about their child's welfare during the day but supervisors/manager realised that the details in the child's profile would be examined by the Inspector and tried to encourage the nursery nurses to keep them very detailed. Again there was conflict between the nursery nurses' views, the day to day needs of the nursery nurses and the parents and the supervisors/manager requirements.

The nursery nurses resented having to take work home but were unable to fit the writing required for assessment and planning, into their working day. Children's achievements were not to be kept in their heads but written down and a certain amount of proof was required. All the new ideas took time which the nursery nurses did not have. They were with the children most of the time. There was tension and conflict between the supervisors' expectations and the amount of writing the nursery nurses had time to write.

During my days spent observing, in the three day nurseries, I realised how important the aims of the nursery nurses were. Many children needed help with personal, social and emotional skills. The nursery nurses I watched made these aspects a priority. It is

interesting to note that none of them put literacy and numeracy high as priorities in their role as nursery nurse. This is certainly a reflection of their training. It would seem that the training most nursery nurses received fitted them for most of the tasks required by the nursery, but not all the aspects which the supervisors required to be put in place for the Early Learning Goals and Ofsted inspections.

7. How do nursery nurses interpret the Early Learning Goals?

'You do the same thing but maybe it wasn't structured in that way because they have to come up to a certain standard by the time they leave. All the children would never come up to that stage because they develop at different stages. For instance a three-year-old may be able to do a 20 piece puzzle and another three-year-old may not be able to do that but that child may be able to count and know the colours. To me I sometimes think they should be allowed to play and learn through the play instead of saying they should know this. This is only my view. I know we have to follow the curriculum and we do it to the best of our ability.' Nursery nurse 3, LEA Nursery, 15/ 11/ 03

In this chapter I return to the main question of the study, 'How do nursery nurses, working in Day Nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals?' The introduction of the Early Learning Goals caused a tension between the discourse of caring and informality, which all the nursery nurses were trained for, and the discourse of standards, inspection and formality of the Early Learning Goals. This conflict of discourses influenced the way the nursery nurses interpreted the Early Learning Goals. I use the themes 'Policy, power and decision making', 'Curriculum, planning and assessment' and 'Nursery nurses' training', from my coding map and data, collected from the three day nurseries, to show how power

was used, who made the decisions in the day nurseries and how this was affected by the policies made by the Government. I use data from all the nursery nurses, and the supervisors/manager in my study.

I show how the conflict and tensions between the supervisors'/manager's requirements, in order to achieve a good Ofsted inspection report, and the nursery nurses' professional judgement, also affected the nursery nurses' interpretation of the Early Learning Goals.

I then show how the nursery nurses' resistance to the discourse of standards, inspections and formality resulted in them often following their own goals and yet managing to provide the evidence required by the supervisors/manager for the Ofsted Inspection. They did this by using strategic rhetoric (Sparkes, 1987). They said that they followed the new curriculum but actually continued with previous practice. What the nursery nurses did and what they said were not always the same. I use examples of what the nursery nurses said in the interviews and how this contrasts with the observation data collected. This chapter will also show how the nursery nurses sometimes used planning and assessment material to suit their own purposes, and how they devised a curriculum which incorporated the Early Learning Goals into the daily routine of the nursery and yet still kept to their own professional ways of working with the children. I also show how time and how they used it, was always an issue for the nursery nurses in the day nurseries.

Curriculum, Decisions and Resistance

As explained in an earlier chapter, the policy of the 'Early Learning Goals' (QCA 1999) was introduced in September 2000.

The early learning goals set high expectations for the end of the foundation stage, but expectations that are achievable for most children who have followed a relevant curriculum. (QCA 2000 p.3)

All government-funded settings are required to deliver a curriculum consistent with this guidance; otherwise the funding will be withheld. The Early Learning Goals are not negotiable. They set the standards which are required by the Inspectors. If the day nursery does not get a good report, parents and carers are reluctant to send their children to the nursery. If the nursery fails the inspection they lose the right to Government funding for three and four-year-olds. This will probably result in the closure of the nursery. The supervisors/manager know this and are anxious for a good inspection report.

These requirements were not all compatible with the training of the nursery nurses in my study, or with their own professional judgement. The nursery nurses were affected by the policy and decisions of the Government. They were also affected by the policy and decisions made by the nursery decision makers; these included the Local Education Authority, the head office of the Chain of Nurseries and the management of the Community Nursery.

In some ways, power and decision making was ultimately with Ofsted. The supervisors/manager and the nursery nurses had to follow the Early Learning

Goals and mainly learnt what was required of them by reading the documents such as the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA, 2000b). As one supervisor explained:

'I think when we do our planning we are all learning from it. When we plan, we keep looking at the pink folders (Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage) and looking at the examples. They are quite useful. We just keep reading it and getting more experienced as we go along.'

'Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

Ofsted published all the day nursery reports on the Web so parents/carers and potential customers could see how good the nursery was. This was a powerful tool for Ofsted.

One manager commented about the recent nursery Ofsted report:

'It is already on the 'web' but the parents have not yet seen it.'

The supervisors/manager had some control over the nursery nurses. If the nursery nurses did not follow the required curriculum and put the required assessment and planning in place they could lose their jobs. In turn, the supervisors/manager had pressures from the people who employed them; the Community Committee, the LEA or the Chain Head Office. There was pressure to get a good Ofsted report and pressure to keep the costs down. Their aspirations were sometimes limited by finance. They could not always give the

nursery nurses the equipment or time they required. There were also limits on the in-service training which was available for the nursery nurses. The reasons for this were usually financial. Sometimes it was the cost of the training and sometimes it was the cost of replacing the nursery nurses while they were on the training.

How much authority the supervisors/manager had over the documentation varied between the nurseries. The LEA Nursery and the Chain Nursery had most of the documentation sent to them. The Community nursery had to write them, but had some help and advice from an advisor from the Local Education Authority.

When asked if the advisor had given advice to the nursery nurses on planning and assessment, the supervisor replied:

'She looked at the documents and said 'that is fine' 'what you are doing is fine; you are covering the areas that Ofsted will require of you. Just keep going along that way, you don't need to change again. Just put that into action and we will review it in the summer and see how it is going.' 'But she did not get involved with helping the staff.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

There were signs of conflict between one supervisor and the requirements of the Early Learning Goals. Although she thought the detailed planning had taken away time from the children she was powerless to stop this happening. She said:

'It's taken time away from the children; I think we are covering the same activities and I think we are covering the same goals in the end but I think we are looking more at how we are covering them. The paperwork is taking up a considerable amount of time, when the children might be spending time looking at the weather, nature or more book time; paperwork is done out of children's time, but at the end of the day, it is still taking time away from the children.'

'You can't cover every single area, because it is quite a vast area really, so you try and cover as much as you can. So we do look at the documents, which state what we should cover.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

However the nursery nurses were more able to resist than was at first apparent, because they could always leave and find another job. Their lack of ambition meant they were quite content to move if they did not like the job. One supervisor told me:

'The present nursery nurses are new and have no experience of the old more flexible plans. The last nursery nurse left because of the new restrictive planning.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

The nursery nurses also knew how difficult it was to get good nursery nurses and if they felt under too much pressure were quite likely to leave. This allowed

them to resist some of the demands made by the supervisors, and through them, Ofsted.

One manager told me:

Yes, it is quite common, I've already had one rumble that one member of staff is not happy; that it is very easy for them to go somewhere else. They do not seem to worry about being in a job for a year or two when they go for the next job. It's something I look for when I'm interviewing and I personally am very wary of, but other people don't seem to. Whether this is a new thing I don't know. Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

One of the nursery nurses explained to me why she may not stay very long at the nursery:

'Well this is a different situation because there are other things going on which may not make me see it as a long-term thing. If it were just down to this room then I would see it as a long-term thing. I get on well with the other staff and I think we work well together as a team and I like the children here, but I'm moving house this week so it may be difficult to get to work as I don't drive. At the moment another member of staff who lives nearby gives me a lift but she may be looking for a new job so I will have to assess the situation.' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

The ease with which they left their employment seemed linked to their lack of ambition and their desire to work with the children and not as a supervisor or manager. The same nursery nurse said:

'I don't think I would enjoy being a manager in a place like this, because it is not direct involvement with the children.' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

Although it appeared on the face of it, that the Early Learning Goals put the nursery nurses under a great deal of pressure, the possibilities of doing things in the way they were trained were manifold. They ran their own rooms and the supervisors/manager were not able to spend much time observing the nursery nurses' practices. In fact I spent much more time in the nursery rooms and saw much more clearly what was actually happening than they did. An Inspector would visit for one day or perhaps two half days and might not pick up the full picture. When asked if the nursery nurse in charge of the pre-school room was allowed to organise activities in her own way, the manager replied:

'The way that it goes on in there is her way of doing it or her team's way of doing it.' Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

Conflict between the requirements of the supervisors/manager for an Ofsted Inspection and the needs of the nursery nurses was apparent in the amount of written work required. The nursery nurses stressed how much time the new plans and observations required, but it was not only the amount of work but also

the type of work that was required, which caused the problems. They disliked work which took them away from the children. They resented having to spend time writing up lengthy reports and observations on the children because they felt it was unnecessary. They particularly resented that they had to do the planning and write up assessments at home. One remarked:

'I do think working with children can be hard work and it can be tiring and some children can be more difficult, but I just see that as part of the job. I do think it's bad that, as we have to do our planning at home, I'd rather have time during the day to do our planning but we don't really get that much time to do it.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

I asked one nursery nurse why she thought the new planning was more time consuming. She replied:

'I find that there is a lot of paper work. I know it's a sign of the times and things move on but I find I'm doing more writing than interacting with the children.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery 20/11/04

The nursery nurses also felt powerless to stop the ever changing format of plans. New supervisors, new advisors, new information from Ofsted all meant changes to the planning. They also complained that they kept being given new plans, often similar but worded differently.

One supervisor told me:

'Planning was my main concern when I started work at the nursery. I have had some training and we have changed the way we do the planning, how they do the observations and the children's profiles. So we are working on that. We have had the training and it is just working on that.'

Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

It is still new ideas for the nursery nurses to learn and put into practice:

'They make the plans but we have to interpret them and make them work.'

Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

The resentment they felt at taking work home resulted in them finding ways to cut down on the amount of work. They only did what was necessary to show an Inspector. Otherwise they carried on as they had always done. However they did feel they could make decisions on how to adapt some of the forms and plans and make them fit their own purpose.

The forms the nursery nurses were given to be filled in, had been decided upon by other people. However they made decisions about how to alter and adapt plans and forms given to them. The nurseries all had planning sheets for the nursery nurses to fill in when doing an 'Adult Led' activity. These were activities related to specific stepping stones. When I asked about them I was told:

'Hopefully you have seen them about- they should have them, because they should be out at least once a day, perhaps a craft activity or out in the garden wherever they have decided they are going to do an activity on a 'stepping stone' that day. They choose two or three 'stepping stones' and an activity to cover them. They can put stickers in as well, so they can write what the children have done. It also has on the sheet what materials are going to be used and a space for evaluation.' Supervisor, Community Nursery, 10/10/02

One nursery nurse, when asked about the purpose of the 'Adult Led' activity sheets told me:

'Oh! The original purpose, I have to be honest, I don't really know, but as we've gone through with our planning, each child has a sheet of stepping stones and outcomes; and we can actually use those to cross-reference with their personal sheets, to mark off. So the original purpose, I haven't a clue, but as it's carried on, there is actually a purpose for them.'

Nursery Nurse 2, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

Another nursery nurse replied:

'No, I never mark it off unless I feel they really understood it. So these sheets are really quite useful now. When we first started doing them about a year ago, that part was not on them then.' Nursery nurse 1, Community

Nursery, 17/12/02

I found that the nursery nurses made their own decisions about how to use forms. Some had evolved and become more useful but the original purpose had been lost. The Supervisors/manager took decisions to try and ensure that the day nursery received a good Ofsted report. The nursery nurses also made decisions which enabled them to continue with the caring side of their training, to use documentation to suit their purposes and to minimise the amount of extra work which the Early Learning Goals created.

Strategic Rhetoric

According to Sparkes, (1987) teachers adopt strategies to attain certain goals within the educational context. Teachers often use coping strategies to deal with change, and one of these he calls 'strategic rhetoric'. He suggests that the use of rhetorical justification is an attempt to create an illusion. The teacher attempts to present a certain picture to a selected audience. Sparkes argues that it is a coping strategy in order to enhance subject status and cope with the possibility of change. He describes a Department of Physical Education in a school. Their department is seen to be of low status; they do not wish to change their methods of teaching but wish to obtain a higher status within the school. He describes what happened when the staff learnt to use strategic rhetoric in the face of changes to the PE curriculum:

However, simply because the physical educators had learnt to use rhetorical justification did not mean that they believed in its content. They

had come to realise its utility in certain social encounters in which attempts were made to enhance the status of the subject, and this in itself legitimated it as a strategy. (Sparkes, 1987, p.45)

He goes on to state that

The notion of 'change as no change' and 'nothing is new' were critical in deflecting the individual's focus away from the implications of the proposed changes in terms of their actual practice in classrooms. (Sparkes, 1987, p.46)

The nursery nurses in my study often appeared to do the same. They appeared to follow the Early Learning Goals and all the planning and assessment which was required but at the same time followed their own goals. I am not suggesting that they did this deliberately but it was their way of coping with a dilemma; to work according to their own training or those ways which they were expected to follow.

Sparkes also thinks of teachers' perspectives as being:

...constituted by or as composites of, ideologies, beliefs, values and knowledge, about what should be included in the curriculum and how it should be taught. (Sparkes, 1987 p.38)

This is what I found. The Early Learning Goals affected all the nursery nurses I interviewed. The nursery nurses knew that it was important to show the Ofsted Inspector that all the aspects were being covered. They tried to include all the areas which were required, but at the same time resented spending time on areas which they did not see as essential, leaving less time for more important aspects, in their view, of child care. Their training and understanding of child development encouraged them to teach the children aspects which they believed would prepare them for school. They also wanted the children to have a good relationship with other children and adults. Sparkes (1987) observed that teachers, in a context of curriculum change, decided that change was no change and that nothing is really new. Teachers accepted that there were a few things they had not thought about but felt that they really did not have to change any of their practices very much. The nursery nurses felt the same. They commented that in order to conform to the requirements they just had to tidy up, or fill in a little more detail.

One nursery nurse said;

'I'm not worried about what we are doing, I know that is fine. All our children are happy. It's just the questions they are going to fire at you which worries me.' Nursery nurse1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

When asked if there was anything she would be concerned about if the nursery was inspected the following week, she replied;

'Not really, except that we would have to basically label the things more clearly, like the labels which have come off the equipment Sort of tidy up.'

Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

Sparkes found that there was little, if any, change in subject pedagogy. He argues that in many cases:

The rhetoric attached to the proposed curriculum innovation had little impact on the life of the classroom. (Sparkes, 1987 p.49)

I found similar results. The nursery nurses filled in assessment forms and detailed planning sheets, but usually ended up using them for their own purposes. They appeared to adhere closely to what was required of them by the Inspectors but still managed to follow what they believed to be necessary for the children and for their preconceived role.

Deutscher (1973) maintains that there is often a discrepancy between what people say and what they do, between words and deeds. Deutscher also says that anyone may lie a bit and try to be helpful when being interviewed and that it is important to follow up interview data with observations. Because of this possible discrepancy, I used observation data, interview data and documents to justify my findings. During the interviews I had with the nursery nurses they continued to use strategic rhetoric. They told me how they taught children to write their names and other words as required by the Early Learning Goals, but my observations showed very little effort on their part to do this. As I got to

know the nursery nurses better, and they relaxed with me, they told me how time-consuming some of the requirements were and how difficult it was to fit in all the requirements. They never left out essential caring responsibilities, only the new formal requirements. In other cases they really seemed to believe they were doing what was required by the Early Learning Goals, but, in fact, did not really understand what was required, as I show later in the teaching of phonics.

I did find that what the nursery nurses said they did and what they actually did were often not the same. I also found that the longer I was with them, the more they spoke of what they really did, although still aware that the Inspector would require different things. Goodson (1983) stresses the difference between the knowledge-based curriculum and the child-centred education which helps prepare a child for the learning process. This latter is the kind of education for which the nursery nurses had been trained. They did not see the imparting of knowledge, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as their role, but rather felt that their role was to help the children become active agents in the learning process.

I tried to triangulate the interview data and the observation data with the Early Learning Goals, but found it did not always triangulate. What the nursery nurses said at interview and what they actually did in the nursery room were often very different.

The discourse of 'caring' and informality and the discourse of 'standards', inspection and formality

Special Requirements for the Early Learning Goals

There are aspects of the Early Learning Goals, which the children were expected to know by the end of the Foundation Stage, which were either only partially covered, or not covered at all, by the nursery nurses' training. These were areas where the nursery nurses became confused or felt they were impinging on valuable time needed to help the children with social and emotional problems. The Government put emphasis on children learning literacy and numeracy from the age of three with their National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (DfEE 1998) and (DfEE 1999). The nursery nurses were expected to emphasise these aspects of learning. I will try and show how the nursery nurses often said one thing and did another. They used a form of strategic rhetoric to impress the Inspector but continued with their own goals (Sparkes, 1987).

Below is a chart showing the areas which the nursery nurses were expected to cover in the Early Learning Goals and similar areas which were covered in their training. The chart shows the difference between the formal Early Learning Goals and the more informal training received by the nursery nurse:

Early Learning Goals

Nursery Nurse Training

Long, medium and short term plans to include the Early Learning Goals	Plan for a balance in activities and experience and learning
Writing experience to include correct pencil hold, formation of letters, write names and other words	The need to encourage the development of pre-reading and writing skills
Read a range of common words	Recognise name
Link sounds to letters; naming and sounding letters of the alphabet	Recognising and sounding letters of the alphabet
Use phonetic knowledge to say and write simple words	Sound letters of alphabet and simple sounds
Use mathematical ideas to solve practical problems	Count to ten. Say and recognise numerals to ten

Use mathematical language involved in addition and subtraction	Use mathematical language such as 'more' and 'less' and 'bigger' and 'smaller'.
Assess children's development in relation to the Early Learning Goals	Assess children's general development using observations

Areas of conflict between nursery nurse training and the Early Learning Goals.

I intend to show that nursery nurses say they do what is required by the Early Learning Goals but in many cases they actually do what they have been trained to do.

The introduction of the very detailed learning objectives of the Early Learning Goals placed great demands on the nursery nurses. Often the nursery nurses did not fully understand the language of the goals or agree with them, but were expected to implement all aspects. They did this by following their own professional experience and knowledge and adding on teaching exercises to please the Inspector. This was especially apparent in the areas of literacy and numeracy. When asked what they hoped children would be able to do when they left the nursery for school, all the nursery nurses said that they wanted them to

recognise their names and at least know the letters of their names, count to ten and recognise numbers up to ten. That is what they had been trained to teach, as outlined in Chapter 5.

Below are some examples of what the nursery nurses see as important and this reflects their training, not the Early Learning Goals. When asked what they would expect a child to be able to do when starting school, one nursery nurse replied:

'Recognise their names, at least know the letters of their name, not necessarily the alphabet, being at the stage of forming their letters, numbers – count to ten and at least recognise numbers one to six and number writing.' Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 27/11/03

Another replied:

'At least count to ten or probably even more; at least recognise the numbers one to ten; to count out objects, not necessarily up to ten, but at least up to five. Their name at least; recognise the letters or the start of their name and even start writing it.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

A nursery nurse from another nursery said:

'I would hope they have an understanding of numbers, letters, colours and shapes. It's going to help them; it's going to give them a good start I think, when they go to school.' Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 6/5/04

A manager told me:

'I would like to hope that they were confident and sociable and would be comfortable to, for example, if it was circle time, and they had something to share, they would be able to speak up and have the confidence to give their opinion rather than be withdrawn. In my training in the past, I think I believed that was quite important and central to everything.' Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

The nursery nurses often found some of the Early Learning Goals confusing. Some did not fully understand the progression implied by the Stepping Stones. They planned to cover all the aspects of the goals, even those meant for reception-age children. They did not fully realise that only the more advanced children would be expected to reach that level. They then only covered the aspects very superficially.

One nursery nurse, who had recently worked in a nursery attached to a primary school where she said that the children were being prepared for reception class, commented:

'When the lady came from the outside to introduce the profile and new planning, she went into depth on how we should plan using the actual guide itself. I think people got confused. I learnt that you had the grey goal at the bottom, which is what the children are working towards and they are the stepping-stones. So when we came to plan, I found that some members of staff were confusing the stepping-stones with the goal. You don't use the blue band when that is the reception age; you should use the yellow or green, or whatever the colours are, because they are the basic steps.' Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 27/11/03

Many aspects of the goals were contrary to what the nursery nurses had previously been taught and some schools had fixed ideas about what children should learn at nursery. Some schools also asked them not to teach any form of writing:

'We had one child go to school in January and her teacher came to see her in the nursery setting. She said they don't particularly want them to write their names as the reception class has changed their approach and they were trying to work from the child's initiative approach, trying to get the children to work at their own pace.' Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 6/5/04

This added more confusion in the minds of the nursery nurses. The Inspector would expect to see the children starting to write their names and the school did not want them to. The nursery nurses did not see this aspect as very important

and were left not really knowing what to do. They were receiving mixed messages about teaching simple reading and writing. Advisors and teachers from primary schools all tried to give advice on how to teach the children to form letters and write their names. Sometimes they visited the nursery before a child left to go to their school. Other times advisors from the LEA came to give advice on these matters.

According to one nursery nurse:

'This is where I become confused. Where I came from we were told we were not qualified teachers so leave reading, writing and number work until they go to school and the next minute they want us to do it.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

When asked if the in-depth details of the Early Learning Goals were useful one nursery nurse replied:

'No, not really because I don't think three-year-olds understand at all. Some of the things are useful, but most of them you think they won't understand that; they haven't a clue about that.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 8/11/02

Another said:

'Quite useful, but also confusing because they sometimes seem to get easier not harder.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 8/11/02

The Early Learning Goals were not in line with nursery nurses' already established ideas, particularly their ideas about what they hoped the children would be able to do before they started school. All the nursery nurses were confident that it was very important that the children should be happy, enjoy themselves, have a good self-image, be able to socialize with other children, sit still and listen. These important goals had to be fitted into the demands of the Early Learning Goals:

'When they go to school they need social skills and to know how to interact with other children.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

Some nursery nurses felt that at times the requirements of the Early Learning Goals directly conflicted with their priorities as nursery nurses:

'Overall for me it's really to see they are enjoying themselves and feel comfortable to do what they want to. It is difficult at times because you know you are doing the Early Learning Goals, which make all your activities link in and you cover all the five main areas but you have some children who all they really want to do is have a doll, carry it around, cuddle it and sit on the mat'. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

The conflict and tension create an atmosphere of passive resistance. The nursery nurses know an Inspector will check to see if the requirements for the Early Learning Goals are in place, but the nursery nurses manage to do this and

yet, at the same time, resist spending too much time on aspects which they feel are less important. Using my data from interviews and observations, I have tried to show how the nursery nurses say they follow the Early Learning Goals in the areas of planning, literacy, mathematics and assessment, but often follow their training. I also show the tension between the supervisors/manager and the nursery nurses as they try to prepare the nursery for an Ofsted Inspection.

Planning

Formal requirements

The Early Learning Goals require settings to provide detailed plans which cover all six areas of learning:

There are three stages of planning – long-term, medium-term and short-term. Planning should cover all aspects of the six areas of learning and help all children to progress towards the goals. (QCA 1998 p.1)

What the nursery nurses did and what they said they did

The nursery nurses were not able to avoid writing these formal plans. Their Long term planning was to ensure that all aspects of the Early Learning Goals were covered during the year. These consisted of topics and indicated how the six areas would be covered. Medium term plans were more detailed. These plans

were expected to cover all six areas of the Early Learning Goals and to show how the stepping stones would be covered. Short term plans were expected to show the activities for the week. Having to plan for six areas of Early Learning Goals meant they planned to include all areas; without these they may have had a one-sided curriculum. It has to be remembered that an Inspector would ask to see these plans and check if everything was included.

The supervisors/manager were expected to put these requirements in place. One manager explained what was expected:

'The nursery nurses are expected to plan for Early Learning Goals. They have been given the training about how 'The Chain' expect them to implement the 'Stepping Stones' and 'Early Learning Goals'. Where on their spider chart they have Aims, they are expected to or they have been told to put an aspect, or choose an aspect from the Foundation stage file and then work towards that aspect. They are then told also that they have to take into account the individual needs of the children in their planning. There is quite a balance there. So, in theory, the planning will have, or should have, on the large blown up one, one of those aspects.' Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

The supervisors/manager spoke the formal language which was required by Ofsted. When asked about the planning another replied:

'The nursery nurses have the long-term plans, the medium term plans and weekly plans. These are done by the staff to meet the needs of the children in their room.' Supervisor, LEA nursery, 10/10/03

They both mentioned the individual needs of the children, which was required by the Early Learning Goals but not seen as essential in the planning by the nursery nurses. This was an area of tension. The nursery nurses were not against planning, they found it really helpful but they were trained to write more informal plans. The more detailed plans caused tensions and took much more of their time but planning itself was taken for granted:

'Although I moan about all the planning, I think I would say 'but I want to do it'. Its something which is built into your brain and you know what you are working towards; all the Early Learning Goals and that's why you are planning and that's why you are setting out what you do each day; and suddenly for all that to be gone it would be a little strange really.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

When asked if they found the training for the new plans helpful one nursery nurse said:

'It was helpful because we had this lady who came in. I think she used to be an Ofsted Inspector. She came in and told us how to do the planning and what was expected of us. I found that helpful, but I found that on a two day course there was a lot for us to cram in. There was a lot of paper work

given to us, which was good, but reading it and trying to put it together was a lot. 'Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

The nursery nurses were trying to follow the required format for planning but still found the new formal system hard to understand and follow. They continually spoke of the amount of paperwork they were required to read and the lack of time to read it.

To ensure that the formal planning for all six areas of the goals was covered, the Community Nursery had introduced activity lists which listed all six areas of learning. The nursery nurses were supposed to check that, at each session, they had out activities and toys covering all six areas. They were also expected to choose one main activity. One nursery nurse said:

'I make sure I've got something for maths out, make sure I've got something creative out and something constructive out. Then I just tick off according to the headings. Most things can go into any of those columns really. You can just tick them all. But you can't really do that; you have to think which the main one is.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 8/11/02.

Here is more evidence of the nursery nurses following the formal requirement but not really understanding the necessity of the requirements.

Although the Ofsted Inspector had power to enforce the Early Learning Goals, the organisation of the time-table for the day also put pressure on the nursery nurses. Although the planning could be changed there were many other aspects of the nursery day to be considered. When asked if the plans were fixed, one nursery nurse replied:

'No it's not fixed, because when I started we had a room meeting and I suggested a few ideas and I asked for the routine to be changed, because I thought they were outside too long and they don't have to go outside at lunch they could go outside during the morning. It is up to us, but you do have to think about the staff breaks and the routine of the nursery. Some children go home at three and start at nine, whereas others start at eight and go home at six. It is just like a maze. If you try and put music and movement in the afternoon, the person on late break comes back and does music and movement. I found that you only have about half an hour before the children go home, so you try and squeeze it in and they are supposed to have their snack before they go. It's not as simple as some other places.'

Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 27/11/03

The nursery nurses' training became apparent when they were doing their planning. Their long-term plans usually covered all the tasks of the Early Learning Goals. My research notes from the Community Nursery's planning meeting show this. The emphasis was on covering all Early Learning Goals and fitting them into their topics and ideas. They were not looking to see if their

ideas were building on what had gone before. The aim was to have interesting and varied ideas to interest and stimulate the children.

The nursery nurses explained what they had to do and how they organised the planning:

'Yes we do a long-term plan and a short-term plan. The short-term plan at the moment is winter. So we have put down all the stepping-stones in the areas and what we expect the children to do.' Nursery nurse 5, LEA nursery, 20/11/03

They followed the formal outline of the required planning and fitted the stepping stones into their plans.

I observed that:

The nursery nurses go through the Early learning Goals and put themes and Early learning Goals for all the months of the year. In this way they try to ensure that they cover all the aspects of the curriculum. They also fill in a 'Spider Web Chart', which shows the Early Learning Goals with the Topic for the month. The nursery nurses fill this in at their monthly planning meeting. Staff look at their long-term plans and one of them reads out the skills number for that month, another reads out the Early Learning Goals skill represented by the number. They then decide how they are to cover the skill and write it on the chart. For example –

Communication, language and literature – number 5 – Use writing as a means of recording and communication – this is covered by writing in the Easter cards. There was some confusion as to how much they were expected to cover. Community Nursery, 25/3/03

As can be seen from these notes, the nursery nurses put forward ideas for topics or areas of interest, thought of as many ideas as possible and then wrote them on a 'Spider web' chart covering all six areas of learning. They then fitted in Early Learning Goals to match with their ideas. They knew which goals they had to cover as it was written on their long-term plans. It is clear that the tasks in the Early Learning Goals were covered superficially. The nursery nurses knew the capability of the children and planned accordingly. The long-term plans and medium-term plans were used to ensure an interesting and stimulating set of activities were put out for the children. They were also used to ensure all aspects of the Early Learning Goals were covered. This was mainly for the Ofsted Inspector. Plans were used as guides.

The informal attitude to planning was very apparent with the 'Weekly Plans' which were used to ensure that the nursery nurse on duty at the beginning of the session knew exactly what to put out at a time when they were also busy welcoming children, and in some cases, serving breakfast. The plans were to provide the nursery nurses with a guide, to enable them to know what activities to put out each day and to be sure to put out a varied selection. Sometimes the weekly plans were written up the day before, or actually on the same morning. The nursery nurses were anxious to ensure that all children had a wide variety of

activities and toys to play with but were not concerned about building on skills already learnt. They knew that their main task was to help many of the children learn personal, social and emotional skills before they went to school. The nursery nurses made sure that they always had activities and toys which covered all six areas of learning. This was seen as very important. They also felt that they must choose one main area for each activity.

The power of the Inspectors is shown here. The nursery nurses have to write out weekly and daily plans; these are checked by an Inspector. The nursery nurses are not happy about this and feel that it is often a waste of time. One of them said:

'It's really the day-to-day writing we have to do, where we say what we have had out each day that takes the time really. What we are going to do and what we haven't done.' Nursery nurse1, Community Nursery, 20/3/03.

Where there was a conflict between the formal discourse and the informal discourse. The nursery nurses found ways of doing what they had been trained to do and yet made it look correct for the Ofsted Inspector. I noticed that sometimes the weekly plans were filled in either the day before or on the same day. I was told that the person on late usually set up the room for the next day and decided what should be put out. The main idea was that there should be something out for each area of learning. I did not notice any idea of progression. This was because the staff did not have time to write up the plans at any other time. Although the long-term and medium-term plans were all complete, the

nursery nurses found the weekly plans difficult to complete beforehand. They did not all start or finish at the same time each day and had very little time together to complete the plans. They thought of a few ideas individually and worked them out on a Friday evening:

'Each week we should plan for the week. It doesn't often happen that way. On a Friday all three of us are together so we can plan at least for the Monday what we want out. When we are choosing the learning intentions for our focuses, I might say 'Can I do that one because I've got ideas for that one?' So we discuss the kind of contact activities we want to do. It is our own ideas. But really whoever was on late yesterday, or early this morning will set out the room and jot down what she has chosen.' Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 27/11/03

The LEA nursery had forms for Adult Focus (activities devised by the adult with a special learning outcome). These forms had the following headings: date, area of learning, what we want the children to learn and what the children will do, resources and targeted children. Nursery nurses might write, 'Knowledge and understanding of the world, begin to know about own / other cultures and beliefs.' They were expected to do two adult focus forms a week. I saw some written out, but the nursery nurses found it really difficult to do these activities as the children were not able to concentrate. The nursery nurses were also expected to write daily evaluations to include the main focus, areas of provision, individual and groups of children and future plans/targets. All this writing took a lot of time and the nursery nurses did not have any spare time, other than in their

break time. The plans were to convince an Inspector but had very little basis in reality. They were time consuming and took the nursery nurses away from the children. However they could always be produced for the Inspector.

I asked another nursery nurse to talk me through the planning, when it was her turn to plan for the week's activities:

'I take the theme into consideration. I've usually got some ideas or look on the internet or look through magazines like Nursery World or Early Educator and see if there are any ideas in there. Then I write down a list of adult led activities and try and work them into the day and write down the different areas of learning and incorporate them into my plan.'

Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04.

When asked if she looked back see if all the Early Learning Goals had been covered the previous week or which aspect had been covered, she replied:

'Well usually we cover quite a lot during the week anyhow. I don't usually go back over our planning and say we have covered that one. Perhaps I should do.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04.

She could not see the importance of looking back over past weekly plans and was quite confident that the children covered all the areas of learning each week.

The nursery nurses and the supervisors/manager all said that long medium and short-term plans included all the Early Learning Goals and were planned to meet the needs of the children. However it soon became apparent that the plans were to help the nursery nurses provide interesting and stimulating activities for the children. This was a strategy to enable them to work towards their own goals and also to please the Inspector (Sparkes, 1987). The nursery nurses found planning useful because it enabled them to know what to set out each day without thinking about it. Few nursery nurses looked back to see which Early Learning Goals had been covered the previous week or tried to make any progression in their planning. The main aim was to ensure that everything was covered. They said that they were doing the plans to ensure all aspects of the Early Learning Goals were covered, but really they were doing them for their own reasons and then adding the Early Learning Goals.

Literacy

Formal requirements

Writing

The Early Learning Goals require nursery nurses to teach children to use a pencil correctly and to form letters correctly. They are also expected to teach children to write their names and simple words. This is part of the formal curriculum which caused tension in the nurseries of my study, between the

nursery nurses and the supervisors/managers who had to prepare the nursery for Ofsted inspections

Use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.

Write their own names and other things such as labels and captions and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation; (QCA 1999 p27)

Reading

Nursery nurses are expected to teach children to read familiar words and explore sounds and words:

read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently;

explore and experiment with sounds, words and texts; (QCA 1999 p.27)

Phonics

This is an aspect of literacy learning about which the nursery nurses in my study, had received very little or no training. It was part of the curriculum and so they included it in their planning. Because of their lack of knowledge, their teaching was sometimes haphazard. What they called phonics was really the

sound of the letters of the alphabet. They had various ways of teaching the children the sounds of words. Some used commercial material 'Letter Land' and some used wall posters. Others helped the children with difficult words when reading stories. They were required to get the children to :

Use their phonic knowledge to make plausible attempts to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words;

Explore and experiment with sounds, words and texts. (QCA 1999 p.27)

What nursery nurses did and what they said they did

The informal training of the nursery nurses encouraged name recognition and mark-making in play. None of them had been trained to teach children to form letters correctly. In order to comply with the requirements for the Early Learning Goals they tried to include name-writing, thus putting some emphasis on the Early Learning Goals. This often resulted in the children being taught letters but not always forming them correctly.

I observed one child being encouraged to write his name on a Christmas tag:

He was encouraged to do the craft activity – Christmas tags – he traces a circle, triangle rectangle and square. 'Can you write your name,' asked the nursery nurse? 'No' he replied, but when she says she will do it, he says 'No I will do it'. He takes the pencil and starts to trace his name in

one shape – he does one more with difficulty – he has a very short name – and says ‘I can’t do any more it makes my hand hurt’, and escapes to follow other children into other room. Community Nursery, 11/7/02.

I asked a manager if she thought it was important for a child to recognise words, she replied:

‘I think that is a bonus and in my experience you will always have the element of children who are desperate to learn that and my opinion is that you go with the flow. I have always encouraged children who have demonstrated by their play and talk that they are ready to go beyond it and extend their learning. Those children who I have felt are not ready for it I feel quite strongly that it is not fair to them and could be detrimental to them to push them any further.’ Manager, Chain Nursery, 25/5/04

In this case the manager is in conflict with the Early learning Goals, but still has to follow them. The nursery nurses would not force a child to do something he did not wish to do. They knew they were supposed to encourage children to hold a pencil correctly and to write their names, but many other activities and nursery routine took their time.

I observed another nursery nurse helping the children write the letters of their name:

Several children are ill today. There are now seven children. One child has just arrived. Four are doing painting with nursery nurse 5. She is showing the children how to paint the letters of their names or to print them with the plastic letters. The children say the name of the letter and the sound. The nursery nurses say it is possible to do some one-to-one work with the children this morning because of the low numbers and the children seem to enjoy it. L paints his name and says the sound of the letters. He is quite pleased about this. 'This is an Lllll' he says. Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 27/11/03.

They tried to encourage mark-making. There was usually a writing table with paper and pencils. Sometimes it was an imaginary office and sometimes a shop. Some children wrote pretend lists when going shopping and others wrote simple words using the letter of the week. These children were usually those who enjoyed writing:

Nursery nurse 6 is at the writing table and a child is saying out the letters on her name badge. He has written a word on a piece of paper and drawn a picture. I see it is 'insect' and it is pinned up on the 'Letter of the week' board. He also asks for the word spider and the nursery nurse writes it for him. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04.

The nursery nurses tried hard to persuade the Inspector that they were following the requirements. They made use of name cards with the children

because they saw this as important when the children went to school. They encouraged name recognition by using name cards for the children to identify their places at mealtimes. This was not done on a regular basis at all the nurseries, as it took quite a lot of time:

'We've got their names written on a card, which we lay out at juice time and then they have to go and find their name on the table. We have also got names on the cupboards and they have to find their names and tell me they have arrived.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

Reading was another area where there was tension between the requirements of the Early Learning Goals and the nursery nurses training. I noticed that the arrival names were rather small and the children often forgot to use them. The nursery nurses put out many everyday words such as 'table', 'cupboard' etc. I seldom observed these being used or referred to. These were there for the Inspector. What they said and what they did were different.

The nursery nurses also used a few work sheets to emphasise some words and their meanings. Here is an illustration of this taken from my field notes:

Some children are doing a worksheet at the table with an adult. They each have a similar worksheet. The pictures are supposed to reinforce the concept of 'in/on/under'. The children work well and enjoy activity. The adult discusses one child's ability with the nursery nurse who says, 'He's

only just three'. His ability to follow the worksheet will be entered in his file. Community Nursery, 15/11/02

In another nursery the home corner was being used as a baker's shop:

The bakers shop (the home corner) has words such as 'bread', 'pasty', 'cakes' and 'rolls' stuck on the outside and a notice with 'open' and 'closed' written on each side. Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

Generally, these activities were seen by the nursery nurses as an extra learning experience; something which they were required to do, rather than a priority. Their idea was to get the children used to the printed word, but they were not able or confident to teach the children to read. Also they were not convinced that children needed to be learning to read, when many of them could not sit still or share with their neighbours.

The nursery nurses had been trained to develop language and listening skills in children, to encourage name recognition and mark-making in play, and to develop pre-reading and writing skills in children. They trained to teach the more formal aspects of reading and writing or to teach phonics, except the sound of the letters of the alphabet. These were skills which the new Early Learning Goals required them to teach and which the Ofsted Inspector would expect to see evidence of. When asked if she did phonics with the children one nursery nurse replied:

'We have got 'Letter Land' books and we have a 'Letter Land' frieze and we are more into the sound of the letters rather than the Letter Land characters. I don't get very involved with the characters. We will sit down and I ask them the sound of certain letters.' Nursery nurse 1,
Community Nursery, 17/12/02

The nursery nurse was really teaching the sounds of the alphabet.

I asked a supervisor if the children received any phonics teaching and if she tried to encourage them? She replied:

'Yes I feel they should, because I feel it is easier for the children to learn from this. They need to know the sound before they learn the names of letters.'
Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

This supervisor was trying to support the Early Learning Goals but she did not really understand the meaning of phonics.

Most of the children in this group could hardly manage to recognise one or two letters and sounds. The nursery nurses were told to include phonics in their planning but they did not understand what it really meant. Most of the children whom I observed were only just able to sound the first letter of their name and a few other sounds. It was questionable if they were ready for more advanced phonics, even if the nursery nurses had been able to teach them, or were likely to be ready while they were at the nursery.

Another nursery nurse, when asked about phonics, replied:

'Yes, in the listening area is a large alphabet chart and we do the phonics in there so we tell them how to recognise their name, the letters in their name and how to form their names using the magnetic letters. We do the alphabet when we are reading stories. If I am reading a story and there is a word they don't understand I will break it down for them, and explain to them what the word means.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

An example of their limited understanding of phonics comes from my field notes. Here we see a nursery nurse apparently teaching phonics:

'We will now do our phonics.' She asks one child if she can find the letter A on the wall cards. She does and is asked to say the sound and the letter. The children then sing 'Ants on the apple – aaa'. This continues. A child finds the letter B, says the sound and name of letter. Children sing 'Balls are bouncing – bbb'. They carry on to the letter E. Most children are listening and keen to take part. The new boy comes in late but is asked to find the letter F. He goes straight to the letter J, which is the letter for his name. He is then told to find the picture of a fire fighter on the picture alphabet and does so. Nursery nurse 5, LEA Nursery, 16/12/03

These nursery nurses were concentrating on the sound of letters, which is what they had been trained to do. They did not think that it was necessary to teach

more reading to children who needed far more help with every day skills.

However they did feel that it was important to teach the names and sounds of the alphabet. They felt that this was important, planned for it and repeated it regularly. Most children would leave the nursery able to say the alphabet.

Teaching writing was an area of tension and one where nursery nurses used strategic rhetoric to persuade the Inspector that they were fulfilling the requirements of the Early Learning Goals and yet were really following their professional judgement. They said that they encouraged children to write their own names, by writing their names for them and letting them write over it. From my observations this did not happen very often and most children were struggling over many of the letters. Once I noticed nursery nurses mounting children's drawings of houses. They put children's names on them. Only three out of twelve children had tried to write their own names. The nursery nurses told me that they were too busy and could only really help the children when the numbers of children were fewer.

One commented:

'Yes we do a lot about writing their names. Yes we do a lot of that. Just recently we have started to encourage them to write their own names on their craftwork; we leave a pencil on the table and ask them to write their names on the work.' Nursery nurse1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02.

What they were doing was encouraging the children to make their mark. This is the first step in writing. When asked how they taught the children to form letters one nursery nurse replied:

'We write the letter and they go over the top. We used to do dots, but we have been told you shouldn't do that! As they get more confident then we ask them to copy it under what we have written. Eventually they write it on their own.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 17/12/02.

Here was more tension. An advisor had told the nursery nurses not to use dots for the children to write over, but had not given any clear guidance. I saw very little evidence of children learning to form letters. I did see some children writing over their names, which had been written by the nursery nurse. Staff said that they encouraged the children to write their names but there was little evidence to support this. This was not seen very often. It was only observed when there were a small number of children in the room or just before the children left the nursery for school. The nursery nurses used strategic rhetoric to persuade Ofsted Inspectors that they understood and were putting into practice the Early Learning Goals. They were, however, still pursuing their own goals (Sparkes, 1987).

The nursery nurses said that they encouraged the children to read their names and simple words. They made an effort to help the children recognise their names using name cards, but there was little evidence of the children reading other words. The nursery nurses said they encouraged aspects of literacy for the

Inspector's benefit. In reality they used their own beliefs, values and knowledge to decide what should be included in the curriculum (Sparkes, 1987).

They were not always confident in sounding out the letters in words. As can be seen from the examples, the nursery nurses had various ideas of phonics and generally did not understand very much about the teaching of phonics. When asked if phonics were included in their planning one nursery nurse replied:

'At the beginning of the year (our year starts in September when most of the children move up) we do have a letter each week until we have worked through the alphabet; it is planned for in that way but when the alphabet is finished it is not planned for then. I don't think it is planned, because we do it regularly'. Nursery nurse1, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

All the nursery nurses whom I interviewed said they did phonics with the children. What they really meant was that they taught the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. The nursery nurses were actually teaching the sound of the letters of the alphabet and calling it phonics. They did not spend time teaching sounds within words. They created an illusion that they understood the full meaning of phonics (Sparkes, 1987). They had to appear to be teaching these aspects of the Early Learning Goals as an Inspector would judge the nursery on these areas. This dissonance required the nursery nurses to use strategic rhetoric (Sparkes, 1987) to make it look as though they were both committed to, and working towards, the Early Learning Goals.

Mathematical knowledge

Formal requirements

The Early Learning Goals require much more detailed knowledge in mathematics. Nursery nurses are expected to teach children to recognise numerals 1-9 and use every day words to describe position; they are also expected to teach the children to use mathematical language, such as 'heavier' and 'lighter'. Much of this was not part of the training of the nursery nurses in my study. They were required to teach:

Numerals and positions

Recognise numerals 1 – 9;

Use everyday words to describe position; (QCA 1999 p.31)

Mathematical language

Use language 'more' or 'less', 'greater' or 'smaller', 'heavier' or 'lighter', to

Compare two numbers or quantities; (QCA 1999 p31)

Solving practical problems

The Early Learning Goals require nursery nurses to teach children simple adding and subtracting and to use ideas and methods to solve simple practical problems:

In practical activities and discussion begin to use the vocabulary involved in adding and subtracting;

Use developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems. (QCA 1999 p.31)

What the nursery nurses did and what they said they did

Many of the nursery nurses in my study, used every day activities, such as counting the number of children present to help the children recognise numbers:

One nursery nurse goes through the days of the week. It is Thursday. They then count the number of children present. There are 13 altogether. '13, so we are looking for 1 and 3.' She gets a child to find the numbers. Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

The language 'more' or 'less' was used most often. I observed the nursery nurses using these terms while playing table games and during informal activities such as setting the tables for lunch.

One such example was:

A child was then asked to count all the girls – counted five and said 'I counted myself first'. She was then asked if there were more girls than boys and said there were more girls. Community Nursery, 30/10/02

Another example from my field notes:

Nursery nurse 3 goes to the maths table. The new boy makes patterns with the Unifix blocks and another child is following the pattern on the card provided. She asks them the colour of the bricks. She says to one child, 'you need one more'; to another child she says 'you need three' and puts three fingers up 'and now four.' The child concentrates on the numbers. 'How many do we need now' 'six' replies the child and puts six bricks in the square. She praises her. M tries to push in at the maths table but is told 'no, there are already four children.' Nursery nurse 3, LEA Nursery, 15/11/03

Another nursery nurse tries to teach children a number game:

Nursery nurse 8 goes to the maths table and shows the children how to play. 'We have 17 animals and 18 insects – is that the same – no – how many more insects do you have?' Child counts and says one. Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

In another nursery, setting up for lunch is used as a learning experience:

One child helps nursery nurse 6 to set the tables for lunch. They put the cloths on the tables and the name cards. The child can read all the names. He counts the name cards- 19 and he counts the napkins – 17. ‘How many more do we need?’ He says three, she counts again and puts up her fingers – he says two. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

I asked one of the supervisors if she was concerned about any areas of the curriculum and she replied:

‘I think we are getting better with our Maths- not there but better.’

Supervisor, Community Nursery, 7/3/03

She obviously saw mathematics as being a difficult area for the nursery nurses and an area of tension.

Some nursery nurses used games and activities. At one nursery each member of staff was responsible for organising an educational activity each week. This is an example of one nursery nurse’s activity:

One nursery nurse calls a child to the table. She has some boxes with numbers on them. The child counts the number of pictures on the card and puts it in the correct box. She concentrates hard. She knows one to four

and then counts up to eight but finds it more difficult to find the number on the box. When she tries ten she needs help. 'Look for a number with two numbers in it.' The child finds it. Nursery nurse says 'nine comes after eight and seven comes before eight.' Child loses concentration. Her friend is then called. She sits beside her friend while she does her number work and sucks her thumb. Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 21/10/02

This was a one off. I did not see this activity out again while I was at the nursery. I did see the nursery nurses showing the children numbers and helping them to recognise them, but in spite of what they said, I saw very little evidence of the children writing numbers. They thought that this was required and said they encouraged the children but only did it occasionally. Again the lack of time and their deep conviction that the children needed help with basic personal, social and emotional skills meant that they only paid lip service to areas which took valuable time from what they felt was really required.

When asked what they hoped the children would learn in mathematics while at nursery, this was the most common reply:

'The number side of it, the counting and sequencing more than anything. At least count to ten or probably even more, at least recognise the numbers one to ten, to count out objects, not necessarily up to ten, but at least up to five.' Nursery nurse7, Chain Nursery, 22/6/04

This was an area where there was tension between the formal requirements and the informal training of the nursery nurses. However, the nursery nurses tried to help the children recognise numerals by various methods. They talked to the children at 'Circle time' and got the children to find the relevant number and used games to reinforce their understanding of numbers. The nursery nurses had their own ideas about what the children should be learning. They had been trained to help children count up to ten and recognise some number names. They did this in an informal way during the day and also had activities out for children to experiment with. They worked hard at aspects which they saw as important for the children when they started school, but felt mathematical problems were for teachers to teach the children, when they started school. Aspects of the curriculum which had not been covered in their training, were difficult to introduce and too time-consuming. For one nursery nurse to concentrate on a few children for any length of time, often meant that the other children were restless and became noisy and sometimes badly-behaved.

When asked if the children were encouraged to write numbers I was told:

'First of all when they first come up to me they start off tracing over the numbers; gradually as the time goes by they trace over and then gradually on the line they do their own numbers.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 17/12/02

There was no evidence of this in my data. They said they did writing numbers but seldom did. Mathematical language was another area where nursery nurses

were not sure what was really important. This had not been emphasised in their training and although scales were occasionally put out, they spent very little time on quantities and weighing. There was also very little time to spend with individual children on weighing and using terms such as 'heavier' and 'lighter'. Mathematical language was used by some of the nursery nurses, although others were unsure of the correct language to use:

'I would like to know which words to say so they will understand, rather than talking long sentences, cutting them down; mostly in maths, but generally in every area. Sometimes when I'm talking to them they look at me as if to say 'What are you on about?' I would like to be able to simplify it for them.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

They did try to incorporate mathematical language into everyday activities. The routine of the nursery left very little time for the nursery nurses to talk to individual children playing at the different activities. Some nursery nurses tried to get each child to take part in a specific activity while others let them choose. All the nursery nurses said they taught the children to recognise numbers. There were only a few observations showing children recognising numbers. The emphasis was on learning to count. Often songs and games were used. The rhetoric they used had little impact on what they actually did. Most nursery nurses said that they used mathematical language with the children, but, except in games and at snack time, there was little evidence of this. The nursery nurses did not get the children involved in many activities with addition and subtraction

or with solving mathematical problems. One nursery nurse admitted that she found it difficult to plan for problem solving:

'Yes, I do find problem solving quite hard to plan for but we do that through out the day; for example how many cups will we need for this, it is an ongoing thing.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 29/6/04

The observation below was unusual. Few of the nursery nurses had time or found children who would respond. Most children could not concentrate for long enough:

One child has been to Disney Land and brought a dish full of wrapped chocolates for the other children. Nursery nurse 7 goes into the reading area with the boy and starts sorting them into colours and pictures. Another child joins them. They make rows of chocolates and then count how many in each row. She asks a child to fetch paper and pencil so that they can write the numbers down. This is done and the chocolates are counted and put back on the plate. Several other children have joined in the activity. She suggests that they might like to add up all the numbers to see how many chocolates there are altogether. This could be done with a calculator. The first two children go to a table with the calculator and with Nursery nurse 3's help add up the chocolates. There are 143 chocolates to be shared between 18 children. She tells them there will be 7 each.

Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 6/5/04

Solving simple mathematical problems was the main area which caused difficulty in mathematics. Most nursery nurses said that they did this sometimes, although one said she did not have the correct language and one said she found this difficult. The nursery nurses did not fully understand what they were supposed to do and did not feel they were supposed to teach the children mathematical problems. There was very little evidence that they involved the children in solving simple mathematical problems although they said they did in order to satisfy the Inspector and the supervisors/manager. They spent their time on what they saw as more important skills.

The new demands which have been put on nursery nurses are contrary to what they were trained for. The nursery nurses in my study had been trained to teach children numbers and thought that it was important. They felt that being able to count to ten and recognise a few numbers would be useful for children when they went to school, and most of them spent quite a long time during each session getting the children to count in an informal way. The requirements of the Early Learning Goals confused them. They felt that they lacked the correct language and were not sure about mathematical problems. Their training had not included problem-solving and they did not see the importance of teaching more mathematical skills to children who had so much to learn in basic skills.

Assessment of Children's Achievements

Formal Requirements

The Government policy for the assessment of young children is set out clearly. Children are to be assessed in relation to the stepping stones and Early Learning Goals. These formal assessments are to be looked at when the nursery is inspected by Ofsted. Nursery nurses are required to formally assess children's attainment and fill in the children's profiles. Assessment is an important part of the requirements for the Early Learning Goals.

'Throughout the foundation stage, as part of the learning process, practitioners need to assess each child's development in relation to the stepping stones and the early learning goals. ---These assessments are made on the basis of the practitioner's accumulating observations and knowledge of the whole child.' (QCA 2003 p.ii)

To help children progress, practitioners need information about what the children know, understand and can do. Through observing children at work, and by making notes when necessary about what has been achieved, practitioners can make professional judgements about their children's achievements and decide on the next steps in learning. They can also provide information for parents and carers about how their children are progressing. (QCA, 2003, p. iii)

What nursery nurses did and what they said they did

Nursery nurses are required to assess each child's development. This includes what the child knows, understands and can do. They are expected to do this by observing children and keeping a record, called a profile, on each child.

Once again the supervisors/manager told me what they knew the Ofsted Inspector would be looking for. One supervisor explained to me:

'Each child will have its own profile and the staff have their observations. The staff look at those every couple of weeks to see areas where the children need more support or things they are not doing and then they incorporate that into the plan to ensure that each child's needs are met and also the Early Learning Goals. You could have two or three children, who have the same needs, in the room. Therefore, you plan activities round that and therefore you are meeting the child's needs and also you are making sure that every child is able to reach those goals. So that's how it is done.' Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

All the nursery nurses tried to fill in the children's assessment records as they were expected to. In the Community Nursery the nursery nurse and her assistant filled them in. Although many children came in part-time, a record was kept on each child. For the larger room this could be as many as forty files. The records were very detailed and had hundreds of skills written on them. The staff wrote comments on yellow stickers and, at spare moments, they entered them into the

correct slot. These comments were usually quite short. The stickers were supposed to be evidence that the child had really completed the skill. For example the sticker might say:

T. was seen counting six bricks, he did this three times.

The staff found this time-consuming. I asked if they filled in all the skills but the nursery nurse said:

'It would be nice if every child who left, could take home a folder with everything filled in but, unfortunately, it is not going to happen. At first when we started filling them in we found we were ticking off the same things quite regularly so there were big gaps in their folders, which were obviously areas we were not covering. So now we go through their folders every two weeks or so to find blocked areas which have not been filled in and we pick an activity which is based around the Early Learning Goals we haven't covered. They are not filled in in order but only when we see a child doing something.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

The nursery nurses in the LEA Nursery and the Chain Nursery, who were given the formal documentation from the provider, were also told how to fill them in and how to do the observations on the children. They did general observations and target observations headed 'Individual Observations' in each of the six areas of learning. Each child also had a 'Record of Achievement.' This contained a list of materials and activities such as – Wet sand, dry sand, water, malleable

material, creative, maths, science, climbing etc. The staff put a letter in the space and wrote the date followed by one of these letters; N – never, O – occasionally, S – Sometimes and F – frequently.

I looked through a child's folder (name removed):

He is four-years-old. He leaves at Christmas. There are many observations under each heading (6 areas) all dated. There is an example of his handwriting – which is a mix of upper and lower case letters. Some are observations from table activities, outside play and some are focus observations. There are monthly plans which highlight which areas should be observed during the month. LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

The nursery nurses concentrated on providing stimulating activities and struggled to do all these assessments. During my time observing in the nursery, I did not see activities planned especially for two or three children taking place. It all sounded good on paper, but was very unrealistic in practice.

The nursery nurses made decisions on how to use some of the documentation. They used them for their purposes. Some staff used 'activity' sheets which set out details of the activity for the day. They contained many details of equipment. They also contained the stepping stones which the children were expected to learn. The nursery nurses used the sheets to help them assess children's ability by checking off which child had learnt the stepping stones listed on the sheet.

When asked about the 'activity' sheets one nursery nurse replied:

'Each child has a sheet of stepping stones and outcomes; and we can actually use those to cross reference with their personal sheets, to mark off certain stepping stones. So the original purpose I haven't a clue but as it's carried on there is actually a purpose for them.' Nursery Nurse1,
Community Nursery, 17/12/02

The nursery nurses checked as many aspects of learning as they could. When they came to write reports on the children, they used the record files, the collection of work and their knowledge of the child to complete the report.

One supervisor told me:

'Each child will have its own profile and the staff have their observations. The staff look at those every couple of weeks to see areas where children need more support or things they are not doing and then they incorporate that into the plan to ensure that you meet each child's needs and also the Early learning Goals. You could have two or three children in the room who have the same needs. Therefore, you plan activities round that and therefore, you are meeting the child's needs and also you are making sure that every child is able to reach those goals. So that's how it is done.'

Supervisor, LEA Nursery, 10/10/03

The nursery nurses had all been trained to observe children. This was part of their training, but the detailed assessment of each child's learning, in literacy

and numeracy, was not. They were trained to observe general development and prepare children for school. They knew that all children learnt at a different rate. They also realised that many children were not ready to concentrate on many aspects of number and literacy at three and four years of age.

'When a child goes to school about half the skills are filled in. We use these records to write a report on the child when it leaves. I asked, 'If the record is blank do you assume the child cannot do that skill?' She replied 'No not necessarily, if you have time you might do an activity with the whole group and check if the child can do it, but you know that child and soon pick up what they can or can't do.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

The nursery nurses used their knowledge of the child to help them fill in the records. Even if they had not written an observation about a skill, if they knew that the child was able to perform that task, they marked it off. At no time did I get the impression that the records were used to move the child on to the next stage, or to pick out children who were having learning problems. They were used to indicate skills achieved. However, it is possible that they did this without realising it as they knew each child very well.

The nursery nurses had their own informal methods of assessing a child's attainment. One nursery nurse explained how she decided if a child really understood an aspect of mathematics:

'After a while we get to know what the children can do and can't do. First of all we have a chart with all the numbers. After she/he has told me the number three times, I tick it off and I know they have done it. If she/he only tells me once, I don't tick it off; it has to be three times.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

When asked what she would do if, when looking at her records, she found that a child hadn't done any of the numbers, she replied:

'I would do number work all that week, perhaps some individual work with that child but more group work so as not to single out one child. Group work but aimed at that child.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

This did not quite fit with the supervisor's model. The nursery nurses used a more informal method and preferred to give the children choices. However, they kept records on each child; they wrote observations and kept examples of the children's work.

The nursery nurses continued to say what was expected of them, but often did not do what they said:

'This morning at one activity a little girl was having difficulty counting up to ten. We have little blue books that we can make notes in, so we can then draw from that, so the next day we can think we need to do an activity based on counting one to ten.' Nursery nurse 8, Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

This did not always happen.

The question of time kept coming up in conversations I had with the nursery nurses. When asked to describe the process of assessment, one nursery nurse replied:

'Well we have our blue books, which are their next steps. If we see them do something we write it down and then we see what the next step is. Each of us has one. I'm not sure we use them as much as we should. If it is a significant observation we will write it up on an observation sheet instead. The book is just for notes throughout the day. We write it on the general observation forms and categorise it in the different areas. It can be quite time consuming. It is just annoying when I try and think of something and it slips my mind because I haven't had time to write it down. Like if I see something going on in the garden, I haven't got anything to write on. It is quite time consuming.' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery, 13/5/04

This shows the conflict between trying to fill in the observation book and finding the time to write the observations down. As far as I could see, they seldom based an activity on the requirements of one child.

The nursery nurses in the Chain Nursery were quite organised with simple 'child profiles' and a blue book for short observations and observation sheets for lengthy observations. They still found them time-consuming and often had to

write them up at home. At this nursery they did not have coffee breaks, but only a one-hour lunch break and they worked at least an eight-hour day. As in the other nurseries, they were occupied with the children all the time. There was no time to write notes. They also found it too time consuming and impractical to help individual children with learning programmes. If they had extra staff on duty they could spend more time with individual children. When asked if they planned to give the older children any extra help with the curriculum one nursery nurse replied:

'No we don't actually plan to do anything extra with them at all. It is so difficult when there are so many children to actually spend time to sit down with any one child for any length of time. We have an activity out and we have sixteen children to get through in an hour. So there is not the time to spend on any particular child who is going off to school'. Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 22/6/04

I asked if they tried to encourage the child, for example, who can count to one hundred, to do more number work:

'Yes, yes we do; it's all down to time really. If we have three staff as we do today and if we are low on numbers, yes we do have more time to spend on individual children.' Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 22/6/04

It was obvious that this only happened on special occasions.

I noticed that the activity sheets had a space for differentiation so I asked the nursery nurses if they were able to adapt activities for children who learnt faster or those who needed more time. One replied:

'We do try to do that. On the activity sheets there is a section for differentiation. So we have the 'minus and plus'; how we are going to make it slightly easier for the younger children and slightly harder for the older or brighter children. We do try and do that, yes, we do try and it's a lot easier in maths and letters anyway.' Nursery nurse1, Community

Nursery, 20/3/03

When asked if they tried to encourage the children who learnt faster, some said 'all the time', but I saw very little evidence of this. The children are mainly grouped according to age and sometimes they plan more difficult activities for the older children or those going to school.

The nursery nurses appeared to follow the requirements of the Early Learning Goals but still continued with their own aims. The idea of moving children on at different rates, they found very difficult. Their training had not prepared them and they had many children to look after and a limited amount of time. They tried to encourage all children to take part in all activities, as they had been trained to do.

As one nursery nurse commented:

'We have twenty children to get through the activity in one hour and it is difficult to plan for each individual child.' Nursery nurse 1, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

When asked how they linked their activities with the Early Learning Goals they said:

'There is also a bit of individual planning as well for our key children and I try and think more of the ages of the children and how we can adapt it, because we have quite a wide age range. I will probably be aiming one activity at the younger children and another, more for the older children, but they can be adapted.' Nursery nurse 2, Community Nursery, 20/3/03

My data shows that the nursery nurses had very little spare time. They were expected to show an Ofsted Inspector detailed assessments and children's profiles but had no time to complete them. In order to satisfy the supervisors and Inspectors, they went through the process required, but found ways to keep assessments as simple as possible, noting areas of development which they saw as important and yet giving the impression that they were fully complying with the requirements. They said that they were doing detailed assessments in order to impress the Inspector but this was only strategic rhetoric. They decided to make the assessments look suitable for the Inspector but spent very little time filling them in. They knew that they could fill in the forms later, if necessary, with their detailed knowledge of the children.

Most of the nursery nurses found the workload involved with assessment too much. They were expected to write observations on the children during the day but found it difficult to find the time. Many of them had several children to observe. In one nursery, the nursery nurse had 40 children's files to keep up to date. This was because many children came part-time. The nursery nurses complained at having to write up their notes at home. They were in favour of observing the children, but felt that there was now too much paperwork.

In one nursery, the nursery nurse in charge, said:

'I think sometimes the workload is too much. I don't think it's achievable at times. We have all got key children and we have all got to keep the files. This is what I think the 'Chain' doesn't allow for. They want you to have parents' nights twice a year and they would like the children's profiles to be full with examples of their work, observations and that kind of thing but they won't build time into your timetable. So I don't know how other places do it.' Nursery nurse 6, Chain Nursery, 22/1/04

One of the other nursery nurses said that she often had to write up her notes at home:

'I do find it difficult to get the observations done during the day because it is always quite busy; I usually write it in rough in my book and write it up

later and do an action plan for it. ' Nursery nurse 7, Chain Nursery,
22/6/04

In another nursery there was a similar reaction:

'In one sense it is good to have something on paper about the children about their ability, but I think the reams and reams of writing is just too much.' Nursery nurse 4, LEA Nursery, 20/11/03

The nursery nurses said that they looked at the profiles every two weeks and planned to ensure that every child's needs were being met. I saw very little evidence that this was really happening. It was not realistic, given the demands on the nursery nurses' time. They said they would do number work all one week if they realised a child was having difficulty, but I did not see any evidence of this. As can be seen from the above comments from the nursery nurses, they all found the observations and writing them in the children's files very time consuming, often having to take them home to write them neatly. The nursery nurses in all of the three nurseries found it difficult to find time to help individual children, especially those with special learning programmes. Thus many children may have been able to do more than the assessment profile indicated, in some aspects of numeracy and literacy. However, the nursery nurses would say that all the children needed as much time as possible, learning the skills and behaviour, which would enable them to settle quickly at school where they would be able to learn the skills which the nursery nurses had neither the time nor the skill to teach them. Their constant use of strategic rhetoric

(Sparkes, 1987), was a strategy to cope with the pressures and change which the Early Learning Goals put upon them.

I asked a supervisor if she looked through the development files to see how the children were progressing. She replied:

'Yes, although not as often as I should. I just haven't had time recently. I haven't seen them since January.'

I then asked her 'How would you expect them to look – if, say, you were to look at them now?'

'Probably more than is in them!! It will depend on how much the child is in. I would expect to see a few stickers on each sheet now and then those cross-referenced to where they are appropriate; and a few stickers and observations which cannot be cross-referenced.' Supervisor,
Community Nursery, 10/10/02

She appeared to recognise that the development files would not be very full.

This is another area of possible tension between the supervisors/manager and the nursery nurses.

Conclusion

The following chart summarizes what nursery nurses do and what they say they do.

What nursery nurses do

What nursery nurses say they do

Care for children's physical needs	Care for children's physical needs
Care for children's social needs	Care for children's social needs
Plan to cover interesting topics	Plan to cover Early Learning Goals
Encourage language development	Encourage early reading and writing
Assess children's general development	Assess children's individual achievements
Help children count to ten	Teach children to recognise and write numbers
Encourage skills required for school	Encourage literacy and numeracy skills

The introduction of the new framework of the 'Early Learning Goals' caused much confusion and concern amongst the nursery nurses. The '*Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*' document (QCA, 2000b), although intended to give advice and help to practitioners, also caused much tension and paperwork for the nursery nurses:

'The Curriculum guidance notes have reference to the need to build on knowledge and skills that the children bring to the educational settings; to work closely with parents; to retain pedagogic strategies that offer a mixture of adult directed and child initiated activities; and learning through play. Still the language, for example Early Learning Goals and Stepping Stones, remain robust in relation to attainments, particularly in literacy and numeracy.' (Anning 2003 p.1)

There were many influences which affected how the nursery nurses interpreted the Early Learning Goals. The nursery nurses' training was related to the discourse of caring and informality. This training affected their professional judgement and conflicted with the discourse of standards, inspection and formality.

Although it appeared, on the face of it, that the Early Learning Goals put the nursery nurses under a great deal of pressure, the possibilities of doing things in the way they had been trained were manifold. I looked to see who made the

decisions in the day nurseries. At first sight it appeared that the supervisors/manager followed the instructions from the Early Learning Goals, received forms and assessment record books from their employers and then told the nursery nurses what they had to do. However I soon discovered that the nursery nurses often used the forms, charts and planning material in their own way, to make them suit their own purposes and make them easier to follow.

The Early Learning Goals are a requirement. Ofsted Inspectors check to see if all the aspects of the Early Learning Goals are in place. The nursery nurses knew how important it was for the day nursery to receive a good Ofsted report and so made an effort to impress the Ofsted Inspector. The nursery nurses did not always appreciate the need for some of the aspects of the goals, especially the detailed plans, the detailed assessments and the emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy skills. They did not feel these aspects were important and had little time to prioritise these aspects. However the supervisors/manager knew how important these aspects were to the Inspectors and this caused tensions and sometimes actual conflict between them and the nursery nurses. The nursery nurses were obliged to make some concessions to the supervisors/manager. These influences were very powerful but the nursery nurses' professional attitudes of caring and informality were also strong.

When these influences were irreconcilable, the nursery nurses resorted to a form of strategic rhetoric (Sparkes, 1987). They used rhetorical justification to create the illusion that they were fulfilling the requirements of the Early Learning Goals, when sometimes they were continuing with their own

professional ideas. They used the power which they had to make their own decisions.

8. Conclusion and recent developments

The research question I asked was ‘How do nursery nurses, working in day nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals?’

The first thing I did was to try to find out who nursery nurses are? I felt I needed to know the answer to this question before I could answer the research question. I wanted to know if they were a special kind of person and if they could be described generally. I discovered that most nursery nurses are women (Skeggs, 1997, Skelton and Hall, 2001). Since the 19th century, childcare has been seen as the responsibility of women (Gaine and George, 1999). Women were first trained to look after children in 1945 by the Nursery Nurse Examination Board and received the NNEB qualification. In spite of the emancipation of women and more equality in the work place, women still dominate the workforce. In spite of government initiatives to encourage more men into childcare, in 2005 (EOC, 2005b) only one in fifty nursery nurses was male. This research shows that nursery nursing continues to be dominated by women. Not only are nursery nurses mainly women but they are predominantly working class women.

When college training became available for all, many working class young women chose to train for childcare, because they liked looking after children and they were unlikely to fail the course (Skeggs, 1997, Penn and McQuail, 1997). I interviewed eight nursery nurses and they were all women. There were no men in these nurseries. They were also all working class women, with very little ambition. One had been to University but was unlikely to take her studies any further. One said that she might

like to be a teacher, but was unlikely to do any further studies in the near future. They all loved working with children, had no desire to be a supervisor, but preferred to be in direct contact with the children. Their aim was to care for children, make them happy and self confident and to prepare them for the world of school. They were quite content to stay in their job, provided that they enjoyed the work, but had no concerns about moving if the job ceased to give them satisfaction. They were prepared to work hard and long hours for low wages, if they had job satisfaction. They also expected to leave their responsibilities behind when they went home. They did not expect to take work home. When they were required to, they all complained about this.

In 1996 the curriculum for early years, changed from one of caring and informality to one of standards, inspection and formality (SCAA, 1996a). This was a complete change for the nursery nurses in my study and was not received well by them. Their training prepared them for a caring and informal curriculum and that is what they saw as important. Their lack of ambition and their desire to care for young children did not sit easily with the Early Learning Goals requirements. Although my research was small, all eight nursery nurses said the same thing. They did not feel that their job was to teach the children, but mainly to care for them. They felt that the children needed much more time spent on personal, social and emotional skills and that left very little time for the literacy and numeracy skills, which were required by Ofsted.

There are two strands running through this research. Firstly what nursery nurses have been trained to do and see as important, the caring, informal curriculum; secondly, what the Government, through the Early Learning Goals, requires them to do; the standards, inspections, formal curriculum. In several cases these are not

compatible and this creates conflict and confusion. The nursery nurses in my study felt that they must spend time on areas where they were not confident, which left insufficient time for them to spend on areas where they felt children needed help. The nursery nurses had been trained to look after the whole child and saw their role as preparing the child for school. The training of nursery nurses and the curriculum they are now required to implement, are not always compatible. Who nursery nurses are and the conflict between the two discourses, inevitably affects how the nursery nurses interpret the Early Learning Goals. It is important to remember that day nurseries usually take children from 8.00 am until 6.30 pm. They give them breakfast, lunch and tea. Some children attend all day and some for a few sessions. The nursery nurses take the place of the child's parent or carer. They help to toilet train the children, encourage good eating habits, teach good behaviour and encourage confidence and language development.

The introduction of the Early Learning Goals and the subsequent inspections created tension and conflict in these day nurseries. The supervisors were required to get a good Ofsted report for the future of the nursery. The Early Learning Goals were a requirement; unless they were followed, the day nursery did not receive Government funding. A good Ofsted report was essential. The supervisors/manager worked hard to achieve good results. The nursery nurses were also aware of this. This research shows the tension and conflict between the supervisors/manager and the nursery nurses. The nursery nurses tried to follow their training aims and objectives and the supervisors /manager tried to follow the Early Learning Goals, even though they did not always agree with them. The nursery nurses did not always appreciate the need for some of the aspects of the goals, especially the detailed plans, the detailed assessments and the

emphasis on teaching literacy and numeracy skills. They did not feel that these aspects were very important and felt that there was not time to prioritise them. The nursery nurses were required to follow the instructions of their supervisors, which often conflicted with their own professional judgements. Here we see the contradictory discourses of caring and standards in a changing policy context.

However the nursery nurses I interviewed knew that the nursery would only get a good report if the Inspector was satisfied that they were following the Early Learning Goals. These conflicting ideas caused tension and conflict. To avoid the conflict nursery nurses used strategic rhetoric (Sparkes, 1987). They said that they followed aspects of the Early Learning Goals, but often did something quite different. Sparkes (1987) suggests that teachers use strategic rhetoric as a coping strategy to deal with change. He suggests that the use of rhetorical justification is an attempt to create an illusion. This research suggests that the nursery nurses used strategic rhetoric to deal with the conflict between their training and the Early Learning Goals. They said they did what the Ofsted Inspector required and put paper work in place, to try to establish this, yet really they often followed their professional judgement. In this way they managed to persuade themselves that they were ready for an inspection. The supervisors/manager thought that the nursery nurses were prepared and most of the time the Inspectors were also convinced.

The nursery nurses were caught between two irreconcilable forces; their professional judgement and the policy of the Early Learning Goals. They interpreted the Early Learning Goals by using their own professional judgements about the needs of the children. They prepared plans and assessments for the Ofsted Inspector and yet used

them for their own purposes. They said that they taught aspects of literacy and numeracy, but there was little evidence of this. This was sometimes because they were using strategic rhetoric and sometimes because they did not really understand what was required. Their interpretation of the Early Learning Goals was always from their training and caring position, but they said things which would please an Inspector. They knew their children well and worked hard to cover all aspects of personal, social and emotional development, but found little time for literacy and numeracy.

Limitations of the research

The aim of this research is to further our understanding of how nursery nurses, working in day nurseries, interpret the Early Learning Goals introduced by the Government in 1999. The naturalistic approach proved valuable in obtaining data from observations, interviews and documentation, with which to explore the subject.

However I only obtained data from three day nurseries. This is a very small sample, but I took three different types of day nurseries from very different catchment areas. I chose nurseries with good Ofsted reports, not poor or excellent, to ensure that they were more likely to represent typical cases. I felt that they were a fairly typical sample. I was able to do in depth studies at each nursery and the staff knew how I intended to use the information; providing that I did not use names, I was able to use all my data. However it is still a small sample and a larger sample may have different findings. There were no men in my sample, but that was true of many day nurseries. I

found it difficult to find much literature about the history of the NNEB courses and early college course material. Although I tried one of the first colleges, Norlands College and the archives of the Nursery World magazine, I found very little information.

My data was quite substantial and I tried to collect it in a rigorous and systematic way. However, my background as an Ofsted Inspector may have affected some of my decisions, because my training helped me to observe in detail most of the nursery nurses movements and activities. An observer with less experience of observing in nurseries, or who was less steeped in the world of early years education, might have seen things differently. It was difficult to find time when I could interview the nursery nurses and therefore we had a certain time constraint and sometimes the environment was not very comfortable. I do not think that this affected the quality of the interviews but it might have done.

My background as an Ofsted Inspector could have affected the nursery nurses' replies. They knew that I had more knowledge of the Early Learning Goals than they did and also were aware that I had been observing their activities. I tried to counteract this by allowing several weeks for them to get to know me, before I interviewed them. By this time they were more relaxed and appeared to see me in a non threatening way. I was very nervous when I conducted the first interviews. I think that I was trying too hard to help the nursery nurses relax and trying not to behave as an Inspector. My questions were rather stilted. Fortunately I was able to interview the first two nursery nurses twice and by then I was much more confident and felt the interviews had more depth.

I would justify the methods I used and the questions I asked, because they enabled me to get close to the nursery nurses without getting only the answers they felt I wanted. There may have been better ways, such as working at the nurseries as a class-room assistant, however I felt that my observations would have been less detailed and my knowledge of what the nursery nurses were doing would have been hindered by the time I would have had to spend with the children. I felt that my approach succeeded in getting the nursery nurses' to relax and enabled me to observe them without them changing their usual way of operating. Later in the research I realised that I could have asked more about the nursery nurses' reasons for choosing nursery nurse training, but it would have been difficult to return to the nurseries as one had closed for refurbishment and some of the nursery nurses may have left.

Implications of the findings for policy and practice

New policies have a far reaching effect and the policy of the Early Learning Goals has had a dramatic effect on nursery nurses working in day nurseries.

When making policies for early years, the policy makers need to be mindful of the wide diversity of child care settings. They especially need to be aware of the characteristics of day nurseries and the role they play in providing all-day care for children of working mothers or mothers with particular home problems. The research shows how many of these children need much more time spent on their personal, social and emotional development, which leaves less time for literacy and numeracy skills. It is also apparent that the Early Learning Goals require nursery nurses to fill in

much more paper work than previously and this causes tension and concern. New ways of cutting back on the quantities of paper work and making planning and assessment requirements more streamline, would improve the nursery nurses' work load.

From September 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), (DES, 2006) which brings together the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000), the Birth to Three Matters Framework (2002) and the National Standards for Under 8's Daycare and Childminding (2003) forms the basis of inspections of provision for young children. All providers of child care services in England from birth to five years are required to implement the new EYFS. There has been much criticism of the EYFS. According to Learner (2007), it has been criticised for its tick-box approach and being too prescriptive. It features 513 skills and attitudes that children should acquire before they are five. A campaign against the EYFS has been organised, arguing that the academic slant will harm young children's development. (OPEN EYE, 2008). Alexander (2007), chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance said that the Government's vision could lead to children being forced to do too much too soon. My research findings link with these concerns, and add to the voices trying to stop the early years curriculum becoming too knowledge based.

There are also implications for nursery nurses' training. The nursery nurses do not fully understand what is required by some aspects of the Early Learning Goals. More emphasis on the goals for literacy and numeracy and help with planning and assessment in their training would enable them to carry out their duties more easily, without resorting to strategic rhetoric. The recent move to enable nursery nurses to

train for a specific age range or type of child care setting also has many draw backs and disadvantages. The research has shown that nursery nurses are a mobile working force. They move from one job to another, often moving from one type of setting to another, or from one age group to another. A more generic training would take this into account.

A policy which forces nursery nurses to use strategic rhetoric in order to perform their duties in a professional manner and causes tension and conflict between supervisors and nursery nurses cannot be in the best interest of the children. This research shows how important it is for nursery nurses to have a sound knowledge of child development and the desire to care for young children who have many personal, social and emotional needs, as well as developing their intellectual abilities. This study adds a little more knowledge to the conflict between the discourse of caring, informality and the discourse of standards, inspection and formality.

The final words in this thesis are dedicated to the eight nursery nurses in my study. They cared for the young children, showing patience and understanding of their various needs, while at the same time trying to cope with the external demands put upon them.

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Appendix

- 1. Letter to supervisors of day nurseries**
- 2. Questions for interviewing nursery nurses**
- 3. Characteristics of day nurseries**
- 4. Samples from the coding process**

Appendix 1 - Letter to heads of day nurseries

19 Mount Harry Road

Sevenoaks,

Kent. TN13 3JJ

01732 453839

Ms Doreen -----

danemore@msn.com

Head of Centre

17/1/03

----- Early Years Centre

Dear Ms -----

I write to introduce myself as a research student at Goldsmiths College. I am carrying out research, as part of my work for a PhD degree, into how Day Nursery staff interpret the early learning goals for three and four year old children and prepare for the OFSTED inspections. I would be grateful if I could use your nursery at New Cross as part of my study. This would involve observing the children one day a week during the summer term and interviewing staff when convenient. I am particularly interested in how the differences in training for staff in day nurseries compared to staff in nursery schools and classes affects their interpretation of these goals.

I have a longstanding background in Early Years. I worked in a Further Education College for many years, training Nursery Nurses and in 1996 became an OFSTED Nursery Inspector, retiring in 2001. While attending the Day Nursery I would be pleased to be of assistance to you or your staff during my visits, if that would be of interest.

I hope that you will be prepared to discuss this further with me, and will telephone you during the next week to hear your response.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Richardson (Mrs)

Appendix 2 - Questions used when interviewing nursery nurses

What training have you had?

Have you been on any in-service training?

How long have you been at this nursery?

Why did you decide to become a nursery nurse?

Do you have ambitions to run a nursery or any other ambitions?

Have the Early learning Goals made things difficult for you?

Which areas of the Inspection are you most concerned about?

How have the Early Learning Goals affected the way you plan each session?

What do you think is the difference between Nursery Nurses and Teachers?

What do you understand by the term 'Child Initiated' activities.

What is the purpose of the 'Activity Records' that you tick each session?

Planning

You spend a lot of time on planning. How does it help you?

Does it make any difference to what you do?

What do you use to inform your plans?

Why do you think you have to do it?

Tell me more about the educational activity.

Where do you get your ideas?

How does it link with your plans?

Do all the children do the educational activity?

What happens if they are not yet able to do the activity?

You have an activity planning sheet – Is this helpful or a waste of time?

You spend time on show and tell. What do you think the children get out of it?

What do you think a child should be able to do when he/she goes to school?

Should you be stretching the more able /or older children or is it OK to get them ready for school?

How might you stretch the more able children in maths?

Curriculum

How do you cover the following areas of the Early Learning Goals?

Use developing mathematical ideas and methods to solve practical problems.

Talk about, recognise and recreate simple patterns.

Extend their vocabulary, exploring the meaning and sound of words.

Ask questions about why things happen and how things work.

How often do you use the number line and alphabet frieze?

Assessment

How do you know how far a child can count or if he can add numbers?

Do you test him or just watch him?

How do you use this information?

Appendix 3 - Nursery Characteristics

D Day Nursery	Community Nursery	LEA Nursery	Chain Nurseries
Position	Town SE England	Outer London	Commuter town SE England
Building	Converted Victorian house	Converted school	Converted school
Qualifications of Nursery nurses	NN1 NNEB NN2 BTEC Nat Dip	NN3 NNEB NN4 BTEC Nat Dip NN5 BTEC Nat Dip	NN6 BTEC Nat Dip NN7 Degree in Early Childhood NN8 NVQ2 Mature student
Documents	Own design	Sent from LEA	Sent from head office

Children	Social services recommended and full paying	Local children and language problems – all free	Full paying including some special needs
Coffee break	15 mins break in morning and afternoon. 1 hour lunch break	No breaks 1 hour lunch break	No breaks 1 hour lunch break

Appendix 4. - Samples from the coding process

1. Observations from the First nursery

2. Interview data from Third nursery

PhD Observations on Nursery Nurse- Room 1

9.30 a.m. A1 is sitting with three children at the craft table in the craft room. They are making Christmas cards for their parents. 'What are these? Blues that's right, there are loads of colours. 'One child finishes his and she asks 'J, while you're here would you like to make a Christmas cracker? - No- OK you don't have to.' Children go to another activity table. She clears up the glitter and paint and goes to find another child. She helps the child to put on an apron and pushes up the child's sleeves. 'Right, we are going to make a Christmas card for your mummy - do you know what a Christmas tree looks like?' she points to some paint in a pallet, 'Do you know what colour that is? - Green that's right - we will paint a Christmas tree on the front.' Another child shows her what she has made with tubes. 'Very good.'

Children talk about Christmas tree - 'Do you have any sparkly things on your tree at home? Shall we put some on our tree? Children sprinkle glitter on the green paint. 'Put a hand print inside - shall I help?' She goes round the table and paints the child's hand red - he prints this inside the card and goes to wash his hands. 'B, come and put some sparkle on your tree. Put a little glue on the tree and shake on glitter.' She shows him and he does it for himself. She holds up a large jar of tiny coloured shapes, which the children can stick on their tree. She talks about the shapes, 'look there are squares, stars, circles and triangles, you can sprinkle them on your tree.'

While working she encourages the children to sing the alphabet. They sing some of it. One child at another table calls out, 'Look what I have made?' She looks and says 'Well done'. Child who is painting a cracker suddenly realises he has painted over his name. 'Oh dear how will we know it is yours.' 'Don't put paint over the same place it just turns a nasty colour'. Two children come and ask if they can paint a cracker. She says, 'No, because it's time to clear up.' She relents and lets the child who goes home at lunch time to paint one, the other child insists she wants to paint with her friend and gets her way.

10.00. a.m. A1 begins to clear up; children help. She takes children to the toilet and pins up large sheet of paper, containing children's drawings, on the wall by the toilets. She walks past child who looks shy, she touches his face and says 'You alright J?'

Continues clearing up - children sit on chairs in a circle in the other room. One child has red eye, A1 and Supervisor (who has just come in) discuss this and decide to contact the mother to take her to the chemist. A1 phones mother.

10.10. a.m. One child counts the boys - needs a little help, as he counts one child he says six, the child replies, 'no, I'm three!' A1 returns from phoning and takes tables next door to prepare for snack; this is her duty today other staff takes children. While she is wiping the tables down I ask her about the Parents Evening earlier in the week. 'Very disappointing, I waited from 5.30 until 8.00 p.m. and only one parent came out of a possible twenty five.'

There is a new wall display connected to the theme last week which was Shades. It was four large squares of different shades of blue, underneath were shades of green, red and yellow.

10.15.a.m. A1 has her coffee break while other staff member takes children for Show and Tell.

try to get each child to do activity

link with home
increase language
math shapes
sound of letters

Caring child development

Social Behaviour
Caring
Health

'Counting'
Food preparation

Parents Eve
only 1 parent
colours

free choice

child does it independently
Adult initiated
smg

caring

Language development

Caring

number

Caring

Trained for this

10.30 a.m. She returns and finishes setting out for snack, she then takes over from the other staff member and finishes Show and Tell. Child goes to the box, 'You didn't bring anything this morning - you are visiting from the other group - come and tell us something (he looks blank), - tell us about your trainers'; he does and sits down happily. 'Girls go and sit at the table and now the boys. Passes round the biscuit tin 'only one, which one are you going to have?' She watches as children take biscuits, asks child who refused if he would like one but he shakes his head. Another child asks for one, 'you've had one' child says no 'oh I'm sorry - how silly of me - I thought you had.' Gives him one and then asks two children to give out empty mugs - chooses two very quiet children who have finished their biscuits; they look pleased. She then goes round with the drinks asking each child in turn if he/she would like juice or milk, she corrects them if they don't say please and thank you. 'M sit on your chair - otherwise you will spill your drink. She then sits down next to child M, This child sat on her lap during circle time. She then talks to visiting child; 'do you like this group? You will join us in January.'

Supervision

number

children

good

relationships

11.00 a.m. Children put on coats, adults help where necessary. Children go out to play in the playground. A1 takes list of children with her, having counted them out of the room. She stands by a concrete post by the doorway and watched the children. They run up to her occasionally and talk to her or wave from the other end of the playground. Children who need to visit the toilet are taken by A2. One child hides behind A1; two staff kick football and several children join in. Staff look after any child not only their own group. I wonder if A1 is not feeling well, she looks cold and doesn't move during the session.

Personal Development

Training of children eating

11.40 a.m. Children return to room, go to toilet and wash hands. A1 serves out the lunch and puts plates on the table. Children all come into the room and sit at the table and eat lunch. Lunch consists of meat loaf, rice, cauliflower and peas. A1 takes round the gravy. Children are encouraged to use a knife and fork. A1 cuts up meat if children ask for help. 'Don't like that' says a child. 'You haven't tried it have you? - its meat loaf, like a burger. Another child says 'I've cut it up myself' A1 praises him. A1 keeps an eye on all of the children; sits next to different children this time. - helps new child with his meat. Supervisor comes in to cover for lunch time; A1 tells her new child is having a sleep after lunch - she touches his face in a caring gesture.

12.05. p.m. she goes for lunch hour.

9-10 Craft activity - close contact with children to improve skills & language.

10-12 Short time for counting - children talking - Show & Tell, Rest of time snack, storytelling, outdoor play, sorting, preparation for lunch.

When asked says she has 1 hour for education activity - today she did craft - assistant did Ed Activity large amount of time spent on 'caring'

PhD Interview NN1 Third Nursery

First I would like to chat about you. Where you come from? Can you remind me what training you did?

NN1 I did a B.TEC. The qualification I've got is a B.TEC. NNEB. A two-year course.

Me. So you did a two-year course in a Further Education College?

NN1. Yes, at Canterbury. I've also done a PPA course; playgroup certificate. I don't know if you can do that any more but I did that when I was working as a nanny. I worked as a nanny and I enjoyed it and I wanted to work abroad. That's what I wanted to do originally. I knew that to get a decent job I needed to get qualified, so that's why I went to college. Just before I went to college I met my partner and we are still together. We have been together about 13 years. I have been abroad for 18 months doing the Ski season. Once I got qualified I did nannying in London. Its good being qualified because you get to choose the better jobs and you're always more specified, whereas if your not qualified you end up doing everything.

Me. When you say its more specified, can you just explain what you mean?

NN1. As a Nanny you have a contract, you just do children's duties. I still worked long hours but I did the children's washing and the children's meals. I didn't have to cook the family's meals, whereas before I got qualified I had a job as a nanny and I did everything, ironed the families clothes, cooked lunch and even polished their shoes. But having said that it was one of the best jobs I have had. Of course if you are qualified the pay is better as well.

Me. You did nannying and then?

NN1. I did nannying and then I decided I wanted to go travelling. It was something I had wanted to do ever since I went to college. In the end I decided I was going travelling whether my partner was going or not. It so happened that he was made redundant so we went off travelling. Originally it was going to be for a year. We got a one way ticket and it ended up being eighteen months. When we came back we decided to live together. Before that I had live in jobs. There were not many nanny jobs available at the time so I went into childcare. I worked in a nursery in a nearby town for three years. I worked as a nursery nurse in the baby room for a year and a half. They saw some potential and suggested I worked with the older children. I was confident with babies and at first I thought I did not want to work with the older ones but I did and loved it. I was just a nursery nurse mucking in with everyone else. I loved the job, it was great, but as I don't drive I had to get the train everyday and then I saw this job advertised when this nursery opened up locally. So I applied for the job because it was convenient and it was head of unit as well. I got the job but when I got here it was not quite like they said. It had just opened and they did not have all their numbers so all the children were together, the babies, toddlers and older children were all together. I was here for about eight months. There were a lot of problems and for me it just wasn't working out. It just didn't seem to be progressing at all. I was really excited and keen to try to be head of unit but I never had the opportunity to go into the 'nursery school' room because it never really took off. Numbers did not increase much and they had difficulty finding staff initially. So I left and went to another nursery

nearby. I was there about a year and everyone was made redundant, the owner had big debts and it was taken over. He just came in at the end of the year and told us. It was bad for everyone, but especially the parents as they had no warning and had nowhere to send their children. We thought it was being sold but it must have fallen through and we all had to leave. After that I saw an advertisement for here. I thought it might have improved and phoned up. A girl who I used to work with; who is now a manager at another of these nurseries; answered and persuaded me to come along. I came along to see how it had improved but there was a misunderstanding and I ended up being interviewed. I got the job as nursery nurse in 'learning centre'. I really enjoyed it and actually wanted to be a nursery nurse having had a bad experience of being head of unit. I think at the back of my mind I really wanted to work less rather than more. I felt that as just a nursery nurse I could leave and go travelling if I wanted as there are no real commitments. My friend was promoted to manager of the other nursery and obviously I was the next person as I had worked with her as choice for head of unit. I was a little reluctant at first but they talked me into it. Actually I have really enjoyed doing it but I could see how much hard work it was and how much it takes over your personal life as well, you can't just shut the door it cuts into your weekends and at times it has caused a few problems.

enjoy
what
I want
extra work
at home

Me. I remember you telling me you had thought of an idea last night; you obviously don't switch off.

lack
of time

NN1. It depends how committed you are I suppose. You are always looking out for ideas and the workload is quite heavy. There is not enough time to get it done at work.

Me. Do you mean the planning or the children's files?

Planning
very long
consuming
delegation
but still
take
more

NN1. It has improved quite a lot, because at one time I had no time aloud in the nursery to get work done and at one time there were only two staff now there are three of us. It was the planning, children's files to keep up to date and just generally paper work. Things have improved a lot since then. We have a new manager, I delegate the planning, we all take a turn in planning a week, which is great and has helped an awful lot. When it's your turn to plan, you don't get time to plan you do it at home and it's the same for everyone. We try to make time here to do it but it's not always possible.

Me. Do you have planning meetings at all?

use of
planning
meeting
child
issues

NN1. We have room meetings once a month and within that time its two hours and we try to cover everything but just to use it solely for planning, we have tried but to get the four weeks planning done it would be rough sketches and everyone would be talking about their ideas, which is what it should be, but we found that we never actually completed it. So now what we do, we still have the two hours but we talk about room issues, things that are bothering people, key children issues, how they are progressing and their individual plans, events coming up and children's parties. We briefly discuss the planning and that's the only way we can do it,

Me. How do you get your ideas, do you have books to help you?

A few
resources
involve
training

NN1. We haven't got an awful lot but we do have some resources. We have a few resource books, some of us have been on training and we have developed folders. I did a science workshop and NN3 has just come back from a maths workshop and so you build up your resources. We have done that before. We have had books out and tried to brainstorm but we find you never get it done because you go off at tangents. We find this way works, even though we do it in our own time, its much better getting it down on paper than having two hours to talk about it and not getting it finished. I have books at home and I go to the library sometimes. I find that the best way to do it, rather than countries around the world you pick one subject so when we were doing 'Farms' last week we focussed on vegetables, tractors and dairy products so from that you can get ideas from the word rather than thinking about 'Farms and country side' because it covers such a wide area.

How
they
plan

Me. How much of the planning is given to you from headquarters?

Outline
from
them

NN1. Well they do have a ---curriculum. In there it tells you about planning but it's just the rough outline. They have examples of planning, which they have completed and we have all been on --- training as well.

Me. I think they do the long-term planning, is that right?

NN1. Yes, the long-term planning and some of the short-term planning because some of it is already done for you in the sense that they have done the long-term planning for twelve months and they tell you what themes you are covering and then we do the short-term planning to link with their themes.

Me. What would you say was the best part of your job?

Enjoys
working
with children
children
learning

NN1. Well I suppose it's seeing the children enjoying themselves. What I really like is if you have done something and you are really trying to get something over to them and it comes out later, so it's reinforcing their learning. We did something about stars at Christmas time and after about a couple of weeks during free-play one of the children had gone off and made themselves a three-D star. In that sense you feel that what you are doing is worthwhile. For me I suppose it's a sense of achievement. You know its not just gone over their heads you've done it at their level. It's obviously made an impression and they are they are reinforcing it by showing you it back again.

Me. What is the worst part of the job?

Time-
lack of

NN1. I do find the time-management side quite frustrating at times because as head of unit you actually do a nursery nurses job as well. As head of unit you are overall responsible as well, for your staff, the room, the children and with that there are administration things to do and there just isn't time to do them. I would like things to be better labelled or I see an area and I think that really ought to be done but in the day-to-day running of the nursery you have to prioritise things and at the end of the day, perhaps its not very tidy but you have done this or that with the children. I find that quite frustrating. I don't really think that '---' really appreciate how hard it is being head of unit, I think sometimes the workload is too much. I don't think its achievable at times.

NN1

Me. How do you think you have learnt?

. I did my training back in 1990, so no.

Me. Did you get any help in helping children to recognise or write their names or aspects of maths?

Training

NN1. Its such a long time ago its difficult to remember. I think we did cover that development area. I found that the course didn't cover many practical things, for example what do you do if a child bites, or has difficult behaviour and things like that. I found at the time that the course lacked practical things, we did sociology, psychology, food and hygiene and those kind of things, but if you're going to leave the course and go to work with children its completely different. Obviously we covered a lot of theory and had placements but it doesn't really prepare you for the real world.

NN1. I think its just dealing with the situations as they arise. You do learn from other people particularly when I hadn't worked in a nursery before. It's completely different from nannying and I wouldn't mind going back to that because I really enjoyed nannying. So, yes you see who has good practice and you do learn from those people. How they deal with situations and I suppose you subconsciously pick up that sort of thing.

Me. What would you say your aim is for the children? What do you really want for the children? Perhaps even today what were your aims?

Her aims

NN1. We actually do aims, like to learn one to ten. Overall for me it's really to see they are enjoying themselves and feel comfortable to do what they want to. It is difficult at times because you know you are doing the E.L.G.'s which make all your activities link in and you cover all the five main areas but you have some children who all they really want to do is have a doll, carry it around, cuddle it and sit on the mat. You try to extend that by perhaps bringing in clothes but if that's all they want to do I do find it quite hard. You try to encourage them but really you are stopping them from doing what they want to do, which is what it is about really isn't it. Just to see that they are happy really.

Conflict with ELG's

insert p. 3

Me. There are several who will be going to school in September, what, in general, would you hope they would be able to achieve when they go to school?

Preparation for school

NN1. For them to have an understanding of numbers and letters. We had one child go to school in January and her teacher came to see her in the nursery setting. She said they don't particularly want them to write their names as the reception class has changed as well and they are trying to work from the child's initiative approach. Trying to get them to work at their own pace. But I would hope they have an understanding of numbers, letters, colours and shapes. It's going to help them; it's going to give them a good start I think, when they go to school. They need social skills and know how to interact with other children, because I think that is quite important. We don't have a check list to say they can write their name or count to five. We try to work towards those things but don't have a check list. I think most of them can recognise their names. I think that is important but I'm not sure how

Social skills

important
Me. important it is for them to be able to write their name. Recognise the letters and beginning to pick out letters for their name.

Me. Have you any children who cause you problems or concerns, either special needs or other problems?

special needs
NN1. WE do have one child who has special needs. He has 'aspergers' and we work with his SENCO officer and we have been working along side his mother and we have been doing short achievable activities for him to do. Actually his behaviour has improved a lot although at one time it was quite challenging. Now he is a lot better. We do have some children who are not recognised as having special needs but have behaviour problems. We deal with that in a positive way when it happens as much as we can.

Me. How would you compare the children here to those in the other nurseries you have worked in?

lack of imagination
NN1 I think it is a fairly mixed group. It's difficult to say really. At the place I worked five years ago the children seemed to show really good use of their imaginations. I find with our children sometimes you have to suggest things, not give the whole game away but make suggestions and help them to use their imaginations. I don't know why that should be. I find also that they need to be entertained more. They have lots of manufactured plastic toys; they don't have to make something out of a box or anything. Perhaps because of that they are not using their imaginations.

Me. If '----' suddenly decided they had the money and were going to put a teacher into your unit, what difference do you think it would make?

Teacher
NN1. We try not to make it too structured and I fear a teacher would make it too structured.. We try to have a good balance 50/50. We do have times when , to prepare them for school, they do have to sit at the table and I'm afraid a teacher might make it more structured. They are only 3 and 4 years old and it is nice for them to play and we do try to do activities through play. There has to be a reason for everything we get out, say for example you were getting out the 'Duplo' you don't just put it on the floor and that's it, you get it out because you want them to build a bridge or that kind of thing. Sometimes you can't make them build a bridge, you get it out and suggest that's what they do. Sometimes I think it would be so nice to get it out just because!

Me. Do you believe in learning through play?

Play Learning
NN1. Yes I do, I can see how they learn through play. You don't necessarily have to teach them but provide the equipment, for example you don't have to say hear is the funnel and we are going to fill it to the top and when its full it is all going to run out, you can provide the equipment for them to realise that just basically by playing and one day they will say 'oh look it has all poured out, this one has got more init than that one. That does happen.

ME. Do you ever have the urge to be a teacher?

NN1. No, I don't think so although I do like this age group. With the course that I did I could go back to a teacher training college for another two or three years. But I don't think I will.

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