The Relational Approach to group work:
The role of the pre-school practitioner in the
development of children’s social competencies

Jennifer E. Colwell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Brighton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012

University of Brighton
Abstract

The Relational Approach to group work was developed during the UK-based Social Pedagogic Research into Group-work project (SPRinG). The Approach is built upon the premise that children will need support to ensure they can engage in, and benefit socially and cognitively from interactions with their peers. The SPRinG research found that, in schools where the Relational Approach was developed, there were positive gains for teachers and pupils, including: increased pupil-peer cooperation; widening of pupils’ social networks; and improved pupil attainment in reading and Mathematics.

This thesis adopts a social constructivist methodology to explore the development of the Relational Approach to group work with children aged thirty to sixty months within one pre-school. A number of data collection tools, including interview, sociometry and video recording, were employed to explore the development of the Approach and its impact on children’s peer interactions, and on practitioner pedagogy and practice. Data were analysed utilising an appropriate combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, for example content analysis of video data.

A major finding of this research is that developing the Relational Approach to group work within the pre-school led to changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice, which positively impacted upon the development of children’s social competencies. Using the example of the Relational Approach to explore the role of the pre-school practitioner, a series of five mediating factors are identified which together provide a framework for practitioner pedagogy and practice to support the development of children’s social competencies. These five factors are that practitioners should: understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of relational programmes and activities; provide a suitable setting in which positive relationships and the development of social competencies can thrive; reflect upon their practice and observe children’s behaviours and use the knowledge gained to develop
their practice accordingly; hold expectations that the children are capable of developing social competencies and make these expectations explicit; and model the desired social competencies to children.

The framework provides a useful guide for all practitioners working with young children, particularly those who wish to improve the quality of their practice and for those who wish to ensure children benefit socially and cognitively from interactions with their peers.
# Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 1

Contents .................................................................................................................. 3

List of Tables .......................................................................................................... 5

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 8

Declaration .............................................................................................................. 9

1. Introduction ...................................................................................................... 10

1.1 Background: The development of the research interest .................................. 10

1.2 Context ............................................................................................................ 14

1.3 Structure and content of the thesis .................................................................. 19

2. Literature Review ............................................................................................. 24

2.1 Pre-school provision ....................................................................................... 24

2.2 Pre-school children’s peer relationships ......................................................... 31

2.3 Pedagogic approach in pre-schools and the use of group work ....................... 40

2.4 The role of the practitioner in developing children’s social competencies skills ... 52

2.5 Conclusions and the research questions posed .............................................. 61

3. Methodology and Methods ............................................................................. 65

3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 65

3.2 Methodology .................................................................................................. 67

3.3 Research methods ........................................................................................ 72

3.4 The research process ..................................................................................... 99

4. Research Findings: Development of the Relational Approach ....................... 103

4.1 The Relational Approach in practice .............................................................. 104

4.2 The impact of the Relational Approach at Bumbles Pre-School ...................... 116

4.3 Chapter summary .......................................................................................... 132

5. Research Findings: Pedagogy and Practice .................................................... 133

5.1 Pedagogic style .............................................................................................. 133

5.2 Chapter summary .......................................................................................... 163
## 6. Research Findings: Practitioner Modelling and Children’s Peer Interactions .................................. 165

6.1 Defining modelling .................................................................................................................................................. 165
6.2 Practitioner modelling of social competencies – practitioner-led activities ......................................................... 168
6.3 Practitioner modelling of social competencies – child-led activities .................................................................... 178
6.4 Children’s social competencies and peer interactions .......................................................................................... 186
6.5 The impact of practitioner modelling on children’s peer interactions ................................................................ 234
6.6 Chapter summary ..................................................................................................................................................... 242

## 7. Discussion of Findings ........................................................................................................................................ 244

7.1 The development of the Relational Approach ......................................................................................................... 244
7.2 Pedagogy and practice .............................................................................................................................................. 254
7.3 Practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions .......................................................................................... 260
7.4 A framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of
cchildren’s social competencies ................................................................................................................................. 272

## 8. Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................................. 273

8.1 Revisiting the research aims ...................................................................................................................................... 273
8.2 Developing a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the
development of children’s social competencies ......................................................................................................... 276
8.3 Reflecting upon the research process ....................................................................................................................... 283
8.4 Implications for ECEC policy and practice ............................................................................................................. 290

## 9. Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................................... 292
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Doctoral research timeline</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Data collected during the doctoral research project</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Categories used to analyse the practitioners’ interactions with the children</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>A typical daily routine at Bumbles Pre-School</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Examples of the relational activities used in Bumbles Pre-School following the Relational training</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Use of the pre and debrief across the three phases of data collection</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Use and composition of groups during practitioner-led activities</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>The role of practitioner during practitioner-led activities</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>The role of practitioner during child-led activities</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>The role taken by the practitioner across the three research phases</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>The findings of the environmental rating scale</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>The sociometric data: children’s choices and reciprocal choices for Play</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>The sociometric data: practitioner choices for Play</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>The Sociometric data: children’s choices and reciprocal choices for Work</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>The Sociometric data: Practitioner choices and reciprocal choices for Play</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>The items considered for practitioner pedagogy – adapted from the Child Caregiver Interaction Scale</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17  The mean scores of the observations made of Beth’s interactions with children during practitioner-led activities across the three research phases

Table 18  Data collected during circle time observations

Table 19  The mean scores of the observations made of Clare’s interactions with children during practitioner-led circle time activities

Table 20  The number of observations of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision: Beth

Table 21  The number of observations of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision: Clare

Table 22  Information on the groups Izzy was observed within, and her interactions within those groups across the three phases

Table 23  Information on Izzy’s prosocial interactions with her peers across the three phases

Table 24  Information on Izzy’s challenging interactions with her peers across the three phases

Table 25  The mean scores for Tabitha’s interactions with practitioners across the three phases

Table 26  Information about the groups Tabitha was involved in during across the three phases

Table 27  The mean scores for Tabitha’s positive peer interactions across the three phases

Table 28  The mean scores for Tabitha’s challenging interactions with her peers across the three phases

Table 29  The mean scores for Tabitha’s interactions with practitioners across the three phases

Table 30  The mean scores for Tomas’ use of groups across the three phases

Table 31  Tomas’ positive peer interactions across the three phases
Table 32  The mean scores for Tomas’ use of groups across the three phases  221
Table 33  The mean scores for Tomas’ interactions with practitioners across the three phases  223
Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks go to the participants of this study, the children who warmly welcomed me into their world and the practitioners who embarked on a learning journey and allowed me to share their experience. Their passion for caring for young children is an inspiration.

I am grateful to my supervisors Professor David Stephens and Dr. Helen Beaumont who have provided expertise, direction, faith, and patience to me throughout.

I would also like to thank Professor Peter Kutnick and Dr. Cathy Ota who not only gave me the opportunity to collect the data for this study, but also generously gave their time and expertise. I am also grateful to Professor Peter Blatchford and Kay Mathieson for agreeing to take on the task of examining this thesis.

I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues: Professor Avril Loveless, Dr. Carol Robinson, Dr. Keith Turvey, Professor Andrew Pollard, Lorraine Harrison, Professor John Pratt, Julie Canavan, Elizabeth Briggs and Linda McVeigh.

I am thankful for my friends who have stood by me throughout this phase of my life: Helen MacIntyre, Julie Pope and Susie Larcombe.

Special thanks to all my family. My husband, Alex, whose unwavering belief in me helped me to pursue this dream, my mum and dad, who have always believed in me, and my sister, Angela, for her proofreading skills.

I dedicate this thesis to my son, Oscar, who has given me more joy than I could have imagined possible and has accepted this distraction in his life. I hope I have shown him that with hard work and determination anything is possible!
Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated in the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Dated:
1. Introduction

1.1 Background: The development of the research interest

The SPRinG project

In 2003 I gained a post as an assistant on the large-scale Social Pedagogic Research into Group-work (SPRinG) project, funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). (Appendix 1 provides detailed information about the project.) Led by Professors Blatchford, Galton and Kutnick, the SPRinG project aimed to enhance the learning potential of classroom activities (across Key Stages 1 to 3), through the use of group work as a pedagogic tool (SPRinG, 2008). The project was built upon the premise that pupils require skills to work effectively within a group and that the development of these skills needs to be supported through the development of a relational pedagogy. To support the development of these skills, and the use of group work as a pedagogic tool, the research team worked collaboratively with teachers to develop what became known as the Relational Approach to group work. The Relational Approach supports the development of effective group work in classrooms in four key ways: consideration of the physical and social organisation of groups; the provision of tasks which legitimise group work; establishing the role of teachers and other school staff in group work; and supporting the development of children’s group work skills (Baines et al., 2009). The Programme focuses on building pupils’ trust for each other and their communication skills, before moving on to introducing the pupils to working in groups on problem solving tasks (Baines et al., 2009). I worked with Professor Kutnick at the University of Brighton, whose work focussed predominantly on children in Key Stage 1; aged five to seven years.

The findings of the SPRinG project presented a number of positive conclusions, including that the development of the Relational Approach in schools led to positive gains in pupil attainment – in reading and Mathematics (Blatchford et al., 2005); growth of children’s
social networks (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008); higher levels of pupil engagement in classroom activities; teachers being less directive (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009); and an increase in teachers’ professional skills and confidence (Baines et al., 2009). Kutnick and Berdondini (2009) noted that teacher engagement with the Programme was a key factor in the success of the approach. They reported that pupils of teachers who demonstrated higher levels of engagement with the Relational Approach displayed increased levels of engagement in tasks and dialogue with peers.

As the development of the Relational Approach led to positive gains for pupils, Blatchford et al. (2005) argued there is a need to reconsider current pedagogic theories, which predominantly focus on the use of a combination of teacher-led and individual pupil tasks, to include a third dimension of group work or interactions between pupils. Yet this form of collaborative working remains underutilised in the classroom (Howe, 2010).

My time working on the SPRinG project at Brighton allowed me to witness first-hand the potential benefits of the Relational Approach. I became increasingly interested in the role children’s social competencies played in their cognitive and social development, and how variation in the development and the delivery of the Relational Approach Programme by individual teachers led to different outcomes for pupils. This interest developed further during the research work I was involved in following the SPRinG Project, which was concerned with developing the Approach for use in the early years.

**Developing the Relational Approach for use in the early years**

The work of the SPRinG project continued following the end of the initial funding from TLRP. The follow-on research included the development of two projects: the European-funded Relational Approaches in Early Education, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation-funded Developing a Relational Approach to Peer-based Pre-school Experience (see Appendix 2 and 3 for more detailed information about these projects which ran in 2006-2007). These projects focussed on developing the Relational Approach Programme for use within Early
Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and evaluated its impact on children’s peer relationships, broadly replicating the focus of the SPRinG research. This involved bringing together a number of pre-school and reception class practitioners for training in the use of the Relational Approach structured by the Relational Approach Programme. The training, which was held over two days, involved providing an overview of the philosophy behind the Relational Approach, and consulting with the practitioners on how best to adapt the Relational Approach Programme for use in the early years. Following the initial training sessions the practitioners sought to develop and implement the Programme for use in their setting. Each half term the practitioners were brought together to discuss how they were implementing the Approach, any changes they had made to ensure suitability of the programme for use in their setting and any benefits they observed.

The development of these research projects provided an ideal opportunity for me to design and conduct this doctoral research. I began by exploring the literature in the field and through this my interest grew in how the processes of developing the Relational Approach and implementing the Relational Approach Programme led to positive gains for children: What changed in the practitioners’ practice? How did these changes lead to changes in outcomes for children? What skills do children need to allow them to work together successfully? How can pre-school practitioners support the development of children’s social competencies? What is the role of practitioner modelling? These interests became particularly pertinent as research focussed upon early years and pre-school provision was increasingly demonstrating a link between high-quality pre-school experiences (a concept which I will discuss in the following chapter), and children’s cognitive and social development (e.g. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE), Sylva et al., 2004).

These experiences and interests led to the development of my research focus, namely: the role of the pre-school practitioner in development of young children’s social competencies.
As I had spent some time working within pre-schools prior to my role on the SPRinG project, I recognised that there were a number of substantial differences between school and pre-school provision. Such differences would impact on the implementation of the Relational Approach and would therefore require thoughtful consideration.

Concurrent to this doctoral research, the SPRinG research at Brighton University led to the development of Working With Others (WWO) research and education unit, led by Dr Cathy Ota. WWO has continued to develop and deliver the Relational Approach, and has worked with pre-schools both nationally and internationally. Further detail of the work of WWO is included in Appendix 1. It is noteworthy that whilst WWO has continued to develop and support the implementation of the Relational Approach, no further substantial pieces of research have been conducted which have documented its development or impact.
1.2 Context

Pre-school provision in England

Attendance at school becomes statutory at aged five years in England with many children accessing some form of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) prior to this. Such provision is offered through a range of providers, including childminders, council-run pre-schools, privately run pre-schools, nurseries within primary schools, playgroups or through independent schools. The focus of this thesis is pre-school provision, provided within either the maintained sector or the Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) sector, by suitably qualified adults, attended by a group of children on a regular basis. This includes nurseries in children’s centres and private day nurseries, for example.

In England the pre-school experiences of young children can vary enormously; these variations became a core concern of the last Labour Government (1997-2010). Through the Every Child Matters paper (DfES, 2003), the Labour Government outlined a framework to ensure that every child received the support they need to meet five key objectives of: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic wellbeing. To ensure that ECEC provision was of a high quality and supportive of the five key objectives, a number of substantial changes in policy were introduced directed at ECEC provision. These changes included the introduction of a curriculum for the early years, investment in training for the early years workforce, and the introduction of free part-time ECEC provision for children aged over three years.

The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) (2000, DfEE), for children from three to five years, was introduced in 2000 and succeeded by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2007), for children from birth to five years, in 2008 (which was revised 2012). All those providing care for children from birth up to the 31 August following a child’s fifth birthday, must deliver the EYFS, and be
registered with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Ofsted, 2008). This combination of the EYFS and inspections by Ofsted, which focus upon the extent to which the requirements of the EYFS have been reached, have been recognised as contributing to an increase in the quality of ECEC provision. This increase in quality is evidenced by an increase in the number of ECEC providers being judged to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, rising from 59% in August 2008 to 68% in 2010 (Ofsted, 2011) and through an increase in ‘achievement’ measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile for children (Ofsted, 2011).

The Government’s focus on increasing the qualification levels of early years practitioners has supported the implementation of the EYFS. This focus was seen to be necessary due to the fact that, in 2004, 40% of the early years workforce did not hold a qualification higher than level 2 (i.e. GCSE level) and only 12% of the workforce was qualified to level 4 or above (to Certificate of Higher Education level and above) (The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2005). This relatively low qualification profile (the schools workforce in 2004 saw over 80% of its workforce qualified to level 4 and above (DfES, 2005)) was seen to be problematic as research demonstrated that the quality of early years provision increases when led by a graduate (Sylva et al., 2004). As such, the Labour Government developed plans to increase the qualification levels held by early years practitioners to support the delivery of the EYFS and increase the quality of provision. These plans included the development of a new graduate level status – Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), in addition to developing the general qualification level of staff by requiring staff to undertake at least a level 3 qualification (equivalent to A Level). The aim of EYPS was to increase the number of graduates working in the sector, who could lead high-quality practice and support the work of lesser-qualified staff (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2006, 2008). In March 2012, 8,400 people had gained Early Years Professional Status, with a further 1,800 undertaking certification and training (Department for Education (DfE),
Thus there has been an increase in the number of graduates working within ECEC supporting the delivery of the EYFS.

Concurrent to these changes in provision, uptake of the free pre-school places succeeded in increasing attendance at pre-schools, with 95% of three and four year olds in England accessing some free pre-school education in 2011 (DfE, 2012b).

The introduction of each of these strategies — the curriculum, the increased qualification levels and the free part-time places — has arguably reduced variations in children’s preschool experiences. However, not all those involved in the education and care of young children see all of these developments as positive and not all children have benefited. For example: Traveller children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have not benefited from the improvements in the ‘attainment’ measured by Early Years Foundation Stage Profile that other children have (Ofsted, 2011). Furthermore, critics of the EYFS have raised questions regarding the appropriateness of a curriculum for young children. The Steiner-Waldorf Foundation, through the Open EYE campaign, has openly criticised the EYFS, stating:

The very idea that it is appropriate to have a ‘curriculum’ for young children is absurd and represents a totally inappropriate encroachment of a schooling ideology into the lives of young children

(House cited Hofkins, 2008 p.1).

This conflict of opinion suggests that whilst the value of high-quality provision on children’s life chances is generally agreed, perspectives on how high-quality provision can be achieved and what this looks like in practice differ, an issue which will be explored further in chapter four. Such differences of opinion often reflect conflicting philosophical positions.
Pedagogy and practice in ECEC

Play is central to the ideology of EYFS, a curriculum which advocates a balance between child-led and adult-led activities. Although the EYFS policy document does not make reference to specific theories of child development, the influences of Piaget (1896-1980) and Vygotsky (1896-1934) are evident (Parker-Rees, 2010). The work of Piaget can be seen as an influence as the policy requires practitioners to develop a challenging environment in which children can explore and learn independently, while the work of Vygotsky is evident as the EYFS notes that children learn with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other, and that the practitioner has a key role in children’s learning and development (Parker-Rees, 2010).

Bertram and Pascal’s international study of early years education found ‘an almost universal promotion of an active, play-based pedagogy’ (Bertram and Pascal, 2002, pii) within the countries they studied. Crucially, however, they note that ‘what is written is not necessarily what is practised’ (Op cit. p.7). Indeed, there are advocates of play-based learning and those who prefer a more formal approach based on fostering academic skills (Guimaraes and McSherry, 2002). Within ECEC there is evidence of conflicting discourses which represent opposing pedagogic positions, i.e. child-centred versus adult-led education, and outcomes focussed versus process focussed education (Papatheodorou, 2009). The opposing positions taken by the Steiner-Waldorf Foundation, those who adopt the Montessori and Reggio Emilia Approaches, and advocates of the EYFS, demonstrates this well.

As I began to work on this thesis the CGFS was in place, which represented a stark change in early years provision given that no such curriculum had existed previously. The Government claimed that the CGFS focussed on ensuring preparedness for school (DfES/QCA, 2000) and emphasised the role of the practitioner is supporting children’s learning. In the foreword to the CGFS (2000), Margaret Hodge (MP) states: ‘[the CGFS] principal aim is to help practitioners to plan how their work will contribute to the achievement of the early learning
goals’ (2000, p.2). Such a statement highlights the focus on outcomes. The CGFS was heavily criticised for taking this approach as many practitioners working within the sector were focussed on facilitating children’s learning rather than directing it (Pascal and Betrum, 2002). The replacement of the CGFS, the EYFS, placed an increased emphasis on facilitating learning. Whilst this addressed some of the concerns raised by practitioners such as House, debate regarding the appropriateness of the EYFS has persisted. Currently the EYFS has 69 measures termed as ‘Early Learning Goals’ (ELGs), which children are expected to reach by the end of the first year in formal schooling. The need to achieve these ‘targets’ arguably necessitates a focus on outcomes by practitioners. Following a review of the EYFS by Dame Clare Tickell (2011), the EYFS was found to be popular with practitioners but that improvements could be made. One of the improvements sought was a reduction in the number of ELGs. These will be slimmed down to 17 goals from September 2012 (DfE, 2012). These changes illustrate how debate continues regarding the most appropriate way to deliver high-quality ECEC and that at the heart of this debate is the role of ECEC in preparing children for formal schooling or otherwise. A debate which generates a continuum of practice with free play and exploration at one end, and preparedness for formal schooling and a focus on learning outcomes at the other. Yet, Piaget claimed that ‘if...we had to choose from among the totality of existing educational systems those which would best correspond with our psychological results, we would turn our methods in the direction of what has been called ‘group work’...’(Piaget, 1932 p.412). Yet, group work as a pedagogic approach is given little attention within the EYFS and, as I will illustrate in the following chapter, is a practice which is misunderstood and underutilised with ECEC in the UK. A practice which I will argue supports children to gain the greatest learning potential from their free play activities. A practice which has the potential to support free play and exploration whilst equipping children with the skills they will require within formal schooling and beyond.
1.3 Structure and content of the thesis

This thesis follows a structure of Literature Review, Methodology and Methods, Findings and Analysis of Findings, Discussion of Findings and a Conclusion. In chapter two, the literature review, I begin by examining the potential benefits a high-quality pre-school experience can have on children’s cognitive and social development and discuss constructions of high-quality provision. Here I recognise that there is a relationship between high-quality provision and a focus on supporting the development of children’s social competencies. I then move on to consider the programmes and tools predominantly used by practitioners to support the development of these competencies. I argue that there is a lack of a robust evidence base to support the use of the tools and programmes commonly used by practitioners (e.g. circle time and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)), and I present the case for the use of the Relational Approach Programme as a more suitable tool given its strong theoretical underpinning and robust evidence base for the benefits of its use. Given my interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the processes which lead to the benefits of the Relational Approach Programme being realised, I conclude with a review of what is known about the role of the practitioner in the development of children’s group work skills and social competencies. It is necessary to expand my review of the literature here to include research undertaken within schools as there is little research into the use of group work with pre-school-aged children.

Through this review I identify three core themes to be explored: the development of the Relational Approach, practitioner pedagogy and practice and, practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions. The chapter concludes with the nine research questions posed to explore these themes.

Chapter three presents the methodological approach that underpins the research, which is based within a social constructivist paradigm. I discuss the case study method approach
taken and the tools used to gather the data required to consider the nine research questions. In this chapter I also provide information on the context for the research – Bumbles Pre-School.

The following three chapters, chapters four, five and six present the findings and the analysis of the findings. Each chapter focusses upon one of the three core themes: the development of the Relational Approach, practitioner pedagogy and practice, and practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions. The contents of each chapter is organised using the research questions as subheadings.

Chapter seven brings synthesis to the findings under each of the three themes and presents a framework of five complex mediating factors which together outline the key roles of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.

The final chapter, chapter eight, summarises the key findings of the research, provides a critical discussion of the limitations of the research and the data collection tools used. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research for early years pedagogy and practice.
1.4 Terms and definitions

Pring (2000) recognises that within fields like education there are often no obvious ways in which differences in opinion around issues such as what is ‘education’ can be overcome. Rather than lose sight of the focus of this thesis I have provided a glossary which explains the terms used throughout this thesis. The purpose is not to claim that these are the ‘correct’ definitions but rather to define the parameters of my study and allow this work to be understood. There are a number of complex debates which inform this study that are not explored in any detail in this thesis. I do not attempt to disentangle either the conceptual differences between ‘education’ and ‘care’ (Dahlberg et al., 1999) nor the appropriateness of the notions of ‘learning’, ‘education’ and ‘work’ within early years provision versus a concept of ‘freely chosen play’. Rather, I touch upon these issues as is necessary in relation to the core focus of the work.

**Early Childhood Education and Care**: used to refer to all out-of-home provision designed to support learning and development for children before they enter statutory schooling. This includes babies and children from birth to five years. The focus of this research is children aged 30 months to 60 months.

**Peer**: used to refer to non-family members of similar age and similar status (Ladd 2005); specifically in this case children within the same pre-school environment.

**Pre-school**: all ECEC provision, run within either the maintained sector or the PVI sector, which is provided by suitably qualified adults, offers both an educative element and care (i.e. they implement the EYFS) and, which are attended by a group of children on a regular basis. This includes nurseries in children’s centres, primary schools, private day nurseries and pre-schools in shared premises.
**Practitioner:** used to refer to all adults who work directly with children in ECEC and school settings. I do not use this term to distinguish between qualification levels.

**Teacher:** A graduate with Qualified Teacher Status.

**Pedagogy:** the practice, art, science or the craft of teaching.

**Play and work in the Early Years:** I adopt a position outlined by Goodman (1994) that play is not at the opposite end of a continuum from work and that within early years somewhere between the two, where a child is supported in play tasks, e.g. building with blocks, threading beads, is a valuable context for learning. Subsequently for me, learning, play and care within the context of early years are not thought of as compartmentalised concepts, they are intrinsically linked (The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 2000: p. xii).

**Child-led and Practitioner-led activities:** used throughout to distinguish between the different contexts operating within a pre-school, contexts which are explored further in the following chapter. Child-led refers to freely chosen activities, and practitioner-led refers to those activities led by an adult, e.g. story time, circle time and cooking.

**Group:** a union between two or more individuals (Howe, 2010).

**Group work:** more than one child engaging in an activity together which requires some form of communication and cooperation, e.g. jointly completing a jigsaw, jointly creating a picture.

**Social competencies:** the social skills required for developing relationships and the traits required to use such skills appropriately.

**The Relational Approach and the Relational Approach Programme:** the Relational Approach refers to the philosophy which underpins the SPRinG project, an approach which
believes in the social dimension of learning and that children’s peer interactions are a valuable site for learning. I use the term Relational Approach Programme to refer to the handbook of activities developed to support the development of the Relational Approach as a pedagogic tool. The Relational Approach is much more than a programme of activities, it is a specific pedagogic practice.

**Practice:** as in ‘the practitioners practice’, I am referring to the practical application of education and care strategies, the ways in which the practitioners act.

**Setting:** when I use the term setting, I am referring to the context/environment in which ECEC is provided, e.g. pre-school. As ECEC can be provided in a number of different ways, it is sometimes necessary to use a term which is broader than the specific term of pre-school.

**SPRinG schools:** schools which participated in the SPRinG project research.
2. Literature Review

In this chapter I provide a review of relevant research which I have organised into four sections: pre-school provision; pre-school children’s peer relationships; pedagogic approaches in pre-schools and the use of group work; and the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies and group work skills.

2.1 Pre-school provision

In this section I explore research that documents the potential benefits of a high-quality pre-school experience, before moving on to consider how quality is measured and understood.

The potential benefits of attendance at high-quality pre-schools

Having a high-quality pre-school experience has been shown to have significant benefits for children’s cognitive and social gains (e.g. Clifford and Bryant, 2003; Sammons et al., 2004). Amongst the most commonly cited studies are The Highscope Perry Pre-school Study (Schweinhart et al., 1985), the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Campbell et al., 2002) and the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education project (EPPE) (Sylva et al., 2004a).

Conducted in the USA, with a focus on children living in poverty, the Highscope Perry Pre-school study and the Carolina Abecedarian Project both found that high-quality pre-school provision had substantial benefits for children. The Highscope Perry Study found that focussed high-quality pre-school education led to increased educational attainment, income and economic status (Schweinhart et al., 2005). The research concluded that every dollar spent on the pre-school intervention gained a return on investment of $7.16 (Barnett, 1993). The Carolina Abecedarian Project concluded that attendance at their specifically designed high-quality settings resulted in children outperforming a comparison group on IQ tests at ages 8 and 15 years (Campbell and Ramey, 1995) and, being more likely to attend post-compulsory education (Campbell et al., 2002).
In the UK, the ongoing EPPE project has dominated research in this field. EPPE was the first major European longitudinal study of the effects of pre-school education on children’s Primary, Secondary and Post-compulsory education experiences and is one of few studies to use a normative sample which allows the benefits of effective pre-schooling on all children to be identified. The initial phase of EPPE followed a sample of approximately 3,000 children (decreasing slightly over the lifetime of the project), across a variety of ECEC providers. Using a range of methods, including cognitive assessment; social/behavioural assessment; and observation, the research team developed a picture of pre-school education, identified differences across pre-school provision and experience, and recorded the impact of these experiences. Significant findings of the phase one pre-school study include:

- Pre-school experience compared to none, enhances all-round development in children.
- Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good-quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.
- There are significant differences between individual pre-school settings and their impact on children; some settings are more effective than others in promoting positive child outcomes.
- High-quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children.
- Settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress.

(Sylva et al., 2004b)

Subsequent research phases revealed that children’s pre-school experiences continued to remain significant throughout a child’s education. For example, throughout primary education:
The positive benefits of both medium- and high-quality pre-school education persisted to the end of Key Stage 2 for attainment in reading/English and Mathematics and all social/behavioural outcomes.

High-quality pre-schooling [compared with low-quality or no pre-school experience] was especially beneficial for the most disadvantaged pupils and for those of low qualified parents in promoting better Mathematics outcomes at age 11.

Children who attended poor-quality / less effective pre-schools generally showed no significant age 11 benefits in improved outcomes compared with those who did not attend any pre-school.

(Sylva et al., 2008)

Notably, the findings of these studies and many others (for example Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Vandell and Wolfe, 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), 2005) recognise high-quality provision as key to children’s futures, benefiting both their social and cognitive development. Thus, understanding and defining what constitutes high-quality provision is crucial for early years practitioners, researchers and policy makers alike.

Defining and measuring high-quality provision

The concept of quality is value-laden and culturally sensitive (Sheridan, 2001). As a consequence, what one person considers high-quality provision may differ from the view of another. Those working inside pre-schools may have a different opinion of quality than those external to the setting, e.g. inspectors and parents (Katz, 1993). Given the reported benefits of a high-quality pre-school experience, a number of tools have been created to understand and measure quality within ECEC provision. Such tools often identify both structural attributes and processes (Howes and Hamilton, 1993; Howes and Smith, 1995; Sylva et al., 2004a) as being key dimensions for measures of quality. The former refers to the regulatory features of a setting, that is, curriculum guidance, child-practitioner ratios
and staff qualifications, and the latter to the process style, or the pedagogical approach, adopted by the practitioner and/or setting. The processes implemented by pre-schools vary more across providers in England given that the former are prescribed and often carry a legal obligation, e.g. the focus upon the aforementioned Early Learning Goals and the EYFS and child-staff ratios.

A number of tools have been developed to measure quality within ECEC, which include the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) (Arnett, 1989) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms and Clifford (1980). ECERS has been revised and developed to produce ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1998); the Infant Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2006) and, ECERS-E (Sylva et al., 2010).

The Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) developed by Arnett, (1989) is a 26-item scale which observers use to understand practitioner engagement with children and children’s language development and security of attachment (Helburn, 1995; Howes, Phillips, and Whitebook, 1992). The 26 items are usually organised into the following four subscales:

- practitioner engagement
- sensitivity
- harshness, detachment
- permissiveness

(De Kruif, McWilliam, Ridley, and Wakely, 2000).

Each of the 26 items is rated on a four-point scale and combined to give an overall score for quality of interaction. CIS excludes any considered focus on children’s interactions with their peers. In 2007 Carl built upon the CIS and produced the Child Caregiver Interaction Scale (CCIS) as she recognised that the provision of high-quality care required both positive child-practitioner interactions and a suitable environment. However, despite this widening of
focus, children’s peer relationships and peer interactions as a site for learning and development were not included in the additions.

ECERS-R has been used as a measure of quality in many large-scale studies (e.g. the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers study), and was used in the EPPE study along with an additional variation ECERS-E (Sylva et al., 2010). Conducting ECERS-R involves the consideration of 43 items placed in the following seven subscales (See Appendix 4 for a full list of the items):

- Space and Furnishings
- Personal Care Routines
- Language-Reasoning
- Activities
- Interaction
- Program Structure
- Parents and Staff.

ECERS –E has an additional four separate subscales (consisting of 18 items):

- Literacy (e.g. adult reading with child)
- Mathematics (e.g. counting, shape/space)
- Science/ Environment (e.g. science resources, food preparation)
- Diversity (e.g. planning for individual needs, race and gender equality).

These additional items highlight the focus on academic and learning outcomes in England, compared with the USA, and address the critique of ECERS-R made by Bracken and Fischel (2006) that it focuses, like many measures of pre-school quality, on the role and style adopted by the practitioner and does not account for differences in curriculum content.

Both ECERS-R and ECERS-E include consideration of children’s interactions with their peers
(specifically under the interaction sub-scale), however the consideration given to children’s interactions with their peers and their peer relationships is limited and does not give sufficient weight to this site as a dimension of learning noted as potentially beneficial by Blatchford et al. (2005) and Howe (2010). The role of the practitioner and their interactions with the child dominates.

**Attributes of high-quality provision**

Whilst I have suggested the above measures fail to adequately consider the potential of children’s peer interactions as a site for learning, research conducted using these tools has undoubtedly increased our understandings of the attributes of high-quality provision. In England this understanding is largely informed by the findings of 14 detailed case studies of pre-schools identified as providing ‘excellent’ quality in the EPPE project. These settings were identified by the EPPE research team using ECERS-E in addition to other measures, including quality of care and pedagogical practice (which encompasses the relationships between child and practitioner and the environment) (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003). The main conclusions drawn from this study include that pre-schools providing high-quality or ‘excellent’ provision: hold the view that cognitive and social development are not compartmentalised, they are linked; offer a mix of planned practitioner-initiated group work and learning through freely chosen play; engage children in adult-child interactions that involve ‘Sustained Shared Thinking’ (SST) and open-ended questioning; provide formative feedback to extend children’s thinking; and provided children with support to rationalise their conflicts (Sylva et al., 2004). The acknowledgement of the contribution of group work is noteworthy, however there is little detail provided as to the content of that group work or its organisation.
SST refers to periods:

...in which two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend.

(Taggart et al., 2004 p.5).

It is relevant to note that in the EPPE reports it is stated that SST was most likely to be seen either during a one-to-one practitioner-child interaction or in a child’s interaction with a ‘with a single peer partner’ (Syraj-Blatchford 2002, p.12). Yet, much of the focus on SST has been on the role of the practitioner and supporting practitioners to fulfil this role. I propose that this is further evidence of the focus on the child-practitioner interaction, rather than children’s interactions with their peers.

I believe that this repeated focus on the role of the practitioner and the significance of practitioner-child interactions has lead to a cyclical process by which measures of quality focus on the practitioner-child dimension, thus practitioners focus on the practitioner-child dimension in their practice and planning (e.g. Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Meadows and Cashdan, 1988; Bennett, Wood and Rogers, 1997) at the expense of supporting children’s peer interactions as a site for learning. As a consequence, child’s interactions with their peers are given less weight and are observed less and, as such, the significance of the potential for learning in this context is often overlooked and the competencies children require to operate well within these situations is not fully understood.
2.2 Pre-school children’s peer relationships

The significance of children’s peer relationships and peer interactions

Children’s peers make a significant contribution to each other’s development (Ladd, 2005). I propose that children’s peer relationships and peer interactions require greater consideration than they are currently awarded in ECEC. Children experience two distinct social worlds within pre-schools. These relate to either: a child’s interactions with the practitioner, or with their peers, with each involving children being in groupings of differing size, composition and purpose (Kutnick et al., 2007). Children spend more of their time within the child-peer context than they do within the child-practitioner context (Layzer, Goodson and Moss, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog and Kontos, 1998; Kutnick et al., 2006), and this is seen to be particularly true as children progress through pre-school (Ladd, 2005). Whilst a child-adult ratio of 1:4 must be maintained for children aged two in an ECEC setting in England a ratio of 1:13 is permissible for children over three years when a suitably qualified practitioner is present, i.e. a qualified teacher or EYP (DfE, 2012). As we are concerned with quality of experience it therefore seems apposite to conclude that we must consider the experience of the child within both of these distinct social worlds — child-practitioner and child-peer — and plan for children’s experiences within both.

Whilst I have argued in the previous section that insufficient attention is given to children’s peer interactions as a site for learning and development, I recognise that children’s peer relationships are considered by many working within ECEC to be of great importance. Within both the EYFS and the recent review of the EYFS (Tickell, 2011), children’s personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is considered as key to high-quality provision. The Practice Guidance for the EYFS states that for children’s PSED:

> Children must be provided with experiences and support which will help them to develop a positive sense of themselves and of others; respect for others; social skills;
and a positive disposition to learn. Providers must ensure support for children’s emotional well-being to help them to know themselves and what they can do... Children need adults to set a good example and to give them opportunities for interaction with others...

(DCSF, 2008 p.24).

As a consequence there are a number of programmes that exist to support the development of what I will refer to as children’s social competencies.

**Social competencies**

Consideration of how children operate within social situations led Crick and Dodge (1994) to develop a model of information processing within social interactions. This model identifies how children use their knowledge of social situations as a database for governing their behaviour. The model identifies six steps which occur within social interactions which determine a child’s behaviour:

- encoding of external and internal cues
- interpretation and mental representation of those cues
- clarification or selection of a goal
- response access or construction
- response decision
- behavioural enactment.

This model provides an understanding of how processing steps work together to influence social behaviours.

Crick and Dodge’s model (1994) highlights the importance of children being able to express their own emotions, recognise the cues given by others and, the role this plays in shaping their behaviours. Halberstadt, Denham and Dunsmore (2001) state that ‘emotions are
primary elements in social interactions’ (pg.80) and, that it requires the development of social competencies to be able to express one’s own emotions and recognise the emotions of others within social interactions.

Social competencies are defined by Topping et al. (2011) as those skills which allow children to ‘integrate thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes...’ (p.1), and by the Social Competencies Interpersonal Process (SCIP) model, as the skills needed to ‘recruit and maintain satisfying and supportive relationships’ and, the ‘trait-like dispositions that govern use of these skills’ (Mallinckrodt, 2000 p.239).

This suggests that pre-school children’s behaviours within social interactions are shaped by the social competencies they have. Given the relationship between developing positive peer relations and children’s life chances (Ladd, 2005) supporting their ability to operate successfully within social contexts, and therefore the development of their social competencies, should be a primary concern of pre-school practitioners.

**The role of children’s peer interactions in children’s learning and development**

The work of both Piaget and Vygotsky, highlight the significance of interpersonal relationships in the development of young children’s knowledge and skills (De Vries, 2000). Vygotskian sociocultural theory proclaims that children learn in a social context – as a member of a relationship (Vygotsky, 1962), in which the guiding role of more knowledgeable members is key. For Vygotsky, learning is reliant on a more knowledgeable partner. This partner allows a child to move from what they know to what they can know with the support of another. He coined the phrase ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) to refer to this ‘gap’ in their understanding. The more knowledgeable partner helps them to bridge this gap; similar to the support of the practitioner or peer partner highlighted in SST. That is not to dismiss the value of play for Vygotsky. He recognises the social aspects of play are significant for development, but that for the full learning potential of a task to be
reached a more knowledgeable partner or guide is a crucial role, which may be filled by teacher or peer partner (Rogoff, 1990).

Piagetian sociocognitive theory, however, purports that social interaction and conflict between individuals leads to higher order understanding (Piaget, 1928). Piaget recognises that peer interaction can lead to the advancement of one another’s cognitive development through cognitive conflict arising as a result of differing perspectives. Such learning is not dependent on one partner having greater knowledge than the other; here the interaction itself is sufficient to increase the learning potential of the situation (Damon and Phelps, 1989). Piaget did not assume that the peer group was the only context in which children develop (Howes, 2010) but recognised the important role this context plays.

Both Vygotsky and Piaget recognise that children’s peer interactions are a key site for both cognitive and social development, a position held widely within education (e.g. Kutnick et al., 2008; Rogoff, 1990; Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2000). Yet, it is suggested that merely providing children with opportunities to interact is insufficient for learning to take place. Child’s peer relationships are complex and a number of issues may arise during interactions which hinder learning. Damon and Phelps (1989), drawing upon Piaget’s work, state that whilst interactions are likely to lead to a level of understanding which could not have been reached through working alone, this requires equal power between the individuals. They note that complex understanding is gained through terms such as ‘mutuality’ and ‘connectedness’, where both partners are equally participative and they work together (Kutnick and Colwell, 2009). Where power is unequal a number of issues arise, including that:

- those who fear being mocked may not take the risk of joining the activity and become passive (Galton and Williamson, 1992)
- group activities can become an opportunity to ‘fence sit’ or take a ‘free ride’—i.e. allow others to do the work (Bennett and Dune, 1990)
members of the group can become polarised by the group because of gender or ability for example (Cowie and Rudduck, 1990).

These issues highlight that working in a group can itself act as an inhibitor to learning. As research has shown that young children with poor peer relationships have an increased risk of school failure (Janes, et al., 1979; Kupersmidt and Coie, 1990), this warrants further consideration. Such work suggests that for children to gain the greatest potential benefits from their interactions with their peers, they will need the social competencies for these interactions to be supportive of learning.

Programmes available to support the development of children’s social competencies

There are a variety of texts available to practitioners which offer support to practitioners wanting to support the development of children’s social competencies (e.g. Social Skills (Skills for Early Years) Evans and Irving, 2001; Social Skills in the Early Years (Mathieson, 2005). However, despite recognition that acquiring social competencies is a primary developmental task (Fantuzzo et al., 1995), detailed programmes to support the development of these skills rooted in theory and research rarely centre on children under the age of six (Battisch and Watson, 2003; Littleton et al., 2005). This may be due to the fact that children of this age are often considered too egocentric to develop such competencies (Kutnick et al., 2004). I assert that this is problematic given that it has been suggested that as an area of the curriculum PSED is one of the most difficult to plan for and implement (Mathieson, 2005).

Two of the mostly widely adopted activities used to support the development of children’s social competencies in England are Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and circle time, each with their advocates and critics. SEAL and, for children under three, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD) (DCSF, 2008) programmes provide resources and activities which aim to teach social, emotional and behavioural skills, including social skills, managing feelings and self awareness (DCSF, 2007). Whilst the programme is not statutory, it was advocated and promoted by DCSF and has been widely adopted in England. An
evaluation of SEAL conducted in primary schools found that the small group work aspect of SEAL (where children with additional needs are removed from the whole group for additional support) is beneficial for the development of emotional literacy and social skills (Humprey et al., 2008). Banerjee (2010) also found that SEAL led to positive outcomes for children and that where schools had adopted a ‘whole school ethos’ to positive social relationships and behaviour they benefited from:

- More positive pupil experiences of peer interaction
- Better Ofsted ratings for behaviour
- Lower levels of persistent absence
- Higher attainment in KS2 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs).

(Ibid)

I speculate that a whole school ethos is likely to be more beneficial as children’s understandings of what is expected of them is clear by receiving a consistent message through both planned interactions and through the ‘hidden curriculum’. That is, children note and acquire, through the experience of being within a school or pre-school, the behaviours which are required, expected and valued. This aligns with the findings of the SPRInG research, which also found that the greatest benefits were found where a whole school ethos was adopted (Baines et al., 2009).

The SEAL programme has received substantial criticism for both its lack of a strong theoretical underpinning (Craig, 2007) and the notion that there is any benefit to the sustained consideration of personal feelings (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). I claim that there is no substantive evidence to suggest that SEAL or SEAD sufficiently support the development of young children’s social competencies to develop children’s peer interactions as a site for learning and development.
The most frequently adopted approach to the development of the skills required for successful peer interactions and relationships among children in England is circle time (Lang, 1998). Jenny Mosley is often accredited with developing circle time for use as a whole school approach in England through ‘Quality Circle Time’. However, the use of the circle in schools to develop children’s social skills, self esteem and confidence can be seen around the world, for example in the US in the 1960s through the ‘Magic Circle’ (Lang, 1998). Circle time involves, as one might expect, sitting in a circle. The circle is significant as this allows every member of the group to have eye contact and to hear what others in the group are saying. It is generally considered that to effectively implement circle time, a whole school long-term commitment to participating in activities and addressing issues together, sitting in a circle, using agreed rules is required. Rules include that when one member of the group is talking, the others must listen and not talk and that everyone who wishes to speak will get a turn. The aim is to foster positive and respectful relationships between children yet ‘...the teacher [usually] dominates the interaction’ (Reich, 1994 p.52). Advocates of the approach purport that using circle time can:

- Promote positive relationships
- Create a caring and respectful ethos
- Help children develop their self-esteem and self-confidence
- Provide efficient and effective systems and support for all staff
- Promote the social and emotional development of all children.

(www.circle-time.co.uk/, 2010)

Supporting such claims is research conducted by Wooster and Carson (1982), who concluded that circle time used as a tool for facilitating social skills led to improvements in the social interactions of eight year olds with social behavioural problems. In addition, Moss and Wilson (1998) reported increases in willingness both to learn and play with peers following circle time being implemented in a year six classroom. However, systematic research of circle time is
scarce, furthermore there is no one agreed understanding of what circle time encompasses as it has been used and developed differently in countries across the globe and across pre-schools in England. Lang (1998) states that, as it is used in England, circle time lacks any clear link to systematic development and is often used by staff with little or no training, it does not follow any clear theoretical position and it is not rooted in a theory of child development and that this gives it little tangible impact. Dowling (2005) builds upon this critique stating that circle time can become accepted as a blanket method for dealing with many personal, social and emotional matters and is often ill prepared and fails to establish an environment of trust between group members. It is my contention therefore that there is inadequate robust evidence to support the use of circle time as a tool for increasing the learning potential of children’s peer interactions as a site for learning and development.

In conjunction with the claims made above, I also posit that as the majority of ECEC practitioners lack a graduate level training (DfES, 2005), they would need clear guidance and support to allow them to implement such programmes to their greatest potential. Whilst the approaches outlined offer some training and support, many pre-schools and/or staff within pre-schools adopt SEAL and circle time without accessing such support. As a consequence this adds to my assertion that children’s peer interactions, as a context for learning and development, are not being adequately developed through these programmes as they are used in England.

I recognise that individual pre-schools adopt other processes to support the development of children’s social competencies and their functioning as a member of a group, and that there are a number of texts available to support such practice. What is noteworthy is that there are few programmes which are widely adopted. Many of the texts available focus on children with additional needs and, of those available, there is little in the way of a robust evidence base or a theoretical and conceptual framework to substantiate their benefit. Without a robust evidence base, whether such initiatives support the development of
children’s social competencies sufficiently for children to gain the greatest potential from their peer interactions to support their cognitive and social development is uncertain. Furthermore, the programmes discussed above provide a framework for supporting children’s peer relationships, and provide little in the way of a framework to increase the learning opportunities afford by the child-peer context. Whilst improving self-confidence and developing care and respect is hugely positive and is likely to positively impact children’s peer interactions. I suggest that this is insufficient to support the development of children’s social competencies in a way which will enhance the potential for learning through their interactions with their peers; addressing any of the issues recognised as resulting from imbalances in power. There isn’t any evidence to suggest that such programmes support practitioners to consider group work as a pedagogic tool and develop their understandings of the potential of group learning as recognised by Blatchford et al. (2005) or Piaget (1928).
2.3 Pedagogic approach in pre-schools and the use of group work

In the previous section I asserted that initiatives currently favoured for supporting the development of children’s social competencies have been shown to be more successful where a whole school approach and ethos has been developed. This suggests that the approach taken by practitioners is a crucial element in the delivery of these programmes. In previous sections I also noted that there exists a difference of opinion regarding the best way to provide high-quality ECEC provision. Such differences reflect the conflicting philosophical positions that exist relating to pedagogical approach, i.e. those which focus on processes and those which focus on outcomes. In recognition of these issues the following section will consider the key drivers to the pedagogical approaches adopted by pre-school practitioners, the use of relational pedagogy in preschools, and the use of groups as a pedagogic practice. Following which I detail the Relational Approach to group work, initially developed during the SPRinG project (Kutnick, Ota Berdondini 2006) and its theoretical underpinning.

Pedagogic approach in pre-schools

In the introduction I note that there are advocates of play-based learning and those who prefer a more formal approach based on fostering academic skills (Guimaraes and McSherry, 2002). The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years study (REPEY) (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) (conducted during the implementation of the CGFS the early years curriculum) was conducted to identify the most effective pedagogical strategies which support the development of young children’s skills, knowledge and attitudes, and ensure they make a good start at school. The study concluded that the single element of the curriculum considered most popular by early years practitioners in this study was its emphasis on continuity into the primary school, that is, preparing children for formal education and learning the expected behaviours of formal schooling.
However, more recent research, conducted in 2010 by the DfE, suggests there has been a move away from the focus on preparation for formal schooling, and greater focus on learning through play. This follows a long tradition in Western society which advocates the benefits of play (Bennett, Wood and Rogers, 1997); a tradition which posits that children benefit developmentally from play environments that support self-directed engagement with peers, with adult facilitation directed primarily towards building on the abilities that the child already demonstrates (Varga, 2003). The DfE states that practitioner groups welcomed the play-based child-led nature of the EYFS and that they viewed this:

...as a validation of early years principles, or as a return to early years approaches after a period in which pre-school was conceptualised as preparation for school...

(DfE, 2010, p.2).

As discussed previously, despite this positive view there remained a tension between the curriculum focus on preparedness for school and the use of Early Learning Goals (ELGs).

Such contradictory positions highlight the disparate views on appropriate pedagogic practice in the early years (Kutnick et al., 2007), those which are concerned with the processes of teaching and learning and those which are focussed on outcomes and the reaching of specific goals. I suggest this is an issue which remains unresolved. Currently the EYFS has 69 ELGs which children are expected to reach by the end of the first year in formal schooling. The need to achieve these ‘targets’ arguably necessitates a focus on outcomes by practitioners. Whilst this will be slimmed down to 17 goals in 2012 (DfE, 2012) there will remain a need to measure young children’s progress against these targets. In addition I assert that, because of the policy position adopted, we have a culture in our education system which is concerned with outcomes, demonstrated by the use of league tables. Whilst the revised EYFS (2012) encourages high quality practice which highlights how each child is unique and how the environment they are in and how their relationships with others are
key to supporting their learning and development (Early Education, 2012). This may have an impact on practice which will encourage and support a greater focus on process, however I propose a need for a shift in the culture of education in England as a whole for this tension to diminish. The current position and the current focus on targets leads to the potential third context for learning and development, children’s peer interactions (Blatchford et al. 2005), being underutilised. It is not my intention to suggest that it is inappropriate for practitioners, parents and others involved in supporting young children, e.g. health visitors to be driven by a concern for individual children and their development, but rather to suggest that this policy position fosters an outcomes focussed culture within early years provision. The literature I have reviewed suggests this is at odds with the pedagogical beliefs of many practitioners.

In 2009 Papatheodorou argued that the adoption of a relational pedagogy, a pedagogic approach which she strongly advocates, would build a bridge between processes versus outcomes-based approaches. She summaries that relational pedagogy involves adult and child embarking on a journey together that involves the practitioner being responsive to the needs, passions and interests of learners (Gold, 2005, cited in Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009); an approach which would seem to support the notion of SST. Papatheodorou defines relational pedagogy as a dialectical process with interactions and communication as its core which focuses on equipping learners with the skills to ‘...become reflective, critical and meaning-making active citizens...’ (Papatheodorou, 2009 p.14). She describes relational pedagogy as:

- an empowering force for knowing ourselves and others
- building both individuality and the collective conscious
- focusing on the building of relationships

(Papatheodorou, 2009).
These arguments are presented at the beginning of an edited volume, which is a precursor to a series of chapters which present a strong argument for the benefits of relational pedagogy. Whilst I find the arguments presented compelling, again there is a great emphasis on the practitioner-child interactions and much less attention given to children’s-peer interactions and supporting their growth. The relational pedagogy she refers to differs from the Relational Approach developed during the SPRinG research at Brighton for use with 5 to 7 year olds. This text notes the benefit of a move away from an outcomes focussed culture in ECEC to one more concerned with processes. Yet, the use of groups as a pedagogic tool, which will provide children with greater opportunities for learning and development, remains largely under developed.

**Groupings in pre-schools**

It is generally accepted that children benefit from exposure to a range of classroom structures, from one-to-one time with a practitioner through to small and whole group practitioner-led or child-led sessions (Bowman et al., 2001). Lone play is also recognised as having a potentially important developmental role (Henniger, 1994; Lloyd and Howe, 2003) and playing alone does not impact upon young children’s social status (Coie, Dodge and Kupersmidt, 1990). Whilst I have noted that groups are advocated and used within ECEC, there is limited research on the use of groups in pre-schools or their organisation and purpose. The preliminary scoping exercises conducted as part of the research to which this project is linked (Kutnick et al., 2007) looked at groupings within the early years. We found that (prior to the Relational Approach Programme being implemented) practitioners composed 100% of practitioner-led groups and children composed 88% of child-led groups.

Within the practitioner-led groups the:

- mean group size was 11
most common roles the practitioner took on were those of director (leading the activity) (44%), Actor (joining children in the activity) (33%), and Introducer (introducing new activities to the children) (22%)

- groups were an even mix of mixed-sex and same-sex groupings
- groups were used for a variety of activities, including: singing, painting, reading, cooking and circle time.

Within the child-led groups the:

- mean group size was 2
- practitioners were observed as absent from groups 75% of the time
- groups were predominately composed of same-age same-sex groupings
- groupings were most likely to be seen within free play opportunities.

(Kutnick et al., 2007).

That we found child-led groups were predominately formed of same-age same-sex peers is unsurprising; previous research has resulted in similar conclusions (e.g. Fagot and Leinbach, 1993; Galton et al., 1980). Given that in this review so far I have argued that child-peer interactions are a crucial point for children’s cognitive and social development, I propose that this is problematic, not least, as this represents a narrowing of children’s potential peer interactions. Given that the literature reviewed is iterative of the benefits to learning in interaction with another individual, it seems apposite that to maximise the potential benefits of the learning opportunities available to children they must be able and willing to interact with all the children in their setting, after all children are each other’s resource (Barnes and Todd, 1977, Mercer et al., 2004). There are a number of studies which support this position, for example, Howes and Farver’s 1987 study found that 2 year olds engaged in play activities with 5 year olds display more complex forms of symbolic play than when playing with same-age peers.
The use of group work as a pedagogic tool

Much of the research which focuses upon programmes which support the development of children’s social competencies has been schools-based rather than focussed on children under the age of 5 years. This is also true of group work research. As such, it is necessary to consider work conducted within schools when considering the use of group work as a pedagogic tool.

Classroom-based research has shown that cognitive development can be enhanced when children work in pairs or small groups independently from their teacher (e.g. Kutnick & Thomas, 1990). These theories consider the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, presented in this chapter, and recognise that social contexts impact upon the emergence of learning (Kutnick and Colwell, 2009). Despite this, groups in classrooms are often formed without a strategic view of their purpose, consideration of the social dynamic of the group (Blatchford et al., 2005) or how the task itself must facilitate learning in groups (Blatchford et al., 2003). Mercer et al. (2004) comment that whilst groups are being used in schools, children are rarely offered guidance or training in how to communicate effectively in these groups and therefore they just do not know how to operate effectively in this context. This comment is supported by research, indicates that whilst children may be sat together in groups they are seldom working collaboratively on tasks (e.g. Galton et al., 1980, 1999; Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980; Bennett and Dunne, 1992), suggesting that the potential of group work is not being realised.

Such comments are based upon the results of research conducted within schools, it is my contention that the situation is mirrored within the pre-school context; that young children seldom receive adequate input on how to play and learn collaboratively. I propose this is evident as the aforementioned schools-based research informs us that children are not entering statutory education with these skills. It has been suggested that this may be the case as children of this age group are often considered too egocentric to be involved in such
work, and/or that they lack the basic skills for such an approach to be appropriate (Kutnick et al., 2004).

Where practitioners in schools do adopt group work as a pedagogical tool it has been claimed that the Ds, that is, the Delays, Deficits and Disruptions (Huber and Huber, 2008) often cause those practitioners, who start with great expectations, to give up. This can in part be attributed to practitioners’ lack of understanding of how to establish effective groups (Cohen, 1994). Where practitioners are dedicated to developing group work as a pedagogic tool, and are able to dedicate time to developing the process, benefits accrue: pupils can be seen to work together and act as each other’s resource (Lotan, 2008); there is often a decline in the demands pupils place on practitioners (Dune and Bennett, 1992); increased pupil attainment levels (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008); and an increase in on-task behaviour (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009).

If practitioners can benefit from pupils demanding less of their time, whilst pupils demonstrate increased focus on tasks and increased attainment, group work must remain an attractive prospect. That said, there must be a dedication to developing the process which in many cases will require significant time commitment and diligence as ‘...for practitioners to significantly change their teaching behaviours requires intensity and focus on specific changes with follow-up and coaching...’ (Stevens, 2008 p.107).

The Social Context of group work

In the previous section I have concluded that groups are not being using effectively within schools, and that this is likely to be mirrored with pre-school contexts. However, there is a wealth of literature which supports understandings of developing group work in the classroom. For example, co-operative learning, as considered by Johnson & Johnson (2003), is underpinned by social psychological theory which emphasises the potential of social interactions to support learning. Such theories are influenced by the work of Deutsch (1949)
who provided evidence that when groups were given a shared task to complete, as opposed to a competitive task, they were more motivated to achieve, developed more positive supportive relationships, and communicated more frequently and more efficiently. This study challenged the traditional view that ‘students who compete to receive rewards work better than students who co-operate’ (Gillies and Ashman, 2003 p.5).

Influenced by the findings of this and related research there are those who believe that positive working relationships develop as a result of successful working in groups (e.g. Bornstein, 1989; Harmon-Jones and Allen, 2001). Slavin (1995) suggests that interpersonal relationships can be enhanced as a result of co-operative tasks. In contrast there is a substantial body of work which claims that positive and supportive relationships are a prerequisite for cognitive and social understanding (Hall, 1994; Kutnick and Brees, 1982; Thacker, Stoate and Feast, 1992) and are therefore a prerequisite for learning in groups. Such theories are based upon the premise that it is not sufficient to expect social competencies and group work skills to develop spontaneously (e.g. Mercer and Littleton, 2007), and that children will need support to develop the skills required to operate effectively within this context and for social interactions to facilitate and support learning. In light of this, a number of theorists have argued the need for pupil group work training (e.g. Hall, 1994; Gillies et al., 2003), which supports both the development of social competencies (e.g. talking skills, listening skills) and group work skills (e.g. how to share tasks, divide tasks based on each member’s strengths).

Recognising that the potential of group work was not being realised in the UK (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick; 2003), and that the social context in which group work takes place was not being considered sufficiently by current theory and practice (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines and Galton, 2003), the SPRinG project sought to develop a relational approach to developing and supporting group work which was suitable for use in schools.
The Relational Approach to group work

The development of the Relational Approach, within the SPRinG project, recognised the issues raised in the research discussed and combined aspects of social psychological and socio-cognitive theory to develop a social pedagogy of group work (Kutnick and Colwell, 2009). Three core principles influenced its development ‘a relational approach, the nature of teacher involvement, and ways of structuring the classroom environment’ (Blatchford et al., 2006, p.751). The Approach assumes that school learning takes place in a social pedagogic context (Blatchford et al., 2003) and that positive relationships are a prerequisite of successful group work (e.g. Hall, 1994; Kutnick & Brees, 1983). With the development of such relationships reducing the likelihood of those issues recognised as resulting from power imbalances within groups.

In recognition of the social pedagogic context of group work the SPRinG research team proposed that the potential for group work could be reached if stages of trust/dependence, communication/responsiveness and joint relational problem solving were scaffolded through classroom activity (Kutnick and Colwell, 2009). In collaboration with teachers, the research team developed a programme which supported the application of this theory in practice. The programme provides a developmental sequence devised to build and enhance social relations between all children (Blatchford et al., 2003). The programme defines three distinct stages in the development of close relationships and competencies that support learning:

Trust and interdependency – supporting the development of a ‘safe’ environment to allow cognitive conflict to arise and to build an understanding which moves away from the individual to an understanding that the success of the group relies on all of them. Galton (1990) stated that pupils need support to develop the trust necessary for working together in groups.

Communication – supporting the development of the skills required to engage in meaningful discussions and to support the development of skills of providing and using
constructive feedback. Many studies have suggested that in order to collaborate pupils need to have developed communication skills (e.g. Gillies, 2003).

**Problem solving** – to provide opportunities which require collaboration. Blatchford et al. (2003) define group work as ‘pupils working together as a group or team’ (p.155) with the balance of ownership and control shifting towards the pupils. The task therefore is crucial to the development of group work in that pupils must have a task which requires and permits them to work together fostering shared motivation.

A handbook of activities, developed by the SPRinG team in collaboration with teachers, provides a guide to developing the Approach. It includes a series of appropriate group work tasks and ideas for lesson development. The activities are provided in segments, which follow the stages outlined above. It is recommended that problem-solving tasks are only embarked upon once it is felt the appropriate levels of trust, interdependency and communication have been reached. It is acknowledged that the time required for this to occur will vary by group. Within primary schools the Approach is usually introduced during (Personal Social and Health Education) PSHE and physical education sessions before being integrated across the curriculum. Activities include games, such as passing on a gentle touch to each other, children supporting each other during a blind-fold walk, and cooperative drawing sessions. A summary of activities is provided in Appendix 5.

Key to the implementation of the Relational Approach is the use of a pre and debrief. The prebrief, conducted at the beginning of an activity, requires the practitioner to make explicit to the group the purpose of the task and the behaviours required to participate in the task, i.e. to be a good listener, to share the equipment, in addition to what would be considered a positive outcome. The debrief, to be conducted at the end of the activity, then asks the group members to consider ‘what did you do well?’; ‘How did you go about the task?’; ‘What might you do differently next time?’. This encourages children to think about how they behaved and interacted, to hear others comment on how they interacted and take this
learning forward to the next task. The debrief also provides an opportunity for the practitioner to reward children for their efforts as a group, rather than as individuals, adding a degree of interdependency. This moves the culture away from one which is focussed on outcomes and the individual, to one which is focussed on the process and the success of the group as a whole.

In addition to reinforcing the value of group work during the pre and debrief, this space also provides the practitioner with opportunities to model the skills of listening and questioning, for example by using open-ended questioning to extend and develop the children’s vocabulary. Such discussions may go some way to supporting children to process information within social interactions (as defined by Crick and Dodge, 1994) including the encoding of external and internal cues. Practitioners can use the debrief to support the children to recognise their contribution, what worked well, what did not go so well, and offer their own suggestions as to how they will work together in the future. Over time, the intention is that the practitioner will gradually reduce their role and allow the children to lead this discussion as they develop the competencies to do so. It is important to note that the pre and debrief are part of the lesson and are not ‘tagged on’ to the task.

As stated within the introduction, the findings of the SPRinG project presented a number of positive conclusions. The substantial experimental research conducted, which included over 4,000 pupils (Baines et al., 2009), led to conclusions that: group work, used as a pedagogic tool, led to positive gains in pupil attainment – in reading and Mathematics scores (Blatchford et al., 2005); a growth in children’s social networks (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008); higher levels of pupil engagement in classroom activities and, teachers being less directive (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009).

The Relational Approach overcomes the problems I have identified in the literature of children’s peer interactions being given too little attention as a context for learning and development. In addition, the Approach is firmly rooted with a theoretical framework and
has a substantial evidence base which demonstrates its impact. I assert therefore that the Relational Approach has the potential to overcome the issues identified with the programmes currently favoured by pre-school practitioners to support the development of children’s social competencies. This assertion forms the basis for this piece of research.
2.4 The role of the practitioner in developing children’s social competencies and group work skills

I have identified within this chapter that the pedagogic approach taken by pre-school practitioners and teachers impacts upon the potential effects of programmes devised to support the development of children’s social competencies. I have also noted that there is little research which has focussed upon group work in pre-schools or the role of the pre-school practitioner in developing group work skills. In this section I will explore each of these issues further, considering the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies and what is known about the role of the practitioner in developing group work skills. I will then narrow this to focus more specifically on what is known about the role of practitioner modelling in these processes.

The role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

I have noted that importance is placed on children’s personal, social and emotional development within ECEC and that there are a number of ways in which practitioners can support the development of such skills. The pedagogic approach individual practitioners adopt has unsurprisingly been shown to be a significant aspect of this. The ‘style’ adopted by the practitioner has been shown to have an impact upon children’s behaviour. For example, Sheridan (2007) found that where pre-school practitioners asserted dominance and demanded obedience from children, the children themselves demonstrated more anti-social behaviours with peers, e.g. lack of sharing and had more conflicts than those children attending settings which did not operate in such a way. She found that what she terms as practitioners with a democratic style (i.e. those who fostered trust, respect and reciprocity), promoted much greater cooperation amongst children and their peers. These findings mirror those of earlier research which found that less directive practitioners correlated with more considerate and prosocial behaviours in young children (Philips at al., 1987). Despite
such findings, little is known about the role of the early years practitioner in modelling appropriate social behaviours to children or if, and how, this impacts upon child’s relationships and interactions with their peers (Buysse et al., 2003).

**The role of the practitioner in developing group work skills: A review of schools-based literature**

The role of the teacher has been recognised as pivotal within literature concerned with the development of group work skills (e.g. Gillies, 2003; Prinsen et al., 2008; Webb et al., 2009). A summary of the key themes identified in sources which considered data collected in statutory schooling and in various countries, including the UK and USA, follows. Again, I have considered schools-based literature as there is a lack of literature in this field which is based upon pre-school experience. Together these points provide an overview of what is known about the role of the teacher in developing group work skills.

**The need to understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the programme**

Johnson and Johnson (2008) state that for the potential of group work to be realised teachers need to have a clear conception of what they are doing and why they are doing it. This understanding will allow them to see why and how group work and the process of skills development is necessary and useful, rather than another addition to a heavy workload (King, 2008).

**Providing a suitable environment in which group work can thrive**

Effective group work requires an effective classroom context (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick, 2008). A number of factors must be addressed to achieve this: the ethos of the environment must be one in which pupils recognise the significance of the group over the individual and pupils must feel able to contribute to discussions and ask questions. As group work progresses, teachers can also begin to alter the hierarchical nature of the classroom and teachers can become increasingly immersed with students as partners in learning (Hert-Lazarowitz, 2008).
Using modified discourse

Research which has focussed upon teacher discourse during group work has shown how what teachers say and do conveys a great deal of information regarding the expectations placed on pupils as learners, and whether teachers expect them to play active or passive roles in their learning (Webb at al., 2009). Research which focussed on teacher discourse through the process of changing to a cooperative learning style, conducted by Hertz-Larowitz and Shachar (1990), found teachers increased their use of positive pro-social instruction and decreased their use of negative instruction.

Providing tasks which require group work

It is imperative that the task which is to be undertaken requires the members to work together and discuss the possible outcomes; the task itself must facilitate learning in groups (Blatchford et al., 2003).

Making expectations explicit

For pupils to feel the group is important and that the success of the group is relevant to them, it must be made explicit by the teacher that this is the case. It is imperative the members understand that the task will be assessed on both the completion/standard of the work and the group process. This takes pupils away from individualist notions of success and outcomes focussed work to a route which is more focussed upon processes and collective success. Kerr (1983) claims that working in this way also removes the issue of potential ‘free riders’ as group members realise that they are all accountable and that their efforts are required in order for the group to succeed.

Supporting pupils to develop the skills required to work in groups
The teacher cannot assume that children are all equally equipped to engage in group work and must provide training and support to develop relevant group work competencies before they start group work (Huber and Huber, 2008). How this is achieved in terms of process depends on the philosophical position adopted.

**Observing pupils**
Observation is a key tool for teachers using group work. Through being observed, pupils feel accountable and therefore more likely to participate. Furthermore, the observations provide the teacher with information on how the group works together and can therefore guide the development of group work skills (Johnson and Johnson, 2008). As pupils gain the skills to operate with reduced teacher input this allows the teacher more time for observation.

**Maintaining pupil motivation**
As for the teacher, for pupils to invest in the process they must see that this is required and has value otherwise motivation may wane. Teachers must recognise pupils’ efforts and achievements to maintain motivation (Stevens, 2008) and ensure assessment does not only focus on the individual (Huber and Huber, 2008).

**Modelling the desired skills**
Teachers have a role in modelling behaviours and language to pupils. The teacher needs to be skilled in asking questions which require pupils to engage with the task as they can control the cognitive elements of the task, including requiring pupils to justify their claims (King, 2008). In addition, in modelling such questioning techniques, pupils will learn how to ask questions of their peers during tasks. King (2008) uses ‘Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning’, in which the teacher needs to make explicit the different types of questions possible and the types of responses they generate. Whether these behaviours can then be taken and used in everyday interactions is unclear. Kutnick and Berdondini (2009) state that during the SPRinG activities teachers modelled behaviours to children, but there is no detail
provided about the nature of this modelling or how, if at all, this manifested itself within children’s interactions.

Within current ECEC practice it is commonplace for story books to be used to facilitate discussions about behaviour with young children; a practice which may also be considered as a form of modelling. For example, within the Practice Guidance for the EYFS it is recommend that practitioners ‘Choose books and stories in which characters show empathy for others’ (DCSF, 2008 p.29) to support the building of relationships. This is a practice supported by the Neo-vygotskian concept of using the language of story books to think and communicate (Mercer, 2000) and Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977) (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter).

The points listed above provide an insight into the role of the teacher in the development of group work. It is noted that the work which substantiates these findings was conducted in statutory schooling, and therefore with children older than those which are the focus of this research, yet many of these findings align with the key themes identified throughout this chapter.

**Reflective practice**

It is also noteworthy that to allow each of the elements listed above to be realised there is a need for the teacher to regularly reflect upon their actions. To inform considerations of whether improvements to practice can be made which will support group work and the development of children’s social competencies. Underpinned by the work of Dewey (1933) and Schón (1983), reflective practice refers to the act of being thoughtful and searching when analysing one’s own practice, to suspend judgement and to be open to alternative interpretations. Within this process the practitioner moves away from trial and error when determining the best cause of action in a particular situation to making deep critical thinking a part of their actions. Pollard (op cit) states that the process of reflecting upon one’s own practice ‘feeds a constructive spiral of professional development and capability...[and] leads
to a steady increase in the quality of the education provided for children (p.5). He recognises three sources of evidence available to practitioners to support reflection on practice which can lead to improvements in the quality of provision: school-gathered benchmark data, educational research and data practitioners gather from their own classrooms. I propose that this third element may be of particular significance in supporting the development of young children’s social competencies within a pre-school. Considering the impact of one’s own practice and interactions with children is likely to be an important aspect of the practitioner role within the field of group work, as is understanding the child’s current ability to engage in group activities.

**The role of the pre-school practitioner in children’s learning**

I noted previously that it has been recognised that within high-quality pre-schools the practitioner creates opportunities for learning centred around providing suitable play-based activities based on the child’s current level of understanding and interests. This is an area which has been subject to much scrutiny. Building upon the aforementioned Vygotskian theory of a more knowledgeable other supporting movement across the ZPD, the term ‘scaffolding’ has risen (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) and has been widely adopted within early years literature. The term scaffolding is used to describe how practitioners support young children’s learning by ensuring activities are appropriate to the child’s knowledge and understanding, and crucially how they provide support to extend this knowledge (Anning, 1997). Over time, the practitioner can reduce the scaffold as the child requires less support. Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) coined the term ‘early childhood error’ to describe the folly of practitioners laying out stimulating play environments but not scaffolding children in play and therefore their learning.

A study which underpins our understandings of the role of the practitioner in scaffolding children’s learning is the Froebel Block Play Research Group (Gura et al., 1992) study, which focussed on children’s play and on the importance of the role of the practitioner in
supporting learning through play with blocks. They concluded that a number of conditions were required to support or ‘scaffold’ learning through play activity, including that the practitioner must:

- be involved
- create an appropriate space for the activity
- allow children to share the initiative about what is to be learnt
- use observation to inform future planning.

Of particular interest here is that these roles align with those outlined in the role of the practitioner in developing group work. The evidence is indicating that the approach adopted by individual practitioners may be a crucial factor in the successful delivery of initiatives aimed at supporting the development of children’s social competencies.

**Practitioner modelling**

There are a number of research studies which suggest that the role of practitioner modelling is important in children’s learning. Modelling has been shown to be a more effective way of learning than trial and error (Bandura, 1977), or didactic teaching methods (Schunk, 1981). Coltman, Petyaeva, and Anghileri’s (2002) study found that exploration alone was not sufficient to ensure learning and that modelling, as a form of scaffolding, had a significant impact on children’s learning and retention of a new skill. The EPPE research found that adult ‘modelling’ of skills and appropriate behaviour was often combined with periods of SST, open-ended questioning and that this was associated with better cognitive achievement (Sylva et al., 2004). Despite such claims there is no one generally agreed definition of what modelling is or explanation of its implementation. Orme et al. (1966) use the term *Perceptual Modelling* to describe an ‘expert’ demonstrating an action and then allowing time for the ‘novice’ to trial or imitate the action. Weiss and Klint (1987) have suggested that perceptual modelling may be of particular benefit to early learners as they lack the skills to be able to translate a verbal instruction into a new action.
Jonassen (1999) noted two distinct approaches to modelling, those of, *behavioural modelling* and *cognitive modelling*. The former links to the perceptual modelling described above — of the expert demonstrating the action to the novice. The latter, however, refers to a more complex process whereby the expert provides a narrative of their actions, thoughts and decision-making whilst carrying out the action. They are modelling the cognitive processes to the novice in addition to the act itself. Making the tacit explicit in this way, and providing a space for the novice to practise the action with help, has been defined by Collins, Brown and Newman (1987) and Dennen (2004) as Cognitive Apprenticeship. Dennen (2004) suggests that cognitive modelling may lead to behaviours being adapted and used in a variety of situations rather than simply imitated. The pre and debrief within the Relational Approach may provide an opportunity for cognitive modelling to take place as the practitioner models aspects of group work to children.

When considering how modelling works as a teaching process Social Learning Theory (SLT), a model of behavioural transmission, developed by Bandura provides a useful insight. There are three key concepts in SLT:

- **People learn through observation** — Bandura demonstrated in the ‘Bobo doll’ experiment that children imitate behaviours they have seen in others
- **Mental states are important to learning** — both environmental reinforcements and our own intrinsic reward systems contribute to the use of a specific behaviour
- **Learning does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour**  
  (Bandura, 1977).

Whilst SLT recognises the potential for modelling to impact upon children’s actions, Bandura notes that simply having a behaviour modelled is insufficient for learning to take place. He recognises a number of processes which the expert and novice must be engaged in for learning to occur (ibid). Bandura identifies these processes as:
- **Attentional Processes** – the novice must be paying attention
- **Retention Processes** – the novice must be able to retain the information gleaned and be able to act on the information as required at a later stage
- **Motoric Reproduction Processes** – the novice must have opportunities to practice the behaviour and develop its application
- **Motivation Processes** – for a behaviour to be imitated there must be a motivation to do so, i.e. a reinforcer. Brophy (2004) supports this, stating that in order to be motivated and to learn, pupils need to perceive these activities as worthwhile (ibid).

SLT has been applied most frequently to studies of aggression, however it provides a useful insight into the potential role of practitioner modelling in the development of children’s social competencies and what the key features of this may be. I assert that, again, there are a number of terms here which align with those I identified as key features of the role of the practitioner in developing group work, i.e. motivation and opportunities to practice.

Despite these indications that practitioner modelling is a crucial element in children’s learning, there remain a number of key questions about its role, specifically in relation to the development of their social competencies. Gillies and Boyle (2005) demonstrated that children model the verbal interactions they have seen demonstrated by each other during cooperative group work and suggest that teacher modelling is less significant here given that the power relationship is not equal. Is the role of the practitioner therefore to support the development of the relevant competencies and provide opportunities for trialling and utilising those competencies, rather than to model behaviours? Furthermore, we have little knowledge about the role of the early years practitioner in modelling appropriate social behaviours (Buysse et al., 2003); how the language of the practitioner can affect pupils discourse (Gillies, 2008), or how changes in practitioner behaviour manifests, if at all, within children’s behaviours (Prinsen et al., 2008).
2.5 Conclusions and the research questions posed

Conclusions

The literature reviewed within this chapter has shown that despite children’s personal, social and emotional development being placed high on the ECEC agenda, ECEC policy and practice tends to focus upon practitioner-child interactions at the expense of supporting child’s relationships with their peers. I have suggested this is problematic for a number of reasons, specifically as research informs us that children spend more of their time with their peers than with practitioners whilst at pre-school. For children to gain the greatest potential from their pre-school experience, this potential site for learning and development warrants greater attention than it is currently afforded.

As research indicates that children’s peer relationships and social competencies are a crucial aspect of their development, a number of programmes have been designed to support their development. Through a review of the most commonly used I have concluded that such programmes lack a theoretical underpinning and a robust evidence base to substantiate their use. Furthermore, they do little to develop children’s peer interactions as a context for learning and development. As a consequence, I have suggested that the Relational Approach, an approach shown to be rooted within theory and have a strong experimental evidence base which documents its potential impact, could be a potentially beneficial pedagogical tool for early years practitioners. The SPRinG project found that the Relational Approach had the potential to increase the learning and development opportunities afforded by the child-peer context.

Whilst the role of the practitioner has been shown by research to be key to the success of the implementation of the Relational Approach, and more generally in the development of children’s social competencies, the precise nature of this role and the role of practitioner modelling remains largely unknown. On this basis a series of research questions, designed to
further understandings of the potential use of the Relational Approach in pre-schools, the impact the Relational Approach has on practitioner pedagogy and practice, and the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies, are posed.

**Research questions**

There are three core themes to this research. These are the need to understand if and how the Relational Approach can be developed and implemented with a pre-school environment; how, if at all, the development of the Relational Approach impacts upon practitioner pedagogy and practice and, what role, if any, practitioner modelling plays in the development of children’s social competencies. I will explore the development of the Relational Approach and, using the development of the Relational Approach as an example, I will explore the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies. The series of research questions developed to explore each of these areas is now provided.

**Theme one: The development of the Relational Approach**

To provide information about the practical implementation of the Relational Approach and the Relational Approach Programme in a pre-school and, to consider whether the approach led to similar changes to those reported in the SPRinG project, the following questions are asked in one case pre-school — Bumbles:

1. How was the Relational Approach implemented in the case pre-school?
2. Is there an increase in the use of groups as a pedagogic tool? Does the composition of the groups change?
3. Is there evidence of increased practitioner support for the development of children’s social competencies?
4. Is there evidence to suggest the implementation of the Relational Approach led to an increase in children’s social networks?
Theme two: Pedagogy and practice

To gain an understanding of the impact of the programme, specifically any changes in practitioner pedagogic style and practice, the following questions are asked:

5. What changes, if any, occurred in the pedagogic style of the practitioners?

6. Is there an increase in the prevalence of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision in EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) which relate directly to observable practitioner practice, namely, is there an increase in:
   - instances of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)
   - practitioners use of open-ended questioning
   - the formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities
   - the inclusion of and support given to children to rationalising and talking through their conflicts?

   Further detail of these attributes is provided in Appendix 12.

Theme three: Practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions

To deepen our understanding of the role of the practitioner in the implementation of the Relational Approach and of the impact practitioner modelling has on children’s peer interactions, the following questions are asked:

7. Do practitioners model social competencies to children? And if so, how and when?

8. Is there an increase in the prosocial behaviours displayed by children? And if so, what are these?

9. Do children use language modelled by practitioners in their peer interactions? And if so, what are these and when do they occur?
In answering these questions it is envisaged that information regarding the impact of the Relational Approach on practitioner practice and on children’s peer relationships can be gleaned. This information will be used to inform the development of a framework which offers a foundation for a detailed understanding of the role of the practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies in ECEC.
3. Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the factors influencing the design of the research and provide sufficient detail to allow the processes of the research to be understood. This information is provided in chapter sub-sections as detailed below.

| Research Methodology | - The Relationship between this research and the funded research projects  
|                       | - Theoretical perspective  
|                       | - Research design  
| Research Methods      | - Case study design  
|                       | - Case selection  
|                       | - The research process  
|                       | - Research tools  
|                       | - Data collected  
|                       | - Data analysis  
|                       | - Triangulation and achieving validity and rigour within case study research  
| Ethical Considerations| - Research with adults  
|                       | - Research with young children  
|                       | - My role as researcher  
| The Research Process  | - Developing and implementing the Relational Approach within a pre-school  
|                       | - Pre-school overview  
|                       | - The Relational Approach training  

The relationship between this doctoral research and the funded research projects

At this stage it is pertinent to reiterate that this research was undertaken alongside two funded research projects funded by the Esmée Fairbain Foundation and the European Commission. These projects investigated the development of the Relational Approach as a tool to support the development of group work skills with pre-school children (see Appendix 2 for more detailed information about these projects). I was the researcher for these
projects, working under the direction of Professor Peter Kutnick. Professor Kutnick’s work focussed on answering a number of questions regarding the impact of the Relational Approach within pre-schools, including the impact of the development of the Relational Approach on children’s relationships and on social inclusion. My work, presented in this thesis, sought to extend the knowledge and understanding gained through these projects, both by conducting a detailed case study investigation into the development of the Approach and by focussing specifically on the role of the practitioner, and the role and impact of practitioner modelling on children’s peer interactions. None of which were investigated within the funded research projects.

It is, however, necessary for there to be an overlap between these funded research projects and my doctoral research; the funded projects provided the basis from which I could conduct my research. For example, the methods used to gather information regarding children’s social networks involve the use of the same tools, tools which are based upon those used by the SPRinG research team. All the data reported in this thesis was gathered only by me and were not reported in the funded research project reports or any subsequent related publications.
3.2 Methodology

Theoretical perspective
It is largely accepted that ontological (the nature of reality) and epistemological (how assumptions can be known) beliefs shape the methodological approaches adopted by any researcher. ‘Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world’ (Crotty, 1998 p.66). Ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions and, in turn, the methods and tools used to collect and interpret data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). I understand that my beliefs and theoretical position shape the way I have conducted this research and that it is necessary for me to make clear my position to allow this work to be understood and scrutinised.

I consider myself a social scientist, an educational researcher (with a foot in the door of Social Psychology). As a researcher I recognise that I am located within two distinct worlds; the first being that of theory, ideas and models and the second the world of observation and experience (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmais, 1996). I endeavour to combine these and conduct research which bears relevance to practice (Pring, 2000). Ontologically, I believe in many realities and, epistemologically, I favour a social constructivist approach, and as such I am concerned with the significance of both context and culture in understanding society. Kim (2001) clearly states the beliefs which underpin social constructivist perspectives. These include that:

- reality is constructed through human activity
- knowledge is culturally and socially constructed
- learning is a social process; meaningful learning takes place when individuals engage in social activities.

(Kim, 2001 p.2)
The impact of the position I hold is apparent throughout this thesis, in the questions I have asked, the approach I have taken and the recurrent emphases on the significance of a social dimension to learning. Further evidence of its influence is apparent in the literature review as the theory used to underpin my work is framed by the work of both Vygotsky and Piaget, both of whom are recognised as key scholars in the development of the social constructivist position.

Yet, I do not believe I started with an epistemological perspective but rather an interest, a fascination and desire to understand something. As Crotty (1998) states:

Not too many of us embark on a piece of social research with epistemology as our starting point. Hardly. We typically start with a real-life issue that needs to be solved, a question that needs to be answered...(P.13).

When working as a member of the SPRinG research team I became fascinated by the changes the Relational Approach brought about in children’s behaviour both within the context of their learning and within their social worlds. On reflection, this fascination drove my desire to better understand the processes by which these changes occurred.

I also acknowledge that the methodology and methods guiding the research were shaped not only by my personal beliefs, but by my past experiences, and also by the research team with whom I was working. I recognise the significance of my relationship with the research team and the funded research projects, these are all intertwined, inextricably linked, and therefore must be recognised and acknowledged. These relationships have influenced my epistemological position and the design of this research. I would state, however, that this did not dominate the design; as a member of that team we shared similar views hence our desire to work together.

My experience as a contract researcher has also shaped the research methodology and methods selected. I have been presented with a number of research opportunities, in
various subject areas, aimed at a wide variety of audiences over the past nine years. As such, I have found it necessary to focus on fitness-for-purpose when seeking to investigate or evaluate different phenomena. I agree with Edwards and Talbot (1999) who state that:

There is no single method and design that can act as a catch all for all studies. Rather, the emphasis should be upon the selection of a variety of techniques that will enable you to explore your research question in more detail, and provide greater weight to any generalisations that you feel able to make in your conclusions (p.59).

These means ‘borrowing’ from a number of theoretical perspectives as suited to the problem being explored. Whilst my work has undeniably been shaped by my social constructivist position and my research role, I also considered the possible approaches to the research and selected the most suitable methods and tools to investigate my research interest.

Research design
This research is both evaluative — how is the Relational Approach Programme implemented in the case setting, what impact does it have in a pre-school setting and, theory seeking — what is the role of practitioner and the role of practitioner modelling in the development of children’s social competencies (Bassey, 1999); each requiring a different approach and different research tools. It was necessary to conduct the evaluative section of the research as this provided the context for the theory seeking questions to be considered. Whilst the SPRinG research gathered data on educational attainment I have not sought to replicate this within this piece of research. This decision was reached as the children at Bumbles were not required to undertake any form of assessment during the research period and I felt that it was ethically inappropriate to introduce any form of testing to further the research. Numerous research studies have concluded that young children experience high levels of stress when subjected to testing (e.g. Fleege et al., 1992). The focus of this thesis is therefore on social competency development, as opposed to measuring cognitive learning.
To enable me to consider the impact of the Relational Approach a detailed understanding of the influence the Relational Approach had on the pre-school environment, the practitioners and the children would be required. To achieve this depth I felt it would be necessary for me to become immersed within a group (population) involved in implementing and developing the Relational Approach. Upon consideration of this, along with the time and resource available to me, I elected to conduct a case study within a naturalistic context. I recognised that this would allow me to collect data relevant to real life practice and would allow me to devote the time necessary to collect the depth of data required to consider the questions posed. Given the social constructivist position adopted the case study approach also affords the opportunity to consider the environment in which the children’s interactions take place.

In considering what type of data I would require to answer the research questions posed I concluded that a mixed-methods approach would be necessary. Qualitative data would, for example, be required to allow the experience of the practitioners involved to be understood. Whilst quantitative data would be required to allow the questions regarding the development of the Relational Approach and its impact to be answered and compared with the findings of SPRinG, which gathered figures on increases in the children’s social networks, for example. To allow comparisons with the findings of the SPRinG research some of the data collection tools used were those designed by the SPRinG team, including the pre-school maps, the sociometry and the environmental rating scale.

The use of a mixed-methods approach can be a source of criticism; it is sometimes assumed that research methods cannot be mixed given their philosophical underpinnings often differ (See Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002, for an overview of this debate). However, I, along with many others (e.g. Pring, 2002; Trochim, 2006) believe that a mixed methods approach is possible and is useful in situations of a complex nature. Such situations may be evident in schools and pre-schools, as the data collected here demands analysis which allows for diverse perspectives to be captured (Sammons et al., 2005). This would support my
ontological perspective that there is no one ‘true’ reality and thus to gain a depth of understanding of the happenings within this pre-school setting seeking multiple perspectives is essential. Such a position is supported by Pring (2000), who states that neither qualitative nor quantitative data alone can capture what he claims to be the world of real life and common sense and thus a combination of the two must be possible. Pring (2000) goes on to stress that in utilising a mixed methods approach, researchers can avoid the ‘philosophical trap’ (p.33), the dualism which places quantitative and qualitative methods as incompatible opposites.
3.3 Research methods

Case study design

Yin (2009) advocates case study research to investigate contemporary phenomena within real-life situations. I elected to conduct a single exploratory case study; as this provided the depth of data required within the limited time and resources available to me. Exploratory case studies are described by Bassey (1999) as a suitable method to gather data for theory seeking research. To support the gathering of detailed information about practitioner practice, practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions, an embedded case study design (op cit) was adopted, i.e. there is a study of sub-cases within the case. This allowed detailed information on individuals to be captured and for these findings to be situated within the pre-school as a whole (selection of these individuals is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter).

There are numerous criticisms of case study design, including that there can be no generalisation of findings and that they are prone to researcher bias (e.g. Edwards and Talbot, 1999). Acknowledging such critique, I state that my primary concern is not seeking findings which are generalisable, but rather seeking to gain a more detailed understanding of the processes which lead to changes in children’s peer interactions following the development of the Relational Approach in one setting. However, I envisage these findings will be of broader interest. Yin (1994) argues that case studies can produce theories which are generalisable. It may be that given the larger data set which exists regarding the use of the Relational Approach, I may suggest the findings of the research can be used as an explanatory or descriptive case of the processes which led to the changes reported by the SPRinG research teams and the European-funded and Esmée Fairbain Foundation — funded research projects.
In relation to concerns of the influence of researcher bias on case study research, I endeavour to provide a comprehensive picture of my position and the factors which have influenced both me and the research, allowing my work to be placed under scrutiny. In addition, I consider my role as a researcher in detail later in this chapter, and use the understanding gleaned to minimise researcher bias and to scrutinise my position and the influences on this research continuously throughout the project. Finally, I also invited practitioners from the case pre-school (Bumbles) to consider the initial findings and offer their thoughts and alternative views on my interpretations of the data before the final conclusions were drawn.

**Case selection**

The selection of the case pre-school was purposive; ‘It is not unusual for the choice of case to be no “choice” at all’ (Stake, 1995 p.3). The pre-school was selected as they were involved in the funded projects which were seeking to develop the Relational Approach for use within pre-schools. As the practitioners had already agreed for me as a project researcher to collect data within their setting, I only had to ask the practitioners to expand the time they were willing to allow me to spend in the pre-school and increase the number of tools used to collect data. I considered this to be a suitable arrangement as it was not feasible for me to attempt to ‘recreate’ the training programme for the purpose of my research. I could have invited a new pre-school to join the training and included them only in the research for this project, but there were no clear advantages to doing this. I approached the case setting initially by telephone to explain my request, following which both my supervisor and I held a meeting with all the practitioners in the pre-school to explain what was being requested and how this would increase researcher presence in the setting. (See Appendix 6 for copies of information sheets for practitioners and Appendix 7 for a copy of the consent form.) As Stake (1995) states choosing a case ought to allow us to maximise what we can learn and fulfil practicalities such as easy to access and willingness...
for the case individual(s) to have a willingness to participate. This is true of the case in this study.

Selection of the embedded cases was also purposive; I selected the cases as they met a particular need. Three practitioners were identified as crucial to the development of the Relational Approach: the setting owner/manager (Anita), the lead practitioner who held responsibility for planning (Beth), and the practitioner responsible for planning and leading circle time sessions (Clare). Three children were identified to form further embedded cases. They were selected to provide examples of children’s differing social networks and social status at the beginning of the research process. They were identified through the analysis of the initial sociometric data and through discussions with the practitioners to ensure they were representative of the children in the pre-school. This information also allowed me to ascertain if there were any aspects to the child’s life which would help me to understand and interpret their behaviours and interactions. The children are identified throughout this thesis as: high social status child: Izzy, medium social status child: Tabitha, and low social status child: Tomas. Further detailed information about the practitioners and the children is provided within the Research findings chapters, chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The research process

The following table provides a succinct overview of the research activity which was conducted on a part-time basis. The initial phase of my exploration of the field and related literature was conducted as part of my involvement in the SPRinG research. As previously stated it was from this where my initial fascination grew and this doctoral research developed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004 (Pre thesis)</td>
<td>Involvement in SPRinG project – ideas phase and initial literature search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Initial meeting with pre-school staff, initial scoping exercise, thesis outline developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-6</td>
<td>Data collection phase – attendance at setting for one day per week for 13 months (during school term times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-8</td>
<td>Data coding and analysis phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>Further literature search and thesis writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Practitioner group interview meeting, further data analysis and final thesis writing and editing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Doctoral Research Timeline

Research purpose

This research is both evaluative and theory seeking. The evaluative element sought to deepen understandings of the viability of using the Relational Approach within a pre-school context and to gain an understanding of whether the approach led to similar outcomes in the pre-school as it did within schools. To pursue this, and allow comparisons between the two projects, it was necessary to use some of the tools designed by the SPRinG research team to collect the data. This included using the classroom maps: to ascertain whether the practitioners’ use of groups or children’s self-selected groupings changed following the Relational training, e.g. frequency, size or composition. The environmental rating scale: to consider the context. Sociometric data: to allow any changes in the children’s social networks to be gathered. Combined, these tools allow comparisons to be made with the findings of SPRinG.

As highlighted previously, the SPRinG research considered children’s attainment scores, specifically in Mathematics and reading, following the implementation of the Relational Approach. The research also considered the detail of the group interactions, specifically looking at children’s interactions in pairs during set group work tasks and how they worked together and the language they used. Given the decision not to add any attainment level
tasks into the pre-school and, given the uncertainty of whether any group or paired working would be observed in the setting, I set out to explore the skills underpinning these behaviours. As discussed in chapter two, the Relational Approach is built upon the premise that for children to learn from each other they must have the skills necessary to work together. The review of relevant literature led me to conclude that social competencies are required for children to work together and that having the skills to interact effectively with others was a key determinant of their future success. This led to the focus on the development of the social competencies which forms the basis of this research. Given the focus of the Relational Approach on developing trust and communication skills, it seemed apposite that there may be something valuable to learn from observing this area in greater detail than had been done previously.

The focus on social competencies also aligns with the theory-seeking element of this work and my desire to better understand the role of the practitioner in the development of the competencies required for children operate effectively within social interactions and so learn from each other. A number of different data collection tools were used to gather the data required to consider these distinct aspects of the research.

**Research tools**

This section provides an overview of the tools employed for data collection. In all, seven tools were used: pre-school maps, sociometry, environmental rating scales (all of which were designed by the SPRinG research team), practitioner interviews, observations (video data), a practitioner group interview and a research journal (which I designed). These different tools were selected as they capture different types of data and information; gathering different types of data serves the case study approach well. Information regarding each of these tools is now provided. Together the combination of tools will provide: an understanding of how the Relational Approach developed in Bumbles, whether the Approach led to changes which aligned with the findings of the SPRinG research, and an
overview of any changes in practitioner practice across both practitioner-led activities, e.g. circle time and story time and within child-led activities.

**Pre-school maps** (Appendix 8)
Pre-school maps of child-peer and child-practitioner activity were designed by the SPRinG research team. The maps provided information on the groupings experienced by the children across a session; capturing a snapshot in time at different points throughout the day. The data gathered noted the size and composition of groups, the types of task being undertaken, and the quality of interaction within those groups, i.e. whether the children were alone, playing alongside each other or involved in conversation and/or joint tasks. This allowed any changes in the composition and use of groups across the life of the project to be recorded. I elected to use these maps as having used them previously, I was confident that they would provide me with the data required to understand groupings within Bumbles Pre-School.

**Sociometry** (Appendix 9)
A simple version of sociometry (Moreno, 1951) was used to gather data on the relative social status of children within the group. Data was collected by asking each child to identify from photographs of all of the children at Bumbles whom they liked to play and all the children they liked to work/do activities. This method was selected as children have been recognised as the first source of information when gathering data around children’s social status (Coie, Dodge and Kupersmidt, 1990). The staff team were also asked which children they thought each child would select. Reciprocal nominations were analysed (that is, were children had nominated each other) to identify children’s social networks. The results allowed the numbers of children each child liked to play with and work with to be identified. This allowed the relative social status of individuals to be identified, i.e. if a child had the most reciprocal nominations they were considered to be of high social status. There is a president in research for this type of data to be considering alongside additional information
gathered from the children, for example asking the children to identify which children exhibit particular prosocial or challenging behaviours. However a review of this literature conducted by Coie, Dodge and Kupersmidt (1990) identified that positive social status is related to prosocial interactions, including being helpful and friendly, whilst social rejection is related to aggression. They also noted that for children under the age of seven years these classifications are basic and that children of this age differentiate between behaviours far less than older children. Given the time frame for the research and the potential complexities of asking the children to identify specific behaviours in their peer and the potential discomfort this may cause, and the limited additional information this may provide, I elected to directly mirror the method used by the Brighton team in the SPRinG research. As I wished to determine whether the Relational Approach had a similar impact with the pre-schools as it did within schools using the same data collection tool was necessary to allow comparisons to be made.

Comparisons were also made between the practitioners’ predictions of children’s choices and the children’s actual nominations. This data provided an insight into the practitioners’ understandings of children’s social worlds and whether this changed across the phases of the research, i.e. following the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles.

The information gathered through the sociometry was supplemented by my observations of the children and the practitioners’ knowledge of the children. Combined, this data was used to identify the children who formed the embedded cases.

**Environmental rating scales** (Appendix 10)

The environmental rating scales were designed by the SPRinG research team to provide information about the environment, specifically the promotion and facilitation of collaboration and group working. The scores, determined by the number of items observed within each category, allow any changes in the environment over time to be recorded. The scale record ratings of six items: whether the physical set-up of classrooms allowed children
to work collaboratively; whether children were assigned collaborative tasks; whether practitioners initiated and supported peer-based relational activities, and whether children used and supported relational activities when interacting with their peers. Again, this tool was used as it permitted a direct comparison with the SPRinG findings.

**Practitioner interviews (Appendix 11)**

Practitioner interviews were conducted with each of the three practitioners who formed the embedded cases informally each week and formally at three points during the research (pre the development of the Relational Approach, part-way through the year and again at the end of the research period). As a social constructivist I recognised it was important to provide a space for the practitioners to express their experiences and interpretations on the development and impact of the Relational Approach and, as such, interviews were selected as an appropriate data collection tool. The questions were semi-structured and allowed for practitioners to provide open-ended responses. The questions were designed to capture detail on the practitioners’ expectations, their experiences of developing the Approach and any impact they recognised the development of the Approach had had on their practice and/or the children’s behaviours and interactions. The questions asked aligned with the questions asked during the interviews for the European Commission- and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation-funded research projects. Given the theory-seeking aspect of this research additional questions were asked and greater detail was pursued. Initial interview questions included whether practitioners had previously received any type of training for using group work and what they expected to gain from participating in the research. Subsequent interviews involved asking how the Relational Approach was being developed, any challenges which they had encountered and whether they had noted any changes in either their practice or in the children’s behaviour.
**Observations — video data**

Video data was collected during 25 pre-school sessions over 13 months. The observations were opportunistic, the day I attended the setting was based upon suitability for the practitioners and myself, though I visited on the same day of the week each week for the period for the duration of the research. During each visit I sought to video 20 minutes of free play time for each of the embedded case children, plus I videoed the circle time sessions and, were possible, another adult-led activity such as story time. The circle time sessions were identified as crucial to developing an understanding of the development of social competencies and the use of group work in Bumbles, as this was the place where the practitioners focussed on developing the skills required for group work. In addition, circle time was one of the only regular times set activities were used which required the children to interact and which provided opportunities for the pre and debrief to be used. Edwards and Talbot (1999) suggest that video data is nothing other than delaying the observation process. I elected to collect video data to enable me to accurately capture what was happening, rather than writing my own shorthand interpretations of what was happening. Having the video data to look back at was also necessary to allow me to revisit the children’s interactions once I had gathered the data related to practitioner modelling. This allowed me to explore whether there was any relationship between the two. Further information on how the video data captured was utilised is provided in the data analysis section.

**Practitioner group interview**

The practitioners who formed the embedded cases were consulted at the final stage of the analysis. This was built into the research process to provide an opportunity for alterative perspectives to be included in the analysis and for this to influence the conclusions drawn. Following a brief overview of the purpose of the research and the research questions, I presented the practitioners with a series of short video clips and asked for their perspective and what they saw happening and how and why they believed these actions occurred.
Following these discussions I presented the practitioners with a summary of my findings which they commented upon. These comments shaped the final conclusions drawn. I elected to conduct a group interview with the practitioners as, given a substantial amount of time passed between the end of the research and the final meeting, I recognised that as a group they would be able to provide a number of versions of the same event, how they experienced it, which may lead to more reliable results (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

**Research journal**

In line with the thoughts of Edwards and Talbot (1999), I believe that it is ‘often impossible’ to have a focus on one person or case without becoming interested in and collecting information about the wider context. Such an approach also aligns well with the social constructivist position I hold. Given the complex nature of pre-schools and the variables influencing the actions of practitioners and children, including policy and family life, I kept a research journal noting things which I believed may bear relevance in the analysis phase. This allowed any thoughts or knowledge gained during my visits to be captured and referred to as necessary throughout the process (e.g. one child was having difficulties at home which coincided with a change in behaviour at pre-school). This information was used to support the analysis of the video data in an attempt to overcome a narrowing of focus, which is recognised as a potential flaw in video data analysis (Edwards and Talbot, 1999).

**Data collected**

Table two (overleaf) provides detail on the quantity of data collected and the time points at which they were collected. During each phase the data were collected concurrently. The scoping phase data is less detailed and is not considered to be part of the core data collection. The scoping data allows a comparison between children at the end of the previous year and the roles adopted by the practitioner at the end of an academic year before they adopted the Relational Approach. Though minimal, this data has an important role in placing and changes observed within the context of children’s development. Parten
(1932) reported that social participation among pre-schoolers increased with the child’s age with children aged 30 months to 42 months favouring parallel play, and children from 42 to 54 months favouring associative or joint play. It is therefore essential that any final analysis is considered alongside the behaviours of the children at Bumbles Pre-School at the end of the previous year. Whilst this does not eliminate the impact the children’s development may have on the findings, it provides further detail which allows the findings to be placed in a broader context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase Tool</th>
<th>Scoping (July 2005)</th>
<th>Phase 1 (September 05)</th>
<th>Phase 2 (January 06)</th>
<th>Phase 3 (July 06)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school Maps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociometry</td>
<td>1 x practitioner</td>
<td>1 x child</td>
<td>1 x practitioner</td>
<td>1 x child</td>
<td>2 x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x child</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 x child</td>
<td></td>
<td>practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Rating Scales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner Interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (Video Data)</td>
<td>1 circle time session</td>
<td>4 circle time sessions</td>
<td>4 circle time sessions</td>
<td>4 circle time sessions</td>
<td>13 circle time sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x adult-led session</td>
<td>8 x 8 minute adult-led sessions</td>
<td>8 x 8 minute adult-led sessions</td>
<td>8 x 8 minute adult-led sessions</td>
<td>25 x 8 minute adult-led sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 x child free play sessions</td>
<td>12 x 8 minute child free play sessions (4 per child)</td>
<td>12 x 8 minute child free play sessions (4 per child)</td>
<td>12 x 8 minute child free play sessions (4 per child)</td>
<td>38 x 8 minute child free play sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner Opinion of analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 practitioners</td>
<td>3 practitioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Journal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Data collected during the Doctoral Research Project
The length of the observations was largely guided by the length of time I was able to sustain a detailed observation without the child leaving or moving away from me.

**Data analysis**

The analysis of the data adopted a time-series approach; the data was considered at a minimum of three points in time and, where data was collected during the scoping phase of the research, a fourth point in time was added. The three core phases (phases one, two and three) represent the duration of the doctoral research. The scoping phase provided information about pedagogy and practice at Bumbles at the end of the previous academic year, and allowed comparisons to be made between the end of the focus year and the previous year. Phase one was pre-intervention at the beginning of the academic year in September; this data provided the baseline data of the pre-schools use of groups and children’s social networks with this group of children. Phase two data was collected at the beginning of the second term (in the fourth month of my research) and provided information on the initial implementation of the programme and its impact. The phase three data was collected at the end of the third term, six months later. At this point I looked at impact, including changes in both practitioner pedagogy and practice, and practitioner modelling to allow consideration of any impact this had on children’s peer interactions.

The data collected using individual tools was in many cases relevant to more than one research question. The following sub-sections provide detail of the analysis techniques employed for each research question rather than for each tool.

**Theme one: The development of the relational approach**

**Research question one: How was the Relational Approach implemented in the case pre-school?**

Data drawn upon: observations, practitioner interviews and the research journal.
To answer this question I draw upon multiple sources: the observations, the practitioner interviews and my research journal. Together, these provide an overview of the training the practitioners undertook, how their learning was fed back to other practitioners at Bumbles and how the practitioners experienced this. The analysis provided is largely descriptive and includes a combination of quantitative data analysis in the form of simple descriptive statistics, e.g. how many times the pre and debrief were observed being used, and qualitative data, e.g. any observations I made regarding the practitioner engagement with the Approach.

I also consider the practicalities of the implementation of the Relational Approach and whether the data gathered provides evidence that the Approach was implemented in Bumbles in a manner congruent with the SPRinG research. This will allow me to determine whether Bumbles is a suitable environment in which to explore the remaining research questions.

**Research question two: Is there an increase in the use of groups as a pedagogic tool? Does the composition of the groups change?**

Data drawn upon: pre-school maps.

The quantitative data collected using the pre-school maps is considered to establish whether there were changes in the use of groups and the children’s experience of groups when at Bumbles. Descriptive statistics are presented and references made to any changes in the use of groups in Bumbles and their composition and function. Statistical analysis was not undertaken as the data sample was too small to meet the necessary criteria for valid results to be generated.

**Research question three: Is there evidence of increased practitioner support for the development of children’s social competencies?**

Data drawn upon: environmental rating scale.
The environmental rating scale categories are scrutinised and descriptive statistics provided to ascertain whether any changes in the levels of support for the development of children’s social competencies was observed. The analysis mirrors that used by the SPRinG research team to allow comparisons to be made, though with their larger data set a more thorough statistical analysis was undertaken.

Research questions four: Is there evidence to suggest the implementation of the Relational Approach led to an increase in children’s social networks?  
Data drawn upon: sociometry and pre-school maps.

The sociometric data is analysed by collating the number of reciprocated play and work choices made by the children. Descriptive statistics are presented and scrutinised to allow any changes in children’s peer networks to be identified across the duration of the project, i.e. are the number of children the children select as those they like to play with or work with changing over the course of the research. Given the case study method adopted there is insufficient data for this to be subject to further statistical analysis. These findings are then considered in relation to the data gathered via the mapping exercises, i.e. do the pre-school maps reveal any changes in children’s social networks, do groups remain predominantly same-age, same-sex groupings, for example, or has there been a change. Overall, this data permits a comparison with the findings of the SPRinG research.

The practitioner-completed sociometry are considered in relation to the child-completed sociometry and from this conclusions are drawn as to the practitioners’ understandings of the children’s social status both prior to and following the research.

The findings of the sociometric analysis are then scrutinised in relation to the findings of the observations, the practitioner interviews and information recorded in my research journal. Considering this data concurrently allows any changes in the children’s social networks to be
reported along with the identification of how these changes manifest in children’s pre-school experiences.

**Theme two: Pedagogy and practice**

*Research question five: What changes, if any, occurred in the pedagogic style of the practitioners?*

Data drawn upon: practitioner interviews, observations and the research journal.

To consider changes in practitioner pedagogic style I consider the pedagogic styles adopted by the three practitioners who formed the embedded cases. I consider the style adopted by the practitioners, providing illustrative cases of their actions, in each of the three phases. Following this, the observation data gathered for each practitioner is subject to directed content analysis. The video data gathered on each of the embedded case practitioners was reviewed through several iterations and all of the behaviours and actions observed were coded in light of the themes identified by the EPPE research (Sylva et al. 2004) and the CCIS (Carl, 2007). (Appendix 12 provides information on the categories identified and the origin of each). Two sets of information are presented for each of the research phases; the first relates to the composition of the group, the relational rating of the session, the level of child engagement in the task and the quality rating — based on those attributes identified by EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004). These figures provide information on the context of the observation and of the practitioners’ practice in terms of composing groups and use of groups as a pedagogic practice. The second data set considers the practitioners’ interactions with the children; the categories used for the observations were adapted from the previously discussed Child Caregiver Interaction Scale (CCIS) developed by Carl (2007). A summary of the items considered is provided in the following table, table three, a full description of each category is presented in Appendix 12. The CCIS measure was selected because, as discussed in the literature review, the CIS is a frequently used tool for
measuring quality within ECEC settings and the CCIS was developed to include further information on environment, an element relevant to my research methodology as a social constructivist. The adaptations I made include a reduction in the number of items assessed; some were identified as falling beyond the scope of this research, e.g. relationships with families and cultural competence. I also reduced the potential score given from one to seven to one to four. These four categories include the terms identified by Carl (2007) inadequate, minimal, good and excellent. Carl allowed for a score in-between these categories which I did not feel was necessary for this piece of work as no clear guidance is provided by Carl about these additional categories. Table three provides an overview of the categories, Appendix 12 provides greater detail on each of these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items considered</th>
<th>Actions observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Emotion and tone of practitioner speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Level of respect demanded from children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of respect for children’s abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Value placed on compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rigidity/flexibility of the tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>Interest, engagement and enjoyment of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>Children’s involvement in discussing rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioner reaction to undesirable behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Level of dialogue entered into with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>Number of activities and level of support for prosocial behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>Directive and outcomes focussed versus process focussed role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Categories used to analyse the practitioners’ interactions with the children

Scrutiny of this combination of data sources provides me with sufficient data to identify changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice over the duration of the research. The preliminary conclusions will be discussed with the practitioners within the group interview at the end of the research process.
Research question six: Is there an increase in the prevalence of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision, as identified by EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) which relate to observable practitioner practice, namely, is there an increase in:

- instances of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)
- practitioners’ use of open-ended questioning
- the formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities
- the inclusion of and support given to children to rationalising and talking through their conflicts?

Data drawn upon: observations and environmental rating scale.

The video data was again subject to detailed content analysis, with the video data gathered for each of the case practitioners and the embedded case children being repeatedly viewed and all observations of the categories identified by the EPPE research (Sylva et al., 2004) being recorded. Quantitative data which captured the number of times each of the items listed above were observed in each of the phases of the research was recorded. It was not possible for me to replicate the extensive tools used by the EPPE research team. These items were selected as they were identified by the EPPE research as key components of high-quality pre-school provision and I elected to include these within this research as they relate to observable practitioner behaviours which could I could include in the observations.

The descriptive statistics presented are considered alongside the data gathered using the environmental rating scales. Combined, these sources allow conclusions regarding changes in practitioner practice, specifically in relation to those attributes the EPPE team recorded as relating to high-quality pre-school provision, to be recorded. In recognition of the benefits of creating ‘vicarious experiences’ for the reader (Stake, 1995 p.63), I provide excerpts of illustrative cases as examples of these items, or their absence, as appropriate.
Theme three: Practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions

Research question seven: Do practitioners model social competencies to children? And if so, how and when?

Data drawn upon: observations and the research journal.

Analysis of the video data involved scrutinising practitioner action and language, within both the practitioner-led and child-led contexts, noting any instances of *behavioural modelling* and/or *cognitive modelling* of social competencies. Excerpts from these interactions are provided to facilitate and inform a discussion of the findings. Practitioners will be asked to consider and review these findings in the final group interview and their comments considered within the final stages of the analysis.

Research question eight: Is there an increase in the prosocial behaviours displayed by children? And if so what are these?

Data drawn upon: observations, practitioner interviews, researcher journal.

To answer this question I focussed upon three embedded cases of children and their actions during child-led free play sessions. The free play sessions were selected as they provided the best opportunity for me to observe the children and their actions where they have the greatest freedom to interact with their peers.

Each of the three focus children were observed for eight minutes on four occasions during each of the three phases (12 observations per child, 36 observations in total). I had originally hoped to conduct longer observations, however the needs of the children were placed at the forefront of my research planning and data collection, and as such I did not do anything that would interfere with the children’s free play time. As a consequence, on occasion my observations had to be cut short, for example, if a child entered the toy house I was unable to view their interactions and therefore had to end the observation. The eight-minute
length of the observations was therefore determined by the quality and quantity of the video data I was able to gather for each child.

For each child, four groups of information were considered, the first provides general information about the child’s interactions with their peers, i.e. number of children interacted with and use of group activities. The second and third groups of data provide information about the child’s interactions with their peers, including the number and type of positive and *challenging* behaviours and interactions they engage in. The list of prosocial and challenging behaviours was developed from a list compiled by Costabile et al. (2000) (presented in Appendix 12) and additional items which arose inductively through scrutiny of the data. The final data set provides information on the quality of the child’s interactions with the practitioners – as gathered using the CCIS (Carl, 2007). These interactions are included as a source of information about the child’s reliance on the practitioner, for example, in resolving disputes, as well as providing information on practitioner pedagogy and practice and their engagement with the child. As these four groups of data are presented in a quantitative form I also provide excerpts from the children’s interactions as illustrative cases of their interactions.

This combination of data will provide me with the detail required to conclude whether there has been an increase in the social competencies displayed by the children.

**Research question nine: Do children use language modelled by practitioners in their peer interactions? If so, what are these and when do they occur?**

Data drawn upon: observations.

The findings from question seven provide information on the use of modelling by the practitioners across the three research phases. This permits the children’s interactions with their peers to be analysed and coded in relation to the identified items. This analysis is inductive and involves several iterations to permit detailed scrutiny of children’s peer
interactions and their relationship, if any, to practitioner modelling of social competencies. This analysis includes the consideration of both manifest (directly observable) and/or latent (that which underlies the action) actions. Essentially, I sought to understand whether social competencies modelled by practitioners led to an observable change in the children’s behaviours and the language they use within their peer interactions. The data will be viewed with the intention of permitting other possible explanations for any changes in children’s behaviour to come to light.

The analysis conducted in relation to each of these nine questions will then be considered in light of the core themes of the research. That is:

- does the development of the Relational Approach within a pre-school result in changes similar to those found during the SPRinG project, i.e. is the Relational Approach Programme a useful tool for early years practitioners to use to support the development of young children’s social competencies?
- what do practitioners do to put the Relational Approach into practice within a pre-school environment, what changes occur in practitioner pedagogy and practice?
- how, if at all, do changes in practitioner behaviour, specifically practitioner modelling, lead to changes in the behaviour and language of the children within their peer interactions?

I alone undertook all data analysis described; support received from the funded research involved interviews being transcribed by paid staff which I then checked for accuracy.

**Triangulation and achieving validity and rigour within case study research**

Whilst the research questions, data analysis and the interpretation of findings have been framed by theory and placed within the context of current literature and research. I acknowledge the aforementioned issue that case study methodology has been criticised for being ‘subjective’ and lacking academic rigour (e.g. see Flyvbjerg, 2006). To address such
potential issues I took a number of actions, for example, I utilised a broad range of data collection techniques to allow for between-method triangulation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), i.e. practitioner interviews, pre-school maps and observations could all be drawn upon when looking to determine whether any change had occurred in the use of groups in the pre-school. Furthermore, to minimise subjectivity I collected video data, rather than making direct observations. This allowed the data to be revisited and scrutinised at a number of levels. As stated previously, this involved a meeting being held with the practitioners, which involved clips of video data being shown and an initial summary of the findings being discussed. These discussions informed the final phase of data analysis and thesis writing.

I was also able to consider my observations in light of the findings and interpretations of the data collected within the other settings involved in the funded research projects. Given the international nature of one of the funded research projects, this presented me with a wide range of views which helped to broaden my thinking and broaden the literature I drew upon to inform my understanding.

In his text on case study research, Yin (2009) identifies four principles which must underlie good case study analysis that you must:

- use all the evidence you have collected to exhaustively consider your research questions leaving no loose ends
- address all major rival interpretations of your data
- focus on the most significant aspect of the case study and not be distracted by other issues
- use your own expert knowledge of the subject matter and current thinking in the field in your interpretation.
I will use this as a checklist in my final chapter when considering the reliability of any findings postulated.

**Ethical considerations**

The relationship between this research and *Relational Approaches in Early Education* (which was funded by the European Commission) led to the ethical approval for this work being sought through the European Commission. All methods where considered by the European Commission and their team of independent international experts and were found to be within the strict ethical guidelines which they adhere to.

I note here that there are two key strands to the ethical considerations to be made; to follow the ‘rules and guidance’ as set out by a number of bodies, including the British Educational Research Association (BERA), and to be true to the morals and principles which I hold. Such considerations need to be constantly revisited throughout the research design, data collection and within the writing up and reporting of the findings. To support this cycle of consideration I found Bassey’s (1999) themes of ethics to be useful ‘respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons’ (p.73). The respect for democracy theme suggests that as a researcher I am free to expect the right to ask questions and to express my opinions and to publish my research; crucially this must be led by a respect for persons and through being truthful about the research and the process. For this piece of research, I recognised two distinct worlds (or persons) which demanded respect; the practitioner and the child. The following sections provide a summary of the considerations given to each and the ways in which I, to the best of my ability, ensured respect for these persons.

**Research with adults**

Pre-school staff were initially contacted by the research team and asked to participate in the research. Following an initial telephone call to explain the additional research I was proposing, both my supervisor and I visited the pre-school during a staff meeting in which
we explained my research. They were made aware of the aims of the research and informed of what was being asked of them whilst making explicit the right to withdraw at any time without reason and without repercussion. I stated that they had no need to agree to participate during the meeting and that I would call one week later and speak to the setting manager to allow them time to review the implications of the research and identify their position and whether they had any additional questions.

During the meeting the practitioners were also informed, they would be given the right to review anything which was written and that every effort would be made to anonymise data. This was a useful endeavour as, in the final meeting with the practitioners, I explained I had concerns that the setting, given its size and locality, was potentially identifiable and that as I result I changed some of the details about the pre-school. These changes were agreed with the supervisory team and are changes which, whilst they disguise the pre-school, do not impact upon the validity of the case.

Whilst permission to conduct the research was sought I also respected that I was entering the practitioners’ place of work and that the research was to take place over a relatively long period of time. As such I remained vigilant and if I gained any indication that my presence was unwelcome or the video camera was a cause for concern I moved into another room. One such example was when one of the practitioners suffered a family bereavement. When she returned to work I did not video her activities or ask her for any additional information about children for several visits until such a point that I took a cue from her that she was feeling able to participate by her approaching me and asking me how my work was progressing.

**Research with young children**

The moral and ethical implications of researching young children are frequently discussed (e.g. Mahon, et al., 1996; Matthews, Limb and Taylor, 1998). Research with young children has been influenced by numerous social, political and research agendas, including: the
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2000). The questions ‘Why am I doing this study?’, and ‘Who benefits from this study?’, and ‘Who may be at risk in the contexts I am studying?’ are seen as critical (Amos Hatch, 1995 p.221) in identifying whether the potential gains of the research warrant children’s involvement and whether children’s rights are being adequately protected. I considered these points alongside the development of the research focus and questions as well as throughout the data collection and analysis.

In line with the BERA guidance (2011), the children were facilitated to give informed consent and were informed by both the practitioner and me of my planned presence in the preschool and what I was planning to do. They were told that they could say they did not want me to watch them and that they did not have to answer any questions I had and that nobody would be cross with them; this was repeated over a number of weeks. Yet, I had doubts as to the true impact of this and I felt the most appropriate way for me to honour these statements was for me to give children the opportunities to move or leave (as there were a number of rooms the children could choose from this was possible) and for me to not follow them or make any insistence on their answering questions. In reality this meant that the data I collected was not always as full as it might have been, e.g. if I was observing a child and they looked at me and left the room, or seemed irritable or unsure I did not follow them and therefore the observation was cut short. Also, if a child answered part of a question and then moved away to do something I did not follow. Whilst this diminished the quality of the data collected at that point I considered this to be the reality of working in a naturalistic environment and holding respect for the young children involved and their limited power and sometimes limited means of communication.

In addition to the consent I sought from the children, consent was requested from parents and carers. As all the parents in the setting had signed a declaration when the children entered the setting that they would allow their children to participate in any research or
practice that the setting deemed appropriate. The setting owner suggested that this meant that I did not need written permission from parents or carers. Yet, I felt there was a need for parents to be informed about the research I was conducting. I therefore requested that information about the research be included in the pre-school newsletter to parents. In addition, I made myself available at both drop-off and collection times throughout the research period to discuss the project with parents. Those who did discuss the project with me were interested in the research and my background. They did not raise any concerns with either me or with the setting manager.

Keddie (2000) discusses how when investigating children’s social worlds she became aware of a tension between being the responsible adult in the setting and trying as a researcher to observe the naturalistic setting. Recognising I may also find myself in positions of conflict I discussed with the practitioners that I ought not be left alone with the children as I was an observer and was not employed by the setting so it would not appropriate. They respected this fact and I found this not to be an issue throughout the research, though as the children became aware that I would not intervene they carried out actions I believe they would not have had one of the practitioners been in earshot. I was fortunate as whilst some the actions I witnessed were not what I would consider to be ‘ideal’, e.g. a child allowed another to take the blame for a minor incident and on another occasion a child rubbed out another’s work whilst he wasn’t looking, I did not witness anything which posed any immediate danger or discomfort. If I did notice any behaviours which were of concern I discreetly passed on a message to the practitioner in the room.

Given the potentially inflammatory nature of collecting the sociometric data (i.e. a child could become distressed that another had not selected them) this was done in a private area. Having used this method in a number of settings previously with no known adverse effects I considered this to be appropriate. To minimise any potential issues I maintained a light touch throughout and tried to make light of the process and made general comments
afterwards like ‘what a nice group of friends they all were’. If a child made any enquires as to who selected who I avoided any discussions about the specifics and maintained a positive tone. Overall I would say they seemed to enjoy being singled out for discussion and being given a sticker for participating but that it was soon forgotten as they moved on to other things.

**My role as a researcher**

Given my employment as a researcher I am fortunate enough to have spent a number of years working with more experienced researchers and developing many of the skills required for using the selected research tools, including developing skills in and experience of observations, interviews and data analysis. However, this research differed from my previous experiences due to the length and depth of my involvement. My field work required me to immerse myself in the pre-school setting for 13 months. I believed this would allow me to become immersed in the group and allow me to gather sufficient data and understanding to produce a useful interpretation of what had happened over the period. With this level of involvement came a level of attachment. Anyone who has spent a long period of time in a pre-school will understand how challenging it is to remain detached from the children. The children became used to me very quickly. They would sit on my lap as I sat in a corner observing. They would ask to see the video camera and would make their own toy video cameras and copy me filming. I did form opinions of the children and grew to like and appreciate them immensely. Furthermore, as my gratitude to the staff for their hospitality and their willingness to allow me freedom in the setting grew, I began to conduct informal ‘interview’ conversations with staff and would find myself helping preparing the children’s snacks whilst we spoke. As time passed I began to feel part of the group. In his book *The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork*, Punch (1986) details cases that illustrate how the researcher, in negotiating a position when becoming a participant-observer in a group, necessarily becomes a part of the research that will have an effect on the outcome and the
data. Whilst this may be seen as flaw in the research and an indication that the work lacked objectivity, I feel that this was part of the reality of conducting naturalistic research, had I ignored or objected to contact from the children I doubt they would have been so relaxed in my presence. I also feel that this would have been counter to my belief in placing the wellbeing of the children at the forefront of the research. Punch (1986) states ‘...social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of data’ (p.14). I ensured that there was a regular gentle reminder of my purpose for being in the setting. I felt it was imperative staff knew I was making judgements, interpreting their behaviours and responses; to be honest and not to take advantage of their openness. I recognise that the relationships which developed allowed me to gather the depth of data I did. When I set out on this research journey I had in mind a clear role as a researcher and that I would conduct myself in a ‘professional’ manner. I believe I maintained this position and developed my understanding of what it means to be involved in research to this level of detail. I acknowledge that the relationships which formed have informed my opinion, however I went into this work to develop an opinion informed by relevant theory and through scrutiny of my position and I believe I have achieved this. ‘Research is not helped by making it seem value free’ (Stake, 1995 p.95).
3.4 The research process

Developing and implementing the relational approach within a pre-school

The following section will first provide a brief overview of Bumbles Pre-School before moving on to outline the Relational Approach training.

Pre-school overview — Bumbles nursery

Based in a small town the pre-school is open Monday to Friday 8.45am to 3pm for children aged 30 months to 59 months and has a predominately middle class intake. Inside, the decor is bright and colourful with joint work displayed on almost every wall. The children have three rooms to choose from during free play activities, they are not separated by age.

Typical daily routine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.45am - 10.40am</td>
<td>Arrival, free choice child-led activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.40am - 11.00am</td>
<td>Snack time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00am - 11.15am</td>
<td>Story time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.25am - 12.30pm</td>
<td>Children split into two groups for circle time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30pm - 1.00pm</td>
<td>Lunch time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00pm - 1.30pm</td>
<td>Movement and music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30pm - 3.00pm</td>
<td>Free choice child-led activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 A typical daily routine at Bumbles Pre-School

At the time of the research there were 18 children, aged 30 months to 58 months, in the setting each day and four members of staff plus the owner-manager. The staff team includes eight members of staff all qualified at either NVQ level 2 or 3 or NNEB level. This includes the owner-manager, who is a qualified teacher with over 10 years teaching experience. Having a manager qualified at graduate level was unusual for a pre-school operating within the PVI sector at the time the data was collected, having a member of staff qualified at this level and ‘outstanding’ judgement given by Ofsted indicate that the case
The setting is atypical of settings at that time and this is noteworthy. However, at the time this thesis was written the number of graduates working in the sector and the number of preschools achieving the highest Ofsted rating of Outstanding has increased and as such this becomes less significant.

Bumbles, though engaged with the Local Authority, was not part of any larger consortium or network. Their involvement in the project offered the staff team an opportunity to engage with University staff and with other early years practitioners engaged in the research, groups which they previously had limited exposure.

**The Relational Approach training**

The training and support sessions took place over one academic year (September to July). Training consisted of two full days’ training one week apart, followed by two further half days of supervision, all of which were held at the University of Brighton. One member of staff from Bumbles Pre-School attended the training and provided feedback to the other staff in the setting through activity planning and during staff meetings. The practitioner’s salary costs for those days were reimbursed to the pre-school by the funded research project to pay for staff cover whilst she was absent.

The training involved 16 practitioners (involved in the funded research projects) being provided with training which mirrored the training developed during the SPRinG research and subsequently developed by the Working With Others training and research consultancy. Delivering the training in this way was an integral part of the process. Mirroring the SPRinG training process meant that the practitioners were placed in the position of the children, i.e. they are required to work in groups with people they had not worked with before. Thus, following an introduction to the theory behind the Relational Approach, the practitioners were asked to undertake the activities aimed at building trust and communication skills. Here the trainers and researcher took on the role the practitioner would in the pre-school. This experience was a crucial element in building the practitioners understanding of their
role in the development of the Relational Approach and how their actions may be experienced by the children.

The programme of activities initially provided was that developed during the SPRinG study at Brighton for children aged five to seven years. Having experienced some of these activities the practitioners were then asked to adapt the activities to ensure they were suitable for use in pre-schools and other ECEC settings. Examples of the activities used are provided in table five below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I was...</td>
<td>Self-awareness and communication</td>
<td>The children each take a turn in stating “If I was an animal I would be.....”. E.g. ‘If I was an animal I would be a kangaroo because I am good at jumping/ I like jumping’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I introduce to you</td>
<td>To build trust</td>
<td>In a group, children pass around a stuffed toy introducing it to the child sat next to them. Once this can be achieved the children then add something they like about the child, e.g. nice ribbon in hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face patting to build trust</td>
<td>Enhance Social and communication skills</td>
<td>Children face each other and gently brush the face (or hands initially) of their partner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Examples of the relational activities used in Bumbles Pre-School following the Relational training

The second training day and the follow-up support sessions provided a space for the practitioners to discuss their initial attempts at using the activities and how both the children and other members of staff had received them. This reflective consideration allowed for practitioners concerns to be addressed and for the practitioners to offer support.
to each other. A key point stressed in this session was that rather than ‘backing away’ from an unsuccessful experience, practitioners should try and reflect upon what worked well and what proved challenging, and for them to consider what they may do differently next time. These sessions supported the development of the ‘constructive spiral of professional development’, noted as a valuable element of Reflective Practice by Pollard (2008). The practitioners benefited from hearing the views of other practitioners who offered alternative perspectives and through hearing about the experiences of others. The sessions offered them a forum in which to develop their reflective skills away from their busy settings.

Following the training and support sessions an additional support meeting was held at Bumbles to ensure all of the staff understood the Relational Approach and were supported to embed the Approach within their practice. I was present at each of these sessions and played a supportive role in the training. Detailed information regarding the training is attached as Appendix 14.

In this chapter I have presented the detail of the methodological position I adopt, the research design, an overview of the procedures employed to collect and analyse the data and a description of the case setting, Bumbles, and the training provided to the staff. The following chapters will present the findings and the analysis of findings.
4. Research Findings: Development of the Relational Approach

The following chapter will consider the development of the Relational Approach within Bumbles Pre-School. For clarity, both the findings and an analysis of findings will be presented concurrently using each of the research questions as chapter subheadings. A full discussion of the findings is presented in chapter seven.

In this section I will consider: the Relational Approach training; the development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles Pre-School; whether there were changes in the pre-school provision as a result of the Relational Approach training and, whether the children’s social networks increased. This information will allow me to determine whether the Relational Approach was developed and implemented in Bumbles Pre-School, the extent to which the practitioners implemented and developed the Relational Approach Programme, and ascertain whether this led to changes in Bumbles Pre-School comparable to those which occurred in the SPRinG schools. Understanding the development and impact of the Relational Approach in Bumbles Pre-School is essential and will inform the exploration of both theme two (pedagogy and practice) and theme three (practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions).
4.1 The Relational Approach in practice

Research question one: How was the Relational Approach put into practice in Bumbles Pre-School?

In this section I draw upon data collected through the observations, practitioner interviews and the research journal.

At the heart of this question is the need to understand the practicalities of how the Relational Approach was developed within Bumbles, to ascertain practitioner commitment to the programme across the duration of the project and to contribute to an understanding of whether the programme is suitable for use in pre-schools.

Implementing the Relational Approach in Bumbles Pre-School

The Relational Approach was introduced to the practitioners through training which was provided by the research team at the University of Brighton. One practitioner from Bumbles, Beth, attended the Relational Approach training sessions and fed back her learning to the other practitioners. The training, which involved bringing together 16 practitioners from pre-schools and reception classes across Sussex, took place over two days, with follow-up supervision sessions held at the University each term.

The training involved the practitioners being introduced to the theoretical framework of the Relational Approach and then to the programme devised to support its implementation in primary schools. The training sessions required the practitioners to participate in the activities as a group so they could gain an understanding of how the activities, and their role supporting the activities, would be experienced by the children. Given the programme had originally been developed for primary school children (aged five to seven years), the practitioners were asked to look at specific activities within the programme, assess their suitability for use with pre-school children and adapt them as they saw appropriate. They then shared their ideas with the whole group. The practitioners then took these ideas away,
trialled the activities within their settings, and made further amendments as necessary. They then shared their experiences with the group at the next training and/or supervision sessions. This dialogue between practitioners proved hugely beneficial. Beth stated:

It was really helpful [discussing the activities with other practitioners]; they gave me ideas for working in a different way, and gave me ideas for activities to try with our children.

Beth, phase one

The discussion and feedback sessions resulted in a handbook of new and revised activities deemed suitable for use in pre-schools (and reception classes in schools) being drafted. This supported the practitioners to develop the Relational Approach within their setting. The changes made to the activities varied but most frequently they related to making the activity more suitable for children with less well-developed communication skills. For example, rather than asking children to explain what they enjoyed in an activity, a traffic light system was devised to provide a way for them to begin expressing their opinions regarding an activity (i.e. Red: no, Amber: middle/ok, Green: yes). This was seen to be introducing the children to sharing their feedback in a way which was inclusive to all the children in the setting.

Beth took the draft programme of activities and fed back her learning at staff meetings at Bumbles. She also integrated the activities devised into their activity planning. Having only one practitioner attend the training and then feeding back to the team could have been problematic as the Relational Approach is devised as a whole setting approach and, as such, it is intended that it would be adopted by the entire staff team. I was, however, relying upon one member of staff to convey the philosophy of the Relational Approach and support its implementation by all the practitioners in the pre-school; a group who had not experienced the activities themselves or been provided with any opportunity to discuss that experience.
This approach was deemed appropriate as it would not have been possible for all staff to attend the two full days of training or the follow-up support sessions, due to time and financial constraints. In addition, throughout this project it was vital to both me and the staff at Bumbles that the children and their needs remained the key priority. Removing multiple members of staff from the pre-school or closing the setting for additional training days was not considered to be in the best interests of the children. Analysis of the phase one practitioner interview data revealed that the practitioners had a positive attitude towards being involved in the research and they stated that they were happy for Beth to attend the training and feed back to them. However, feeding back the training in this way was not without its challenges.

Training one practitioner at Bumbles worked well. There was evidence to suggest the programme was being following and that the children were engaging in the activities. However, early in phase two I noted that the pre and debrief were not being used. Specifically, it was noted that they were not being used during circle time activities which were led and planned by Clare. I felt this was an area which needed development, as circle time sessions provided one of the few opportunities for use of the pre and debrief within the pre-school environment. I discussed my observation with both Beth and Clare asking them if there were any challenges to using the pre and debrief that they would like to discuss and if it would be helpful if I provided any additional support. Within this discussion Beth indicated that she was not sure that the pre and debrief were suitable for use with young children. She also felt that the current approach to beginning a circle time with a discussion of the rules was adequate. The rules included children not speaking unless it was their turn and listening to their peers. This discussion of the rules did not align with the pre and debrief as devised by the SPRinG research. For example, the children are not being asked what it takes to work together nor are they being asked how the session went and what they had learned about working with others. As a result of this conversation I arranged
for a teacher, who had used the Approach in her reception class, to spend an afternoon in Bumbles with the practitioners, discussing the approach. During the afternoon the teacher modelled the use of the pre and debrief. Following this meeting, which was held in February, use of the pre and debrief did increase, as shown in the table six.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Observations of the prebrief and debrief being used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Sept - Dec)</td>
<td>0 of 8 instances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (Jan - Apr)</td>
<td>3 of 8 instances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (May - July)</td>
<td>8 of 8 instances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6 Use of the pre and debrief across the three phases of data collection*

Whilst this additional training for the pre and debrief positively supported the implementation of the programme, this highlights an instance of how my presence in the pre-school influenced the outcomes. Would the programme have been implemented fully had I not been present in the pre-school? This also raises questions regarding whether my initial observation that one practitioner from a staff team attending training and then feeding back to the group worked well. This is an issue of importance as it is recognised that the greatest impact of programmes or interventions within ECEC and schools is seen where initiatives are adopted by all staff (e.g. Banerjee, 2010). In addition, as the Relational Approach was developed as a pedagogic practice, it was important that the staff team understood the approach and were committed to and understood the processes, including the activities and the pre and debriefing. Having not experienced the development of the Relational Approach first hand, as those who attended the training had, may have impacted upon their understanding and their ability to place themselves within the position of the child.

Practitioner qualification level may also have been an important factor which influenced the Relational Approach development at Bumbles. Within the literature review I noted that the majority of ECEC practitioners lack a graduate level training (DfES, 2005), rooted in theories
of child development and learning, and that as such they would need clear guidance and support to allow them to implement interventions/programmes to their greatest potential. The practitioners at Bumbles had a graduate supporting their practice – Anita – the owner/manager. Yet, Anita was seldom observed leading practice. This may have impacted upon their understanding and may explain why further support was required.

**How the Relational Approach was developed in practice**

Whilst the practitioners tailored the activities provided within the Relational Approach programme there was very little adaptation required to ensure the Approach was suitable for use with the pre-school. Analysis of the observation data revealed that the use of the pre and debrief in Bumbles differed from the use of the pre and debrief I had observed within the SPRinG schools. In these schools there was a very specific task to focus the discussions, for example, how the children could work together to choose which items to pack into a suitcase for a beach holiday. In the prebrief the teacher could facilitate a discussion which focussed on the skills required to complete the task, e.g. how they would share the writing and the drawing, how they would need to listen to each other’s ideas. In Bumbles, however, there were less directed tasks and the children had yet to reach the levels of trust and communication required for the introduction of problem-solving tasks which would require them to work collaboratively. I believe this is indicative of the different pedagogic approaches taken in schools and pre-school, with pre-schools favouring child-directed play.

By phase three, towards the end of the research, Clare had adapted the prebrief to ensure its suitability for the children in her care. At the outset of a circle time activity she would discuss the rules of circle time with the children, rules which they were familiar with, and then introduce a new concept or an idea which related to thinking about a social competency, e.g. the need to share. Within the activity Clare then built upon the concept she had introduced and worked with the children to support them to think about the concept (for example, sharing) and how the children could use this knowledge to think
about the ways in which they behave (e.g. thinking about whether they share). An example of such an interaction is provided within the following excerpt.

In a phase three circle time Clare introduces the session and informs the children that she will read to them the ‘Selfish Crocodile’ by Faustin Charles.

**Clare:** Ok so I am going to read this book to you and we are going to talk about what happens in the book. Can anyone remember what we need to do in circle time so we can work together?

**Izzy:** We need to listen.

**Isaac:** We take turns in talking.

**Clare:** Great, right, does anybody know what selfish means.

**Henry:** Well he wants the other animals to stay away from his river.

**Clare:** Yes that is part of what being selfish means – he doesn’t want to share. If you are being selfish you’re not sharing, you’re not being kind to others around you and you are thinking about yourself and not the others around you. [pause] Why might I get upset if I heard children at Bumbles arguing about toys?

**Isaac:** They belong to Bumbles.

**Clare:** That’s right, they are for everybody to play with and if we share it makes it nice for everybody to be here.

**Izzy:** Yes, and the crocodile becomes really nice.

**Clare:** Does he? Does something happen to make him change?

Silence.

**Clare:** Shall we read the story and find out if anything changes.

They read the first part of the story and have a number of discussions. Clare acts out the crocodile shouting at the other animals.

**Clare:** As well as being selfish what else is the crocodile doing?
Alice: He’s being really nasty.

Clare: Yes, these animals look very scared and frightened.

George: He is nasty. Look, the monkey is covering his ears.

Clare: Yes, why is that? How do you feel if somebody shouts at you? If somebody stood and shouted at you like that it is very frightening. When you play animals and roaring do you think about how the other person might feel about you roaring loudly in their face?

Izzy: They might not like it...it might be scary...

Clare: Yes, we must be very careful of the things we do and say to other people, we need to think about how what we are doing might make them feel. It is up to us what we do and how we treat others.

This conversation continues and Clare engages the children in a number of discussions about how they would feel and how they would react to others who shout at them or won’t share with them and whether they would want to spend time with them. Following these discussions she gives each child a chance to say what they would say to the crocodile if they met him.

Bethany: I would say ‘I don’t like you shouting at me and I’m leaving’.

Clare: That’s a good idea, it is very important that if you don’t like what somebody is doing you say that you don’t like it and that if you don’t think you can do this on your own that you ask somebody for help. Who might you ask for help?

The excerpt shows how the prebrief and the circle time sessions changed following the training. Clare informed the children about the plan for the circle time session, and the session had a focus on building the children’s understanding of the skills required to play and work well together. From the analysis of this data and observing further circle time sessions I conclude that Clare was engaged with the idea of implementing the pre and debrief but that she had either modified them to ensure the conversation was suitable for the varying capabilities and levels of understanding the children at Bumbles held or, she had
taken the first steps to implementing the pre and debrief and that further changes may have been observed as she become more confident in using the Approach. Clare commented:

the pre and debrief seems a bit advanced for the kinds of activities we do, we don’t have these sorts of tasks or pieces of problem solving so it will be different when you see it here [at Bumbles].

Clare, phase three

Practitioner experience of the Relational Approach implementation

Three practitioners were interviewed in each of the three core phases of data collection (nine interviews in total); the pre-school owner/manager (Anita), the pre-school leader (Beth) and the member of staff responsible for circle time (Clare). An additional interview was conducted with Beth during the scoping phase. One focus of the interviews was eliciting information regarding the practitioners’ experience of developing the Relational Approach and using the programme.

Interviews conducted during the scoping phase and phase one of the research project reveal how staff felt about adopting the approach. They stated that developing children’s social competencies was a key part of their role and, whilst they relied mainly upon circle time as a tool to support their development in a formal way, that supporting the development of social competencies was an important part of their everyday practice which filtered into all of their interactions with the children. They therefore felt that they would not be required to change their practice hugely to adopt the Approach. They saw it more as a ‘formalising of what we do already’ (Beth, scoping phase).

As the member of staff who attended the training and fed back her learning to the practitioners at Bumbles, Beth commented that she had enjoyed the training days, particularly meeting with other practitioners to gain ideas on how to shape the activities to
make them suitable for the younger children. She stated that the staff team had been willing to include the activities and that they had all enjoyed them.

Yet, I had noted that there were complexities to this process, I felt Clare had been more reserved about engaging in the process, something which she was open about in the interviews. She stated that she was less sure than the other practitioners about the Relational Approach and the activities. This seemed to stem from expectations she had of the children:

I think it is slightly difficult as some of the activities are aimed at the slightly older child and some of those activities are hard to incorporate with our age group.

Clare, phase two

Clare also commented that children of this age are not ‘able to tell you what they think’ (Clare, phase one). Together these statements highlight Clare’s position on child development. I believe at the outset of the research she held the opinion that this Relational Approach was unlikely to work with pre-school children as it is not developmentally appropriate. This is interesting as the practitioners attending the training sessions had felt that they adapted the activities in such a way that all of the children in their setting should be able to be involved. This may be an indication that practitioners have different expectations of young children, which may relate to the conflicting philosophical positions held by individuals working within ECEC.

As the research progressed into phase two I asked the practitioners whether they felt the training and the feedback they had received from Beth had had any impact on their practice.

Anita stated that she was pleased with the progress, and that she thought the staff and children had enjoyed the Relational Approach programme activities. As she was often based
within the office rather than in direct contact with the children she deferred to the other practitioners for comments on the day-to-day implementation of the programme. This is noteworthy as whilst I had envisaged the staff team having their practice led by a graduate at the outset of the research, day-to-day practice was largely left to the lesser qualified practitioners.

Beth and Clare stated that there had been some impact on their practice by month five of the research (phase two) and they recognised that they were thinking more about how they used groups to support children’s learning and development:

- The best thing it has done it has made us think about it [using groups] and look at it in a different way.

  **Beth, phase two**

- I think more about how even if they can’t work with another particular child, they need to at least be tolerant of them and to sit next to them without creating mayhem.

  **Clare, phase two**

Such comments suggest that the practitioners were developing the Relational Approach and that they were recognising some changes in their practice. Whilst these changes are quite practical there is an indication their practice and expectations were evolving. Clare was at this point expecting the children to behave differently than she did previously; she was expecting the children to be able to cooperate with each other in a way she had not done prior to the Relational Approach training. During the phase two interviews the practitioners stated that they did not feel that there had been any noticeable change in the children’s behaviour as a result of the development of the Relational Approach.

Towards the end of the research (phase three, July) it was possible to elicit greater detail from the practitioners regarding their experience of implementing the programme. When
asked again how they had found implementing the programme Anita was very positive about the programme, the training and the support the staff had received. She stated she had noticed differences in how the children were getting on together and that they had been more tolerant of each other. She noted how the older children were being more patient with the younger children. This could indicate that the power relations within the setting are improved, which may lead to increased collaborative learning (Damon and Phelps (1989)). It is noteworthy that Anita was more focussed upon discussing the changes in the children’s behaviours than any impact on her practice.

Beth was also very positive about the programme; she stated that they had seen a number of positive changes. Beth noted that changes had come about very recently and that she now recognised that it had taken a great deal of time, almost the full ‘academic’ year, to embed the philosophy of the Relational Approach into the pre-school and into their practice. This contrasts with her comment within the scoping phase (12 months earlier) that it was more a ‘formalisation of what we do anyway’. As she had reflected upon her practice and the impact that this may have on the children’s development this view has changed. She noted how the additional pre and debrief training in phase two had supported the development of the programme and assisted her in her role of supporting the staff. I propose that it is therefore necessary to ensure support is available to staff who are feeding learning of this manner back to staff teams where change in practice is expected. Given these staff have not had the experience of participating in these activities as those who had attended the training sessions had, they may find it more challenging to understand their role in supporting these activities and how this may be experienced by the children. Having time to reflect upon their role and their practice would support a spiral of professional development leading to an increase in both the quality of their practice (Pollard, 2008) and their understanding of their role within this process.
By phase three Clare was very positive about her experience. She stated that initially she had had reservations about the Approach but that the children had exceeded her expectations. She commented that the children had been able to express themselves in ways she would not have expected. She felt that changes were really just coming about in recent weeks and that she was looking forward to seeing how it would impact upon the children who would be at Bumbles for another year.

Overall, the practitioners felt it had not been too challenging to adopt the Approach and that once they had become familiar with the programme and its aims,

It was easy to fit the activities and philosophy into our everyday practice.

Beth, phase three

All three of the practitioner’s interviewed stated that they had observed positive changes in the children which they believe related to the introduction of the Relational Approach. These changes took time to achieve, this was not unexpected. As highlighted in the literature review (Stevens 2007), it takes time for pedagogic practice to change. As it took time for practice to change, changes in the children’s behaviour could only be expected to occur in the latter stages of the research. Whilst they felt it had not been too challenging it had required substantial and sustained commitment.

My presence in the pre-school and the additional training session I organised could have had a substantial impact on the results. Considering this issue I refer to the findings of the funded projects which ran concurrently with this project. In those projects, 13 of the 15 practitioners attending the training with Beth reported similar findings and that they did not have any additional support (Kutnick et al., 2007). (The two remaining practitioners did not complete the research.) I therefore conclude that, whilst my presence will have had an impact, this does not take away from the potential benefits of adopting the Relational Approach within a pre-school environment.
4.2 The impact of the Relational Approach at Bumbles Pre-School

Research question two: Is there an increase in the use of groups as a pedagogic tool? Does the composition of the groups change?

In this section I draw upon data collected through the pre-school maps.

Whilst the practitioners themselves indicated that there had been changes in the pre-school as a result of their participation in the research, I wanted to look at how, if at all, practitioner use of groups had changed.

The pre-school maps recorded the use of groups within both child-led and practitioner-led activities. In total, 34 maps were collected across the four phases. In phases one, two and three, five pre-school maps per phase focussed on practitioner-led activities (total 15) and five per phase focussed on child-led activities (total 15). A small number of pre-school maps (four) were gathered during the scoping phase for practitioner-led groups only. The tables and discussions which follow provide a summary of the findings. Given the relatively small numbers, raw scores are provided as there is insufficient data for any statistical analysis to be applied.

Practitioner-led groups

Table 7 provides information on the use and composition of groups at Bumbles during practitioner-led activities in each of the research phases.
Table 7 Use and composition of groups during practitioner-led activities

The pre-school map data collected during practitioner-led activities illustrates that practitioner-led groups:

- were large in size, using either the whole group or splitting the group into two and increased in size from a mean size of 12.7 in phase one to 17.8 in phase three
- were always mixed sex and mixed friendship groups
- in phases one and two children were sometimes split by age for activities — 2 of 7 in phase one and 3 of 7 in phase two. Yet, in phase three all activities observed involved mixed aged groups
- the use of peer communication during group activities increased across the three phases — from 2 of 7 in phase one and two to 4 of 5 in phase three
- comparison of the scoping phase data and the phase three data reveals that there is an increase in the number of activities requiring children to be involved in a joint task, despite no joint task activities being observed in phase two of the research.

These findings suggest that there has been a slight change in practitioner use of groups. The size of the groups has increased, indicating more whole ‘class’ activities, including children
of different ages. There has been a slight increase in the use of tasks which require cooperation during the practitioner-led activities with an increase in the number of activities which require joint communication, though joint tasks were not observed in phase two. This demonstrates that a key feature of the Relational Approach was being played out in Bumbles as the children are engaging more with the activity and with their peers. Though the use of groups as a pedagogic tool and as defined by the SPRinG research is less evident. It is also useful to consider the role the practitioner took during these sessions, which could also be extracted from the pre-school maps.

Table 8 below provides details of the role the practitioner took during the practitioner-led sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner role</th>
<th>Scoping Phase (July)</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing Activity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing Activity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting/Playing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Child</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Groups</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 The role of practitioner during practitioner-led activities

The figures in table 8 highlight a change in the role of the practitioner within the practitioner-led groupings across the phases, namely that:

- in phase one practitioners took the role of director (in 5 of 7 instances) and when they were not directing they were introducing activities to the children (in 2 of 7 instances)
- in phase two the role had shifted to be one which was less directive (2 of 7 instances) and incorporated more play and acting (3 of 7 instances)
By phase three practitioners were not directing children but acting and playing – joining the games and activities — (in 4 of 5 instances) or responding to the child (in 1 of 5 instances). This suggests a change in practice which is not explained by a natural change in practice as the children develop. The scoping phase data shows that at the end of the previous academic year the practitioners were predominantly introducing and directing activities as they were in phase one.

The data reveals a change in practice with the practitioner being less directive, an approach related to outcomes focussed pedagogic styles, to acting and playing with the children — potentially indicating their practice has become more child focused. I believe that these changes represent a change in the pedagogic style adopted by the practitioners; this assertion will be explored in the following chapter.

Child-led groups

Presented below is the pre-school map data collected during the child-led activities. As there are more child-led groups than practitioner-led groups, percentages have been added in brackets to aid the reading of the raw data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean group size</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mixed sex groups</td>
<td>8 (31%)</td>
<td>10 (31%)</td>
<td>14 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mixed friendship groups</td>
<td>6 (23%)</td>
<td>8 (25%)</td>
<td>11 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children acting alone</td>
<td>4 (15%)</td>
<td>12 (38%)</td>
<td>12 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mixed age groups</td>
<td>8 (31%)</td>
<td>8 (25%)</td>
<td>16 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of groups involved in peer communication</td>
<td>16 (62%)</td>
<td>14 (43%)</td>
<td>19 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of groups involved in a joint task</td>
<td>8 (31%)</td>
<td>6 (19%)</td>
<td>11 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of groups</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 The role of practitioner during child-led activities
This data provided in table 9 illustrates that the child-led groups:

- increased in number from phase one to three, the increase relates to an increase in the number of children acting alone
- were small in size ranging from a mean size of 3.2 in phase one to 2.7 in phase three
- were more likely to be composed of same sex children, however there is an increase in the number of mixed sex groupings from 8 of 26 (31%) in phase one to 14 of 33 (42%) in phase three
- were more likely to be composed of friends, however we see an increase in the numbers of mixed friendship groups, i.e. children choosing to be in groups with those they have not identified as being their friend, from 6 of 26 (23%) in phase one to 14 of 33 (33%) in phase three
- were more likely to be composed of same age children, however we see an increase in the numbers of mixed aged groups, from 8 of 26 (31%) in phase one to 16 of 33 (49%) in phase three
- demonstrated little change in their use of peer communication between the phases – from 16 of 26 in phase one, 14 of 32 in phase two 19 of 33 in phase three, representing a slight decrease of 2%
- involved children in joint tasks around one third of the time (31%), with a dip in this to 19% in phase two, increasing to 33% in phase three, suggesting the children are not engaging in many more joint tasks than at the outset of the project during the child-led activities.

When considering the findings of the pre-school map data (table 7) in relation to children’s experiences of child-led groupings (table 8), there is evidence of some small changes. There is a slight increase in the number of children acting alone, which in itself may have an important developmental role (Henniger, 1994; Lloyd and Howe, 2003). The groups are slightly smaller in size and there was an increase in the number of mixed sex, mixed age,
mixed friendship groupings across the phases. I propose that this is a positive development as the children are interacting with a wider group, increasing their opportunities for learning. Yet, there is no evidence to suggest that there is greater communication between children and their peers or an increased use of tasks which require collaboration. This issue of children’s interactions with their peers will be explored further in chapter six, where more detailed observations of the interactions will be scrutinised. With the focus here remaining on the use of groups in Bumbles, in the following section I will consider the role of the practitioner within the child-led groups.

Table 10 presents the roles I observed the practitioner taking across the three core phases of data collection. When I observed the groups there would always have been a practitioner present in the room, however, I have recorded them as ‘not present’ unless they were engaged in an activity with the children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner Role</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>16 (62%)</td>
<td>19 (60%)</td>
<td>18 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>6 (23%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing Activity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing Activity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting/Playing</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Child</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Groups</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 The role taken by the practitioner across the three research phases

The table shows that within the child-led groupings:
in phase one, practitioners were most likely to be absent from child-led groups (in 16 of 26 instances) with the role of observing being the second most likely role (in 6 of 26 instances)

in phase two the role had shifted slightly, whilst being absent remained the most common role (in 19 of 32 instances), practitioners were also seen to be directing (in 2 instances) and introducing activities (in 4 instances)

in phase three, practitioners remained absent in over half of the child-led groups (in 18 of 33 instances), there are no notable changes in the other roles.

The findings that the practitioners were most likely to be absent from child-led groups supports the case presented in the literature that children in pre-schools spend a greater proportion of their time with their peers than with adults (e.g. Layzer, Goodson and Moss, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog and Kontos, 1998). Nevertheless, overall findings of the pre-school map data reveals that the children are experiencing exposure to a range of classroom structures, including both small and whole group practitioner-led and child-led sessions. This varied experience is generally accepted as beneficial to children’s development (Bowman et al., 2001).

Where the practitioner was present in the child-led groupings, the data indicates a change in the role they adopted, which is manifested in increased time spent by practitioners introducing or directing child-led activities. This increase, although slight, is one which requires further consideration. As briefly touched upon within the literature review, whilst children’s play is their time for free exploration, the role of the practitioner in supporting that play and scaffolding learning is crucial. This practice removes what Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) coined the ‘early childhood error’, where practitioners lay out a stimulating play environment but do not support children in play. Does this represent a change in the practitioners’ pedagogic practice and understanding and, as such, the children are benefiting from greater support? This issue will be considered further in chapter five —
Pedagogy and practice, where more detailed observations of these interactions will be scrutinised. Notable is the fact that the practitioners were not found recorded as increasing the observations they made of the children during the child-led activities.

The findings considered so far have indicated that the Relational Approach has been successfully implemented within Bumbles and that there are indications its implementation has led to some changes in the use of groups and the role the practitioner takes within those groups. I will now move on to consider whether there is evidence to suggest that there was increased support for the development of children’s social competencies.

**Research question three: Is there evidence of increased practitioner support for the development of children’s social competencies?**

In this section I draw upon data collected through the environmental rating scales.

Support for the development of children’s social competencies is a key theme throughout the analysis of the findings. In this section I will specifically focus upon the data collected through the environmental rating scales. The environmental rating scale data was designed by the SPRinG research team at Brighton to capture information about the environment and to examine practitioner support for child-peer collaborative relationships, and thus support for their developing social competencies. The data is useful in providing an insight into practitioner focus on, and support for, activities which develop children’s social competencies, collaborations and group work. The data collected, which involved the completion of the environmental rating scale sheet (Appendix 10), was collected on five occasions during each of the three phases and, three times during the scoping phase. The following table provides the mean score for each of the six areas measured across the phases. The maximum score was five.
The environmental rating scale scores across phases indicate that there has been an increase in support for the development of children’s social competencies. There were increases in all categories from the scoping phase to phase three, phases one to two and phases two to three, (with the exception of adult training which increased only between the scoping phase and phase three and phases two and three). Each of these categories will now be considered in greater detail.

**Learning Contexts**

This score provides information about the pre-school environment. The scores given were based on factors, such as activities being laid out, which can be undertaken by multiple children and displays of joint work. These items represent a focus on the provision of opportunities for collaboration and the value placed upon collaboration. Bumbles was rated highly in this category prior to the introduction of the Relational Approach, however, there was an increase of 1 point in the mean scores given between both phase one (at the outset of the development of the Relational Approach) and phase three (at the end of the research) and between the end of the previous academic year — the scoping phase and the end of the focus year (phase three). This indicates a change in the environment across the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoping Phase (July)</th>
<th>Learning Contexts</th>
<th>Activities and Tasks</th>
<th>Practitioner Role A</th>
<th>Practitioner Role B</th>
<th>Peer Interactions A</th>
<th>Peer Interactions B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase One (September)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two (January)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three (July)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 11 The findings of the environmental rating scale*
duration of the project which is not explained by practitioners merely changing their practice as the children mature.

Linking this to previous research, these findings suggest that the practitioners have adopted some of those roles identified as necessary for supporting the development of group work skills, e.g. providing a suitable environment in which group work can thrive (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick, 2007), providing tasks which require group work (Blatchford et al. 2003), maintaining pupil motivation through recognising efforts (Stevens, 2008), which provides further evidence that training resulted in the desires effects on practice and provision at Bumbles and ultimately the children’s pre-school experience.

**Activities and Tasks**

This category recorded how the children were being supported to undertake collaborative activities. There is an increase in the mean scores across phases from 1.25 and 1.2 to 3.6, from the scoping phase and phase one, to phase three respectively. Again, indicating an increase in the availability of relational activities and encouragement of collaboration across the duration of the project. Indicating that although group work as understood within the schools context was not observed that the children were engaging in collaborative activities; activities which may serve as an introduction to group work.

**Practitioner Role A**

These scores are based upon the number of instances practitioners were seen to be using the pre and debrief and/or modelling social competencies such as sharing and cooperation. The scores reveal that there is an increase in the mean scores across phases from 2 and 1.6 to 4.6, from the scoping phase and phase one, to phase three respectively. This indicates a change in practitioner practice and an increase in their use of modelling; a point which will be revisited in chapter six.
Practitioner Role B

These scores record how practitioners use activities to encourage trust, sharing and communication skills. Essentially this category measures the use of the Relational Approach activities in Bumbles. This was another area in which gains were recorded, from 2.25 and 2, in the scoping phase and phase one to 3.8 in phase three. This indicates that the programme was being implemented, the activities were being used and that there was a change in practice. Again, the changes from both the scoping phase and phase one scores suggest that these changes do not relate to changes in practice which naturally occur as the children mature. They also suggest that it has taken time for the activities to be integrated into the day-to-day provision and that there is the potential for this to be increased further. This supports the literature reviewed, which stated that it takes time for practice to change (Stevens 2007) and for new ways of working to become embedded, and also supports the practitioner comments that it has taken time to implement the programme. This supports my assertion that changes in the children’s interactions are only likely to come to fruition towards the end of the research as a consequence. The scores for peer interactions allow me to explore this issue further.

Peer Interactions A

This category is focussed upon children’s interactions with their peers. These scores rose from 2 and 1.6 to 3.4 from the scoping phase and phase one, to phase three respectively. This indicates a change in the children’s behaviours, with children engaged in more discussions, collaborations and using group roles following the introduction of the Relational Approach. This lends further support to my assertion that the changes seen in practitioner practice and the environment are having an impact on children’s peer interactions. These interactions will be explored in greater depth in chapter six.

These results contrast with the results of the mapping data which revealed no increase in communication in the child-led groupings. I propose that the mapping data provided a
snapshot in time and focused on specific acts, whilst this data is based upon communication and collaboration over the entire day and therefore may be more useful. This highlights how tools designed to collect data may not be reliable when used alone and, how using a combination of tools and providing a space for the practitioners to voice their opinions, is an essential aspect of this research.

**Peer Interactions B**

This category provided further detail of children’s peer interactions within tasks requiring collaboration. There was an increase from 1.25 and 1 in the scoping phase and phase one to 3.6 across phase three. This indicates that, whilst involved in these activities, the children demonstrated a greater ability to work collaboratively and they were involved in more positive interactions with their peers. This data will be considered and built upon in chapter six, where the observation data will be referred to and excerpts of these interactions provided and scrutinised.

Overall, the environmental rating scale data presents a picture which indicates that there was more relational activity taking place within the pre-school in phase three than in phase one or the scoping phase. These changes relate to changes in the environment, in the practitioners’ practice and pedagogic style, and children’s interactions with their peers. This suggests that the Relational Approach had been adopted in Bumbles Pre-School. This supports the general theme of the findings thus far, that the Relational Approach has been implemented by the practitioners at Bumbles and that changes in practitioner practice and children’s interactions are evident.

**Research question four: Is there evidence to suggest the implementation of the Relational Approach led to an increase in children’s social networks?**

In this section I draw upon data collected through the sociometry and the pre-school maps.
The sociometry data forms the primary data source regarding children’s social networks. Sociometric techniques were employed across the three phases and children were asked to identify ‘who they like to play with?’ and ‘who they like to work with/do activities with, such as painting and cooking?’. The practitioners were also asked to complete a sociometry on the basis of who they thought the children would choose in phases one and three. There is no scoping phase data, as different children would have been involved and, as I did not have any information regarding their social networks at the beginning of the year, this data would be of little benefit.

**Sociometry — child play choices**

Each child’s choices for who they liked to play with were recorded and analysed so that reciprocal choices could be identified, i.e. where two children had chosen each other. Table 12 below provides information on the number of choices and reciprocal choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Play choices</th>
<th>Mean Play Choices</th>
<th>Number Reciprocated Play choices</th>
<th>Mean Reciprocated Play Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(September)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(January)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Three</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(July)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 12 The sociometric data: children’s choices and reciprocal choices for play*

The children’s play choices indicate:

- an increase in the number of play choices from a mean score of 3.2 in phase one to 3.5 in phase two, to 4.6 in phase three
- an increase in the number of reciprocated play choices from 2 in phases one and two, to 2.3 in phase three.
These results indicate a slight increase in children’s social networks, i.e. children are indicating that they have an increased number of peers they like to play with.

**Sociometry — practitioner-anticipated play choices**

The practitioners indicated who they thought each child would select as a child they liked to play with. These choices were analysed in the same manner as the child choices. The results are presented in table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Play choices</th>
<th>Mean Play Choices</th>
<th>Number reciprocated Play choices</th>
<th>Mean reciprocated Play Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(September)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(July)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 The sociometric data: practitioner choices for play

The practitioner-completed sociometry for play indicates:

- a perceived increase in the number of play choices children would make from a mean score of 1.3 in phase one to 2.6 in phase three
- a perceived increase in the number of reciprocated play choices from 0.9 in phase one to 1.8 in phase three
- practitioners underestimate the number of children in the pre-school that a child would report liking to play with for both phases one and three.

**Sociometry – child work choices**

Each child’s choices for who they liked to work with were recorded and then compared to allow reciprocal choices to be identified, i.e. two children had chosen each other. The results are provided in table 14.
The children’s selection for work activities reveals:

- an increase in the number of work choices from a mean score of 0.7 in phase one to 2.4 in phase three
- an increase in the number of reciprocated work choices from 0.3 in phase one to 0.8 in phase three.

**Work – practitioner completed**

The practitioner choices were analysed in the same manner as the child choices, the results are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Work Choices</th>
<th>Mean Work Choices</th>
<th>Number Reciprocated Work choices</th>
<th>Mean Reciprocated Work Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(September)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Three</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(July)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 The Sociometric data: Practitioner choices and reciprocal choices for play

The practitioner completed sociometry for work indicates the practitioners reported:
- a perceived increase in the number of work choices children would make from a mean score of 1 in phase one to 2.2 in phase three
- a perceived increase in the number of reciprocated work choices from 0.8 in phase one to 1.1 in phase three
- that practitioners’ expectations for children’s choices aligned more with the children’s choices for work than for play.

The sociometric data suggest that children’s social networks did increase over the lifetime of the project, more so for play than for work activities. It is noteworthy that the children differentiated between who they would like to work and play with. The practitioners underestimated the number of children the children would state they would like to play and work with, though the disparity between these decreased by phase three indicating the practitioner have a greater understanding of the children’s social networks following the development of the Approach.

These findings show that the children’s social networks have increased. This is a positive development, as for children to gain the greatest potential from their peer interactions their networks need to be as large as possible and include children who differ from themselves. This is further indication that the development of the Relational Approach has yielded findings within Bumbles Pre-School which are comparable to the changes recorded in the SPRinG schools.
4.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have reported the results of the evaluative element of my research. I have found that the Relational Approach training led to changes in practitioner practice, including changes in practitioner use of groups and an increase in the use of activities which support the development of social competencies. I have found that these changes led children’s social networks to increase; something which I have argued will increase opportunities for learning.

Given these changes align with the findings of the SPRinG research I assert that the Relational Approach can be adopted for use within pre-schools. I further claim that its adoption by pre-school staff will lead to a widening of children’s social networks, as noted by the SPRinG research. Such a claim is supported by the findings of the funded research projects. These findings are reported in Appendix 2 and 3.

I will now move on using Bumbles Pre-School as a context in which to explore the theory-seeking questions posed; questions which interrogate the processes by which such changes occur.
5. Research Findings: Pedagogy and Practice

In this chapter I explore changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice following the Relational Approach training. The observation data gathered across the three phases of the research is analysed using the adapted version of the CCIS (Carl, 2007) and the attributes of high-quality pre-school provision identified by the EEPE team (Sylva et al., 2004).

5.1 Pedagogic style

Research question five: What changes, if any, occurred in the pedagogic style of the practitioners?

In this section I draw upon data collected through the practitioner interviews, observations and my research journal.

Pedagogy and practice prior to the Relational Approach training

Through the information gathered during the practitioner interviews and the observations I gained an understanding of the pedagogic style of each of the practitioners.

Anita, a qualified teacher, has a very nurturing caring style. She is very confident in her practice and from our discussions it is clear she has a wealth of theoretical knowledge and practical experience which underpin her pedagogy and practice. Anita has considerable practical experience in both schools and pre-schools. She uses this experience and her expertise to guide the practice of the other practitioners by engaging in planning for the children and supporting practitioner professional development. Her interest in participating in this project is one such example of this support. However, I rarely observe Anita with the children for any length of time as her management duties keep her occupied elsewhere. This is due to the set day that I attend Bumbles. This is a day when the staff-child ratio is
such that Anita is relieved from her duties to attend to matters in the office. Anita spends two to three days with the children during a typical week, but I was not able to observe this.

Anita values outcomes for individual children and is keen to support the children to develop the skills she believes they will need to thrive at school. Anita is also very aware that for individual children their needs and rate of development will differ and, as such, she is keen to support the children as individuals. I believe her understanding of child development, inclusion and the value she places upon the professional development of the staff at Bumbles reflect her postgraduate training.

Beth, qualified to NVQ level 3, takes on much of the pre-school planning; her time is spent with the children managing the day-to-day activities during opening hours. Beth also has a very nurturing caring style; the children sit on her knee during free play time as they wish. She is very calm and patient with both the children and the staff. She engages in frequent direct conversations with children, following their interests and supporting their cognitive and social development. Her approach is one of supporting friendship and respect amongst the children. For example, when a child was observed arguing with another child for stepping on their game she encouraged each to view the situation from the other’s perspective, ‘he was playing and enjoying his game’, ‘she was working very hard and we must be careful of each other and each other’s things’.

I noted in my research journal during phase one that whilst Beth encourages respect she often provides answers for the children rather than supporting them to reach their own solutions. This provides an insight into Beth’s expectations of young children’s capabilities and how this impacts upon her practice. This mirrors an issue which was raised during the literature review and an issue Clare raised, which I discussed in relation to the implementation of the Approach – do children have the skills to adopt the Relational Approach or are they too egocentric?
I believe that Beth values learning processes and favours a relational pedagogy, evidenced by her focus on inclusive practices and friendship between the children, yet I feel she does not have the knowledge or resources to fully realise this. Indeed she herself commented that she wanted to participate in the project to further her knowledge.

**Clare**, qualified to NVQ level 2, takes on the planning and leading of circle time. Clare also adopts a caring approach, often using adjectives just as ‘lovely’ to describe the children. She is louder than the other practitioners and is happy to get involved in the more boisterous activities. It is clear from her manner that she has less experience than Anita and Beth of working with young children. She joined the pre-school four years ago having had her own children and looking to return to work after a period of being a full-time mother. Previous to this she worked in a sales office.

During her interactions with the children Clare sometimes struggles for words to describe items to children using words such as ‘resources’ and when she sees the children have not understood this she use the term ‘stuff’ instead. Clare also seems to tire of the children more easily than Anita or Beth. This is demonstrated through her mannerisms, for example rubbing her face and being more likely to raise her voice. Overall, I observe Clare adopting a authoritarian role in the setting. I observe her demanding obedience from the children on a number of occasions in a manner which is sometimes abrupt. This abrupt manner also extends to her interactions with the practitioners, which were played out in the presence of the children.

The interview data indicates that Clare adopts an outcomes focussed pedagogic style. This is evidenced in her focus on appropriate behaviours, references to what children will be expected to do when they go to school and the learning objectives focussed upon in the circle time sessions. Informal conversations I had with Clare led me to believe that this approach is adopted as she feels she is doing the best for the children in preparing them for what lies ahead in formal schooling. Clare is a much valued member of the team; she cares
deeply for the staff and the children. It is evident that she wants to provide the children with opportunities to learn and enjoy their time at Bumbles, however, at the outset of the research her pedagogy and practice did not fit well with the underpinning theory of the Relational Approach.

**Changes in pedagogic style over the three phases of the research**

Having presented an overview of the pedagogy and practice of the three embedded case practitioners I will now consider any changes in their pedagogy and practice across the phases of the research. In these sections I will draw upon the observation data. As Anita was not observed with the children for any sustained period of time she is excluded from the analysis.

**Beth**

Beth’s approach fits well with the underpinning theory of the Relational Approach. She is caring and she recognises the value of supporting the development of the children’s social competencies. Yet, as noted previously, she often provides answers for the children rather than supporting them to reach their own solutions to their problems and quarrels. Beth also stated herself in the first interview that she was very keen for us to give her more ideas so she could improve her practice.

Beth’s interactions with the children were systematically observed during practitioner-led sessions, including story time session and music time. An analysis of one of these sessions for each of the three research phases is now provided.

**Practitioner-led sessions**

12 observations of practitioner-led activities were undertaken (excluding circle time, these are considered in relation to Clare as she planned and ran these sessions), four in each phase, with an additional two sessions observed within the scoping phase. Beth was present in each of these observations; there were usually two additional practitioners present. Two
sets of information were gathered during these observations, the first related to the composition of the group (as presented in chapter 4). The items considered include: how the group is composed in terms of both age and friendship; whether the task they were involved in was a task which required working together cooperatively (the relational rating of the observation); the level of child engagement in the task; and the attributes identified by EPPE (the quality rating) (Sylva et al., 2004). Combined, this data provides information on the context of the observation and of Beth’s practice in terms of composing groups and her use of groups as a pedagogic practice. The second data set provided considered Beth’s interactions with the children; the categories used for the observations were adapted from the CCIS developed by Carl (2007). A summary of the items considered is provided in the table below, a full description of each category is provided in Appendix 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items considered</th>
<th>Actions observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>Emotion and tone of practitioner speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Level of respect demanded from children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of respect for children’s abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Value placed on compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rrigidity/flexibility of the tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>Interest, engagement and enjoyment of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>Children’s involvement in discussing rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioner reaction to undesirable behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Level of dialogue entered into with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>Number of activities and level of support for prosocial behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>Directive and outcomes focussed versus facilitative and process focused role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16 The items considered for practitioner pedagogy – adapted from the CCIS (Carl, 2006)
The table below summarises the data collected for Beth across each of the research phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groupings</th>
<th>Scoping Phase (July)</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Relational Rating</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Relational Rating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Rating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 The mean scores of the observations made of Beth’s interactions with children during practitioner-led activities across the three research phases. N.B. The maximum score in each category is 4.

When considering the composition of the groupings the data reveals that in the practitioner-led sessions led by Beth:

- the groups were composed of mixed-aged, mixed-friendship groups on all occasions observed
- the relational ratings of the activities increased across the phases from 1.75 in phase one to 2.75 in phase two and 3.3 in phase three
- the relational rating of the observations increased from 1 in phase one to 3 in both phases two and three
- child engagement scores increased across the phases from 2.5 in phase one to 3 in phase three

138
the quality rating of the observations increased from 1 in phase one to 2.75 and 3.5 in phases two and three respectively

the scoping phase data suggests that these changes did not relate to changes in practice which occurred ‘normally’ across an academic year, as the scores all increased from the scoping phase to phase three with the exception of child engagement.

These figures suggest that groups composed of mixed-age, mixed-friendship children were commonplace at Bumbles prior to the development of the Relational Approach and that this remained the case. The figures also confirm that, as was seen in chapter four, there are changes in the activities used and that these become more focussed on supporting children’s peer interactions. Overall, I observed an increase in support for the development of social competencies, as shown by the relational rating. Interestingly, the scores here indicate that, as these increased, so too did the scores for child engagement and quality of provision. Child engagement in the task increased slightly from 2.5 to 3.0, i.e. the children became more engaged in the activities as the activities present required greater joint communication – though this increased only slightly and could relate to a developmental change as the score for the scoping phase was also 3.0. However, the quality rating awarded to the observation increased more substantially from 1 in both the scoping phase and phase one to 3.5 in phase three; this will be explored further later in this chapter.

The analysis of the observations using the CCIS provided specific information about Beth’s interactions with the children across the phases. The changes here signify changes in Beth’s pedagogic style and practice as they reveal an increase in the mean score by phase in each of the categories as follows:

- Interactions rose from 2 in phase one to 3.75 in phase three
- Respect rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Time Management rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Enjoys and Appreciates rose from 2.75 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Behaviour Management rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Communication rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Prosocial Skills rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three
- Pedagogic Style rose from 2.5 in phase one to 3.5 in phase three.

The scoping data, though only based upon two observations, suggests that the changes seen between phases one and three do not solely relate to changes in practitioner expectations of the children as they approach statutory schooling or developmental changes in the children. The scores given during the scoping phase are similar to those given in phase one. As such, these figures suggest that there was a change in Beth’s practice which occurred following the Relational Approach training and manifested in a change in her interactions with the children. Beth become more flexible in her time management, she followed the children’s lead more and she engaged in a greater number of discussions with children.

To further illustrate these changes in Beth’s pedagogy and practice, excerpts of Beth’s interactions with children, which occurred during practitioner-led sessions, are provided below. Each excerpt demonstrates a portion of a typical session during one of each of the three research phases. These excerpts demonstrate how Beth’s interactions with the children and her practice changed; specifically they demonstrate how she supports the children to resolve their own issues rather than either avoiding problems and keeping sessions running to time. Something which is illustrated well in the excerpt provided below.

**Phase one practitioner-led activity: Beth**

Beth is arranging the room for story time; all 18 children are present in the room. They are sat on the floor and Beth brings into the room pairs of chairs and asks individual children to take a seat.
Beth: Charlie this chair is for you...

Izzy: [to Isaac] We’re not going to get chairs are we... [folds arms dramatically].

Beth: [ignores Izzy though she is next to her] This chair is for you, Dan.

Izzy: Oh I wanted a chair.

A few moments pass.

Beth: [to Practitioner 4 — Ellen] What do you think... should we have a couple of extra chairs?

Ellen: Err yes, why not.

Beth: Ok, these chairs are for Izzy and Isaac

Izzy: Is that pink one for me?

Beth: Oh I don’t know... move forward please [tries to place the chair in line with the others].

The pink chair is placed down and Izzy sits in it looking very pleased. The activity commences.

Kitty then cries out.

Kitty: George kicked me.

Beth: Well I’m sure he didn’t mean to, you move forward so that it can’t happen again.

There are two elements of this excerpt which are of interest. The first is Beth’s interaction with Izzy. Beth and I had a number of conversations about Izzy and the research journal entry for this day confirms Beth was aware of Izzy and that she was concerned that, as Izzy is confident and intelligent, she frequently gets her own way. Yet, Beth’s approach was to engage with Izzy and give her what she wanted rather than asking her, along with nine other
children to sit on the floor. There is no indication that the children are expected to organise themselves or for them to cooperate and find a way to take turns in sitting on the chairs.

The second area of interest is Beth’s response to Kitty. There was no attempt to ask George to think about where he places his feet or how they could sit together in this formation (half of the children on chairs at the back and half of the children on the floor in front of them) without kicking each other. Kitty is told to move to prevent a reoccurrence. I believe that here there were two opportunities for children’s social competency development to be supported but that these opportunities were not taken. This extract is typical of the observations made during phase one. These observations indicate that the practitioners ‘keep the peace’ to allow planned activities to progress, rather than behaviours and/or interactions being explored with the children. This is indicative of practice which is outcomes focussed rather than process focussed as there is a drive to keep on task and ensure that the end goal is reached.

**Phase two practitioner-led activity: Beth**

Beth has arranged the room for story time; all children are present in the room. A number of children are sat in the chairs with the others sat in a row in front of them.

**Beth:** Right [slightly raised voice] I need everybody sitting down nicely ready for a story... thank you... Ok Dan, you sit here.

Adam elbows Zac. Beth is engaged in a conversation with George.

**Beth:** Well, George, I think it is better to read to a small group as it is such a small book.

**George:** Ohh I wanted to read it now.

**Beth:** Ok, go and get it and I will show it to everybody and we can read it later when we are in small groups.

George dashes to get the book. Adam elbows Zac and Beth notices.
**Beth:** Err excuse me [voice raised, sounds concerned and soft]. Adam why are you doing that to Zac? [Silence spreads across the room, she waits for a response.] I’m not sure you are being very nice some of you... now just before we start the story I would like to say that at Bumbles I really would like everybody to play nicely together. I think some of you are not being very nice to one another. If you’ve got a problem I need you to come and tell one of the grown-ups. If somebody is doing something you do not like I need you to come and tell me or Kate, Clare, Sue or Jen and then we’ll sort it out. We don’t want anybody getting hurt or being sad. Let’s all try and be really kind to each other.

This excerpt demonstrates a change in Beth’s approach from the phase one observation, here she discusses the issue with the children. However, despite the move to engage the children in conversations about their behaviour, in this situation she clearly states that if the children are not happy, or do not like something that they should tell an adult, who will resolve the issue. The children are not given any responsibility, there is no expectation that they themselves should think about their actions, the consequences of their actions or how they together could resolve their issues. This suggests there has been an increase in relational activity but that the practice promoted by the Relational Approach is not being fully realised.

**Phase three practitioner-led activity: Beth**

Beth is facilitating an art group, the session is very fluid with children coming and going as they please.

Jago shouts out and begins to cry.

**Beth:** Jago, what’s the problem?

**Jago:** [Between sobs] She drew on it... [points to his picture].

**Beth:** Well Jago, if you don’t want Sara to help you draw your picture then you need to explain to her that you want to do this one alone. What could you say to her?

Jago makes an attempt to say something but he is crying.
Beth: I don’t think she can hear you Jago...

Jago: Please Sara can I do this one myself... please thank you.

Sara: Ok, I’ll do this one here.

They sit together and are engaged in their own paintings.

Beth: See all you needed to do was talk to each other and everything is fine. That was great, well done.

Here in phase three we see how Beth is concerned with supporting the children to resolve their own issues rather than resolving the problem herself or suggesting that the children ask an adult. This excerpt also shows how with minimal encouragement the children were able to resolve this problem quite easily and move on happily with their task. The praise Beth gives for this interaction potentially reinforces these behaviours and provides an example of the role of making expectations explicit and maintaining pupil motivation (Stevens, 2008). Here there is an expectation that the children will resolve the issue and they are praised for doing this. It is also noteworthy that as the children develop the competencies required for group working that they could be supported to create a joint picture, working collaboratively. Something which is not evident in phase three.

Clare

I have provided a picture of Clare thus far which acknowledges her caring for the children and her willingness to engage in boisterous activities with children, making her a fun member of staff to spend time with. I have also noted that she has less experience than the other practitioners observed and has a pedagogic style which asserts dominance over both children and staff. I believe this relates to her outcomes focussed style and her lack of experience of working with young children. To further scrutinise Clare’s practice, and identify any changes in her pedagogic style across the phases of the project, as with Beth the practitioner-led sessions provided an ideal opportunity to explore those interactions. As
Clare planned and led the circle time sessions, I will begin with a detailed analysis of how these sessions evolved from the scoping phase and phase one through to phase three.

**Practitioner-led circle time: Clare**

Circle time sessions were observed on four occasions during each of the three phases, 12 times in total, and once during the scoping phase. As circle time was identified within the literature review as a ‘tool’ frequently used to support the development of children’s social competencies, detailed analysis of the sessions was undertaken. Circle time was seen as the activity most regularly conducted within Bumbles which required the children to interact as a group and where the Relational Activities and the Relational programme – including the pre and debrief – would most easily fit. Within the SPRinG primary schools the Relational Approach was initially introduced during PSHE. The observations focussed upon:

- the composition of the groups, e.g. the number of children and their sex and age
- the role of the practitioner, e.g. directing, facilitating, or not present
- the use of the Relational Programme activities, e.g. was the pre and debrief used
- level of child engagement, e.g. disengaged, attentive, engaged
- the relational rating of the activity and the observation, e.g. does the task and/or practitioner support collaboration and/or social competency development
- quality rating, based on those attributes identified by EPPE (Sylva et al. 2004a).

Complete detail of each of these categories is provided in Appendix 12.
N.B. the maximum score for the relational rating categories, child engagement and quality rating was 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Clare’s Role</th>
<th>Number of Children Involved</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Prebrief /Debrief Used</th>
<th>Activity Relational Rating</th>
<th>Observational Relational Rating</th>
<th>Child Engaged</th>
<th>Quality Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Same</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Prebrief</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 Data collected during circle time observations

Initial analysis of the data reveals that in phase one, within circle time:

- Clare adopted a directive role
- groups were composed of mixed-friendship, mixed-sex, predominantly same-aged groups (3 of 4 occasions)
- the pre and debrief were not conducted, i.e. learning objectives were not made explicit and the role the children played in the learning process and/or interactions was not made explicit
- activities had a low relational rating, i.e. the activities were not designed to support the development of children’s social competencies or require joint working (a score of 2 on three occasions and 1 on one occasion)
actions of both the children and Clare had a low relational rating, i.e. the instances of support for children’s relationships or evidence of joint working were limited (a score of 2 on three occasions and 1 on one occasion)

children’s engagement in the activity differed across the observations (a score of 1 on one occasion, 2 on two occasions and 3 on one occasion)

the quality rating of the observations was low, i.e. Clare was seldom seen to be engaged in episodes of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST), using open-ended questioning, supporting children to resolve their conflicts or providing formative feedback (a score of 1 on one occasion and a score of 0 on three occasions).

The phase two data revealed that:

- Clare continued to adopt a directive role
- groups were composed of mixed-friendship, mixed-sex groups, and a combination of mixed-age and same-aged groups (in two out of four occasions for each)
- the pre and debrief were seen to be conducted on one of the four occasions with the prebrief alone being conducted on one additional occasion, representing a change from phase one; I believe this change was as a result of the additional training held during phase two
- activities had an increased relational rating, i.e. the activities were designed to support children’s social competencies or require joint working (a score of 2 on two occasions and 3 on two occasions), this represents the use of the relational activities outlined in the handbook and additional activities devised by Beth and Clare
- actions of both the children and practitioners had an increased relational rating from phase one, i.e. the instances of support for children’s relationships or evidence of joint working were observed (a score of 2 on two occasions and 3 on two occasions). This may be as a result of the change in the activities, i.e. the focus of the activities would impact upon this rating
▪ children’s engagement in the activity was observed to have increased slightly (a score of 3 on one occasion and 2 on three occasions)
▪ the quality rating of the observations increased from phase one (a score of 1 on two occasions and 2 on two occasions).

In phase three:
▪ Clare adopted a role of facilitating, a change from the directive role in phases one and two
▪ groups were composed of mixed-friendship groups, and mixed-age groups
▪ the pre and debrief were seen to be conducted in all four observations, though further scrutiny of the observation data revealed that the debrief was short and less well developed as a strategy
▪ activities had an increased relational rating, i.e. the activities were designed to support children’s social relationships or require joint working (a score of 3 on two occasions and 4 on two occasions)
▪ both the actions of the children and the activity had an increased relational rating, i.e. the instances of support for children’s relationships or evidence of joint working were observed (a score of 3 on two occasions and 4 on two occasions respectively)
▪ children’s engagement in the activity was observed to have increased slightly from phase two and markedly from phase one (a score of 4 on one occasion and 3 on three occasions)
▪ the quality rating of the observations increased from phase one and phase two (a score of 3 on two occasions and 4 on two occasions).
▪ Though only one session was observed within the scoping phase it suggests that there is a change in practice, which relates to something other than that which relates to the development of the children as they approach statutory schooling age.
The data gathered across the three phases indicates that there has been a change in Clare’s practice over the duration of the research. By phase three she has taken on a more facilitative role and the tasks she sets reflect a relational pedagogy rather than an outcomes focused pedagogic style. The circle time groups composed by Clare now involve children of mixed ages, suggesting a change in her expectations of the children and their abilities. Altering the activities and tasks to those suggested in the relational handbook alone would have an impact on some of these scores. Yet, the data also reveals a change in the children’s engagement with the activities and a change in the actions of both Clare and the children. To explore this further, detailed analysis of Clare’s interactions with the children was undertaken using the categories adapted from the CCIS (Carl, 2007).

Table 19 shows that at the outset of the project the scores were relatively low across all areas observed. This supports my earlier claim that Clare adopted a pedagogic style which focussed on obedience, demonstrated by the relatively low score of 1.75 for Behaviour Management. This is indicative of rules not being clearly explained or negotiated and an

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scoping Phase (July)</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 The mean scores of the observations made of Clare’s interactions with children during practitioner-led circle time activities.
authoritarian approach being taken. The scores reveal an increase in all areas measured from phases one to two and two to three, demonstrating that the quality of practitioner-child interactions has improved over the course of the project. This included Clare engaging in more dialogue with the children, showing greater interest in their perspectives and experiences and giving increased support for the development of children’s prosocial skills. This supports my earlier claims that there was a change in the practice of the practitioners following the Relational Approach training. The limited scoping phase data supports this assertion, as these scores are similar to the phase one scores, suggesting the changes recorded are not due to changes which occur as the children approach statutory schooling age.

These claims are further illustrated by the excerpts of Clare’s interactions with the children during circle time sessions. Each of the excerpts which follow demonstrates how Clare’s practice changes across the three phases.

**Phase one practitioner-led circle time activity: Clare**

Eight same-age, mixed-sex, mixed-friendship children are sat in a circle on chairs.

**Clare:** Ok guys, we’ve come to circle time and in circle time we have some special ways of behaving. **DO WE MAKE LOADS OF NOISE?** [shouts]

**Child chorus:** **NOOO** [shouting].

**Clare:** **What do we use our eyes and ears for?**

Children mumble

**Clare:** **Looking and listening. And what do we use our mouths for?**

**Male child:** **Talking when we hold Monkey.**

**Clare:** That’s right, **talking when we hold Monkey. And when we don’t have Monkey we keep our mouths closed. But we’re not going to use Monkey today** [rubs head] ‘cause I’m going to
ask all of you to join in. And, erm... well you’re just not going to shout at me otherwise it gets too loud... George [raised voice, disapproving tone], George, we don’t kick people. I’m not kicking you, am I?

George: No [looks at floor].

Clare: So I don’t expect you to kick anybody else. Right.

Ellen enters and lifts Tomas up and places him on her knee.

Clare: I have got some containers and they have got some stuff in them. All I know is that there are two types of each stuff. Does anybody know what we might call that when there are two the same? A matching...?

Alice: Is there treasure?

Clare: Oh I don’t know, Alice [friendly]. We’ll have to keep a look out for treasure [excited].

Male child: Pair.

Clare: A matching pair. Right so we are going to try and match the sounds. In order to do that you’re going to shake them and we are going to try and match the sounds. Listen very carefully.

Clare: Have you got your ears all ready for listening? [Activity commences]

This excerpt highlights the fun nature of Clare, for example the excitement she shows at the thought of keeping a look out for treasure. Yet, it also demonstrates how she can raise her voice and very quickly alter her persona if she believes a child is misbehaving. George was indeed kicking his legs about without consideration for others, but scrutiny of the video reveals that he wasn’t deliberately kicking anybody. Also, as the Relational Approach would advocate asking George why he was kicking, asking Tomas to think about what the consequences might be. This may have supported George to change his behaviour. Clare’s response illustrates her demand for obedience. She also makes a reference to her modelling – I’m not kicking you am I, yet her manner is quite intimidating and in itself is not modelling a positive interaction style.
Phase two practitioner-led circle time activity: Clare

The children are sat on chairs in a circle; they are a mixed-aged, mixed-sex, mixed-friendship group of eight children. Clare has to stand up and go to the doorway to speak to another practitioner so the children are ‘alone’ for a moment. The group starts to make a noise.

Child chorus: Ohhh ahhh ahhh

Tabitha and another female aged four years start to press their fingers tight to their lips.

Tabitha and Kitty: Shh shh [Tomas joins in smiling along with some other children].

As Clare re-enters the room she sees Tomas ‘shh-ing’ and picks up his chair so he is facing the centre directly and not the child next to him. It appears the aim is to stop the ‘shh-ing’. She does not say anything.

Clare: [re-enters circle] Right, okey dokey... circle time. We have special rules at circle time, don’t we? George, I need you to listen, my lovely.

Tomas leans across the circle towards him, finger pressed tight to his lip.

Tomas: Shh.

Clare: [moves to Tomas strokes his face gently] If somebody needs to be asked to listen darling let me do it ok, otherwise it all gets very confusing, ok my darling.

Clare: Ok, so we have some special rules in circle time, don’t we? We sit very quietly, we listen with our ears, we look with our eyes, and do we talk all the time?

Louis: We talk when we have Monkey.

Clare: That’s right, we talk when we hold Monkey. And today we will start with everybody taking a turn to hold Monkey and tell us something, anything at all you would like to share with the rest of the group. What do we need to remember?

Tabitha: No shouting.

Clare: Great Tabitha, anything else?

Louis: To wait for our turn.
Clare: Great, now who would like to start? [Monkey is passed to Ben]

Ben: I helped my mum make soup.

Clare: Oh lovely. What kind of soup did you make?

Ben: Carrot soup.

Clare: Yum and what did you have to do? Did you cut the carrots?

Ben: I grated and cut the carrots.

Clare: And did you eat it up with mum?

Ben: Yes. [smiles]

Charlie tries to take Monkey when there is a pause in the speech.

Clare: Charlie, we don’t snatch do we, we wait until Monkey is being passed so we can take him gently and look after him. Ok?

The phase two excerpt demonstrates a change in approach for Clare. The aim of the activity, rather than being focussed on a learning objective, is a session in which the children are asked to share something of interest to them. This would be in line with the types of relational activities devised by the practitioner group during the Relational Approach training. In addition, Clare uses more explanation with the children, e.g. to Tomas: ‘If somebody needs to be asked to listen darling let me do it ok, otherwise it all gets very confusing’, and ‘we wait until Monkey is being passed so we can take him gently and look after him’. Yet, there are still indications that a relational pedagogy is not embedded in her practice, for example her immediate reaction to the noise when she returns to the room is to move Tomas’ chair without talking to him or explaining what she is doing. As one of the youngest children in the group, who staff are aware has limited communication skills, engaging with him on why he is being moved may have negated the need for a second interaction and would have been more attuned to the Relational Approach and the relational pedagogy being developed.
Phase three practitioner-led circle time activity: Clare

A group of 10 mixed-age, mixed-friendship children are sat on chairs in a small circle.

**Clare:** Ok, today we are going to do something very special which involves lots of kindness, being gentle and about friendship. And I know you are going to be great at this.

**Clare:** Now, I’ve got something very special. In my hands, I have friendship dust. Now, we are going to pass on the friendship dust from one person to another. When you pass it on, I want you to keep your hands together so it can’t escape and we will gently pass it from one person to the next around the circle. Ok, I will start.

Clare places her empty cupped hands over Isaac’s hands, he says ‘thank you’ and passes the dust to the child next to him. They pass the dust around the circle. Clare states each child’s name as they pass it around. It is quiet in the room, all the children are watching. Voices are used very softly.

**Clare:** Well done everybody, that was great. Now if you look very closely at your hands [looks at her palms] you will see friendship dust [children all look at their hands]. That means we are all going to be kind and gentle to each other because that’s what friendship is all about.

Now we are going to pass a special hello on to each other and because we have friendship dust we are going to be very gentle and stroke the cheek of the person you are saying hello to. I will start again and show you. [leans to Isaac]

**Clare:** Hello Isaac. [gently strokes cheek]

Isaac turns to Tabitha and they pass it on very well in the same way. This continues to George who finds it difficult. He is whispering in the ear of Alice, rather than stroking.

**Clare:** Would you like to gently stroke Alice’s cheek, George? [George whispers again] I’ll come and help you. [moves across circle, gently takes his hand and uses it to stroke Alice’s cheek] Was that nice George? [George nods and smiles]

They continue around the circle. The atmosphere is very calm and everybody is softly spoken.

**Tomas:** [unintelligible, loud] BAM BOM BOW.

**Clare:** Tomas, we are all doing this together can you stop please, it is very loud.
Clare: Now children, what did you think of that? You passed a hello all around the circle. Did you like that? Was it nice?

Isaac: I liked it.

Alice: I liked it, it tickled.

Clare: You liked it, it tickled did it. [smiles warmly]

Clare: Did anybody not like being touched? [allows time for answers]

Chorus: I liked it....I liked it...

Clare: So we all liked it. And why is it important that we are gentle with our friends? [Leaves time] What would happen if I was banging when I stroked you? [Demonstrates]

Isaac: It would hurt.

Clare: It would and being friends is about being kind and gentle and we don’t want to hurt our friends, do we? You all did a great job and we can think about how we show we are friends, and we will see how we remember to be really nice and kind and gentle with each other.

The focus of this circle time session is relationships and the session demonstrates how the Relational Approach activities have been incorporated into the circle time sessions. There is also evidence of further change in Clare’s practice. As one child struggles, Clare illustrates how he can be involved. Earlier observations indicate that children would have been rushed past if they could not participate, as time management and the progression of the planned task were of paramount importance.

Notes from my research journal provide an insight into how these changes are representative of a significant change in Clare’s underlying belief about children’s involvement in their own development and how they ought to be involved in decision-making and take responsibility for their own lives. Following one of my last visits to Bumbles, Clare informed me that she had recently attended a whole school meeting at her
own children’s school. At this meeting the head teacher discussed a number of issues including pupil attainment, pupil engagement in lessons and pupil behaviour. Clare stated that she was appalled at the lack of significance placed on the pupils’ input into how they should manage their work as they approach significant exams and how they could support each other. She felt compelled to stand up and address the hall filled with school staff and parents. She informed the group that it would be better to focus on developing positive relations between the pupils to increase their opportunities for learning from each other. She stated she had seen the benefits of such an approach in her pre-school and felt that the school should be doing more to involve pupils in decision making and encouraging and supporting them to learn from each other. I asked if she thought she would have done this anyway regardless of the project and she laughed:

No way... I hadn’t really given it that much thought before, and I wouldn’t have thought it would have made much difference. I probably would have thought that they should just get on with their work. I have got a lot from this [the research].

Clare, phase three

This comment from Clare demonstrates the fundamental change in her beliefs which I assert led to changes in her pedagogic style, a change which is only being fully realised and played out in phase three of the research. Gaining new knowledge, through the introduction of the Relational Approach and being involved in the interviews supported and encouraged her to reflect upon her practice.

These changes, in both Beth and Clare’s pedagogic style, and how this led to changes in their practice and provision at Bumbles are explored further in the following section, which focuses upon the change in the quality of provision noted earlier in this chapter.
Research question six: Is there an increase in the prevalence of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision in EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) which relate directly to observable practitioner practice, namely, is there an increase in:

- instances of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)
- practitioners use of open-ended questioning
- the formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities
- the inclusion of and support given to children to rationalising and talking through their conflicts?

In this section I draw upon data collected through the observations.

The video data was scrutinised to provide the observation data for this section, this focussed upon identifying instances of the four key attributes of high-quality provision in the observations made of Beth and Clare. These attributes are defined as the use of:

- **Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)** – ‘...where two or more individuals work together to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc. Both parties contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the child’s understanding.’ (Sylva et al., 2007 p.2).

- **Open-ended questioning** – practitioners ask open-ended questions allowing the child to engage in a conversation and allowing the child to direct the conversation to their interest.

- **Formative feedback** – the provision of feedback by the practitioner to the child on their current task which supports thinking and/or learning.

- **Support for conflict resolution** – practitioners are observed modelling and/or supporting children to reach a resolution to their disputes or conflicts, the practitioner does not provide the resolution.
In total, 12 child-led and 12 practitioner-led sessions were observed during each of the three phases (i.e. 72 observations in total) and were scrutinised for evidence of these four attributes of high-quality provision. Table 20 provides details of the observations for Beth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Shared Thinking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended Questioning</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Feedback</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 The number of observations of those attributes relating to high-quality provision: Beth

The data reveals that there has been:

- an increase in the instances of SST observed from 9 in phase one to 12 in phase three
- an increase in the number of instances of open-ended questioning observed from 19 in phase one to 23 in phase three
- no change in the instances for formative feedback observed, though there was a slight decrease in phase two
- an increase in the instances of Support for Conflict Resolution observed from 1 in phase one to 5 in phase three.

This data indicates that there has been a change in Beth’s use of those attributes identified as relating to high-quality provision; with increases seen in all areas other than formal feedback. The fourth category – Support for Conflict Resolution – represents the greatest change for Beth with an increase from 1 in phase one to 5 in phase three. The excerpts provided earlier in this chapter provide an insight into this observed change. I described how Beth moved from preventing conflict by moving children in phase one, to supporting two children to agree their own resolution to a dispute relating to making marks on each
other’s pictures in Phase Three. Overall, I would surmise that this is an indication that through the development of the Relational Approach there was a change in Beth’s practice, which relates to those attributes of high-quality provision identified by Sylva et al. (2004). This may again be representative of an increased awareness of her practice as she has been encouraged to consider the social pedagogic context of the pre-school.

Table 21 provides details of the observations made of Clare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Shared Thinking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended Questioning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative Feedback</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21 The number of observations of those attributes relating to high-quality provision: Clare

The data reveals that there has been:

- an increase in the instances of SST observed from 3 in phase one to 9 in phase three
- an increase in the instances of open-ended questioning observed from 18 instances in phase one to 31 in phase three
- an increase in the instances of formative feedback observed, from 4 in phase one to 8 in phase three
- there was an increase in the support for conflict resolution observed from 0 in phase one to 4 in phase three.

The data reveals that there has been a change in Clare’s practice which relates positively to the attributes of high-quality provision. Changes were seen in all areas, including in formal feedback, differing from Beth. This may in part relate to the role Clare has in providing the circle time session. Circle time afforded the practitioners the greatest opportunities for providing formative feedback and using open-ended questioning. It may also relate to the
assertions made earlier that at the outset of the research Beth’s practice aligned more with the theoretical underpinnings of the Relational Approach than did Clare’s. The data therefore captures greater change in Clare’s practice as her pedagogic style changed more substantially. An excerpt from an interaction during phase three illustrates this change in Clare’s practice.

This interaction takes place in the garden. Clare has a large piece of ice in a box.

George looks into the container wide-eyed, he looks up at Clare.

**Clare: Do you know what it is, George?**

She looks at him and smiles offering the container so he can see inside more clearly.

**George: Ice... and water.**

**Clare: That’s right, we have been talking about ice and water in Bumbles this week haven’t we? What do you think is happening to the ice out here in the garden?**

**George: Erm... the ice is very cold.**

**Clare: It is very cold, George, would you like to have a feel?**

George tentatively strokes the ice, they both laugh.

**Clare: How does it feel?**

**George: Very cold...and wet...**

He shows Clare the water on his fingers.

**Clare: It is isn’t it, do you remember we talked about this. What happens to water when it gets very, very cold?**

**George: Ice, it goes to ice.**

**Clare: That’s right, [she smiles encouragingly]. I had to think how I was going to get the ice**
out of the fridge and into the garden. I put the ice into the container to carry it into the garden, it was too cold for me to carry and too slippery. [She laughs] What do you think happens to ice when it gets warm?

**George:** Erm, it turns back into water [claps], like there...

**Clare:** Excellent George, I think the sun is making it all warm in the garden and so the ice is melting...

**George:** Yeah, that’s the water in there [points to the water in the container].

They continue to talk.

The excerpt shows how Clare and George engage in an episode of SST as they discuss the ice. Within this interaction Clare makes use of open-ended questioning to ensure George is engaged in the discussion, for example, ‘what do you think happens to ice when it gets warm?’, and she also extends his understanding by explaining how the sun is making it warm in the garden, which is making the ice melt. Clare is also very encouraging during their conversation using terms such as ‘excellent George’ and through using positive body language such as smiling. Also, the conversation flows between them for an extended period.

There is also evidence in Clare’s conversations with children that she is explaining thinking processes to them. In the previous excerpt, for example, Clare states, ‘I had to think...’ she is here modelling the processes of planning and thinking to George. This change in practice will be explored further in chapter six.

This interaction takes place during free play in the morning. There are 17 children and five practitioners in Bumbles. Tabitha and Alice are each in possession of one of a pair of dressing-up shoes.

**Tabitha:** NO Alice, I had it first [pulls the shoe vigorously towards her chest].

**Alice:** No, I want them [pulls it hard back and loses her footing slightly].

**Clare:** Er girls, what is happening here? [She has a concerned soft tone]

**Tabitha:** I need the shoe to go with the princess dress and she takes it from me.

**Clare:** And what did you say to Alice? Do you ask her if you could have the shoe?

The girls look at each other.
In the observations in phase one Clare was seen taking a ‘no tolerance’ approach to this type of behaviour – pulling, snatching, yelling. In the excerpt given above a change in her practice is captured. Here, Clare is offering the children a way of reaching a compromise and a resolution with minimal input. The approach to conflict resolution that the children are given is an approach which they could use again to prevent them reaching the stage they are observed within at the beginning of this excerpt.

Overall, I assert that there has been a change in the practice of both Beth and Clare from phase one to phase three of the research. I propose that these changes are as a result of Beth’s attendance at the Relational Approach training and development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles. I propose that these changes have led to an increase in the quality of the pre-school provision offered at Bumbles, demonstrated by an increase in the prevalence of those attributes identified as key features of high-quality provision by the EPPE research (Sylva et al., 2004).

These findings lend further support to my claim that time-management is less of a concern as the practitioners develop a relational pedagogy and, as a consequence, the quality of provision improves.

Clare: Did you talk to each other about sharing the dressing-up? Or looking what at else there is in the dress-up box?

Alice: Er, but, I wanted that shoe.

Tabitha: But I have the dress, what about the snow white dress for you?

Clare: What a great idea, you could both have an outfit if you look together in the box.

Alice looks a little sceptical but they go to the box, choose another outfit and a couple of minutes later they are both playing happily together dressed-up as princesses.
5.2 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the data collected to ascertain whether changes occurred in practitioners’ pedagogy and practice across the duration of research, and whether these changes were as a result of the Relational Approach training and the development of the Relational Approach. I have concluded that there has been a change in practitioner pedagogy and practice based upon the analysis of the embedded cases of Beth and Clare. I have documented a change in their practice which demonstrates a move towards a more relational pedagogy. These changes manifest in greater support provided to children to develop their social competencies and the practitioners becoming more focussed on processes and less focussed on time-management.

The analysis of the data demonstrates that it takes time for change to occur and that the extent of the change related to the pedagogic position of the practitioner at the outset of the research, i.e. Clare had a more outcomes focussed style, thus a change to a process-focussed relational pedagogy led to greater changes in her practice.

The changes recorded in practitioner practice related to an increase in the quality of provision at Bumbles as measured by: instances of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST); practitioner use of open-ended questioning; formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities; and support given to children to rationalising and talking through their conflicts. This evidence suggests that the Relational Approach training and the adoption of the Relational Approach has led to an increase in the quality of the provision. This may relate to issues raised in the literature that many pre-school staff lack graduate-level training rooted in theories of child development. The training offered provides the practitioners with information about the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the Relational Approach. This new knowledge has helped them to view their practice in a different way, their understanding of how children learn has altered and as a consequence
so has their practice. King (2008) recognises that this understanding will allow them to see why and how group work and the process of skills development is necessary, leading to a change in practice.

These changes in the quality of provision may also relate to practitioners becoming more aware of their practice as the training has encouraged them to reflect on their work. Pollard (2008) noted that reflecting on one’s practice feeds a constructive spiral of professional development which leads to a steady increase in the quality of the education provided. It is also pertinent to consider that change may have been facilitated by my presence at Bumbles, as the practitioners were aware that their work was being scrutinised.

Thus far, a picture is forming which suggests that the Relational Approach is suitable for use within pre-schools and that, where implemented, the approach leads to positive changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice and children’s peer interactions. In the following chapter I will consider the relationship between changes in practitioner practice and children’s behaviours. I will explore practitioner use of modelling, whether this changed following the Relational Approach training and, whether any changes relate to changes in the children’s peer interactions.
6. Research Findings: Practitioner Modelling and Children’s Peer Interactions

In this chapter I explore the relationship between practitioner modelling of social competencies and children’s interactions with their peers. To do this I draw upon data obtained from observations made over 54 hours across the three phases of the research. As the observations were video recorded I have been able to subject the data to several iterations of content analysis. As with the previous sections, I have used the research questions as chapter sub-headings to guide the discussion.

Research question seven: Do practitioners model social competencies to children? And, if so, how and when?

In this section I draw upon data collected using observations and my research journal.

6.1 Defining modelling

The initial analysis of the observations involved repeated viewing of the video data to capture episodes of practitioner modelling. The identification of modelling episodes was guided by Jonassen’s (1988) concepts of behavioural modelling (modelling an action) and cognitive modelling (modelling both the action and the thought process involved in that action). Based upon the first stage of the analysis I noted two further distinct forms of modelling. The first was that of explicit modelling, which involved the practitioners intentionally modelling actions to children. These episodes most frequently involved the practitioner encouraging and supporting the children to think about the cognitive processes involved in decision-making. Such episodes were most often observed as a form of cognitive modelling. The cognitive modelling observed in Bumbles was less complex than that defined by Jonassen, I believe this in part related to the age of the children, and therefore the tasks observed are less complex and require fewer cognitive process, e.g. Mathematics.
The second form of modelling I identified was that of *incidental modelling*. This involved practitioners acting without an agenda of modelling to the children. Incidental modelling differs from the modelling discussed within the literature reviewed as, rather than being used as a pedagogic tool to support children’s learning, incidental modelling was unplanned and often involved challenging interactions, for example, when a practitioner reprimands a child for their behaviour. In such an incident, a practitioner may exert their power to make the children behave as they wish them to, for example, to sit down. The incidental modelling in this situation being that you can make demands of others and perhaps that, if you are bigger or older, you can tell those smaller or younger than you that they must follow your instructions without question. I posit that such incidental modelling is of great importance when considering the development of children’s social competencies, as such actions can negatively impact on children’s behaviour. A claim supported by the work of Sheridan (2007), who found that where pre-school practitioners asserted dominance and demanded obedience from children, that the children themselves demonstrated more anti-social behaviours with peers. I do not, however, claim that all incidental modelling has a negative impact. Incidental modelling can also have a positive impact; children observing respect and kindness amongst the practitioners, for example, are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviours between the children (Sheridan, 2007).

To further explore whether the incidental modelling I observed could be defined as modelling which would impact upon children’s interactions I returned to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT). I considered whether such instances, e.g. a practitioner reprimanding a child, would provide opportunities for the four processes Bandura (1977) noted as crucial for modelling to lead to a change in behaviour to occur, that is: attentional processes, retention processes, motoric reproduction processes and motivation processes. I assert that these processes could occur following incidental modelling. Overleaf, I provide a possible scenario for this occurring following a practitioner reprimanding a child:
Attentional Processes – when an adult is reprimanding a child, the child involved and frequently the other children in the vicinity observe the interaction, i.e. they are giving the interaction their attention.

Retention Processes – if such behaviours are repeatedly observed I posit that the children are likely to retain the information.

Moteric Reproduction Processes – as I have stated that children spend most of their time when at pre-school in the presence of their peers I believe that they would have opportunities to practise such behaviours and develop their application (an idea which will be explored further within this chapter.).

Motivation Processes – if such behaviours lead to the desired outcomes, e.g. a younger child relinquishes a toy the dominant child wants to play with, or a child learns that bossing around other children means that they decide which game the group will play that there is a motivation for the child to continue to demonstrate such behaviours.

I found that incidental modelling was always behavioural whilst explicit modelling of social competencies could be either cognitive or behavioural. Having established four categories of modelling: incidental, explicit, behavioural and cognitive, I widened my analysis of the observation data to include these categories. I observed their use within the two distinct social worlds that children inhabit when at pre-school, that of the practitioner-led and that of the child-led, to determine whether there were differences in the types of modelling used within these different contexts.
6.2 Practitioner modelling of social competencies – Practitioner-led activities

I observed three of the four identified categories of modelling. I did not observe Incidental cognitive modelling. Whether it is possible to unknowingly cognitively model social competencies requires further investigation. Such investigation would require more detailed interviews with practitioners about the intentions behaving their behaviours.

Explicit modelling

I observed a number of different ways in which explicit modelling was used within the practitioner-led context. This included: during the pre and debrief, during the implementation of the relational activities, using books to discuss social competencies, and supporting the children to practise the skill modelled in previous instances of explicit modelling. Excerpts demonstrating practitioner modelling within each of these categories is provided overleaf.

Practitioner modelling during implementation of the relational activities

During phase one and, to a lesser extent, phase two, practitioners were observing being more outcomes focussed and, as such, time-management was prioritised as practitioners sought to ensure the end goal was reached. Being outcomes focussed in this way meant that though there was some room for conversation, this time was limited and the children were hurried along. During the latter part of phase two and phase three there is greater evidence of the children being given space to ask questions and for the activity to be guided by the children’s interests. This observation supports the finding presented in the previous chapter, that there is greater evidence of the practitioners being flexible and using SST and open-ended questioning as the Relational Approach became embedded within their practice and the practitioners used the Relational Approach activities. As use of the activities increased I found there was an increase in the number of opportunities available for
practitioner modelling of social competencies and an increase in the instances of practitioner modelling.

**Practitioner modelling of social competencies during the pre and debrief**

In chapter five I discussed how the pre and debrief observed at Bumbles differed from that which I had observed within the SPRinG schools. I also noted how the pre and debrief was only developed in Bumbles in the latter half of the research. As the practitioners, notably Clare, developed the pre and debrief process I observed an increase in their use of explicit modelling at the beginning of activities. The excerpt, below, shows how in phase three the practitioners use modelling to explain to the children how ways of behaving impact upon other people in addition to explaining the expectations placed upon them by the task.

Practitioner Irene is trying to get the attention of the children with little success; the majority continue to talk.

**Irene:** Oh dear, I am starting to feel very sad and a bit frustrated as I have asked nicely and nobody is listening to me.

**Children chorus:** I am, I am, I’m listening, Irene.

**Irene:** Oh good, you are listening. [The children stop talking] Well, what do we need to do so people know we are listening?

**Isaac:** We could stop talking and look at you.

**Irene:** Great idea, if you were looking at me and you weren’t talking I would know that you were listening to me. Great. Now I wanted to talk to you today about music and it is really important that you listen as we are going to listen to some different sounds.

**Tabitha:** Irene [Irene stops and look directly at Tabitha and stops talking, allowing Tabitha to speak], is it OK if I go and put my jumper on my peg, please?

**Irene:** Yes, of course, Clare is there if you need any help.

This excerpt demonstrates that Irene is using behavioural modelling as she stops and looks directly at Tabitha when she speaks to show that she is listening. She is demonstrating to
the children the actions which they have just discussed. She also demonstrates a form of
cognitive modelling as she involves the children in a discussion which encourages them to
think about how their behaviour is viewed by others (i.e. if you are not looking at somebody
when they talk to you) and how this might make people feel (she states she is sad and
frustrated). I posit that this modelling is explicit as, although unplanned, Irene is
intentionally supporting the development of children’s social competencies by discussing
the consequences of actions and asking the children for alternatives. This excerpt also
demonstrates how being process focussed and developing the Relational Approach supports
children’s group work skills as the discussion focuses on developing listening skills.

Additional opportunities for modelling were created by the Relational Approach
Programme. An example of an activity which provided an opportunity for practitioners to
model social competencies to the children is provided in the following excerpt.

The practitioners at Bumbles would create a ‘wall of kindnesses’. The wall provided a space
for children to write about the kind things that they, or other children, had done. To help
the children articulate what they are good at and what they noticed that their friends at
Bumbles had been doing to be kind, the practitioners asked the children for examples which
could be put on the wall of kindnesses. This process involved modelling to the children the
types of statements they could make; as time progressed the practitioners took a step back
and allowed the children the time to develop the statements alone.

Beth: Now I noticed yesterday that Sam was very helpful in the workshop, she tidied up and
she swept up all of the sand that had been spilt on the floor. I am going to write that down
and put it on the wall so we can all remember how helpful Sam was. Do any of you have
anything you could tell me about? Something that somebody has done which has been very
kind or helpful to others?

Alice: I helped mummy cook.

Beth: How wonderful, I’ll write that on here and you can put it up on the wall. Anybody else
have anything they would like to add?

Isaac: I’m very good at tidying up.
In this excerpt Beth is explicitly modelling the behaviour of noticing and acknowledging the kindness of others. She explains how she recognised ways in which people had been helpful and how she had written it down so she could remember. I posit that this is a form of cognitive modelling, as Beth discusses with the children how she noticed the behaviour and how she is writing it down so she can remember the kindness. In this excerpt Beth states, ‘I noticed yesterday that Sam was very helpful in the workshop, she tidied up and she swept up all of the sand that had been spilt on the floor’. This is an example of how the practitioners made explicit the behaviours which are valued in Bumbles and the expectations that they have of the children. This aligns well with the claim that one of the roles of the practitioner in the development of group work skills is for them to make expectations explicit (Kerr, 1983).

**The use of stories to support practitioner modelling of social competencies**

Story time also provides opportunities for the practitioners to explicitly model social competencies to the children. The use of books for discussing challenging or difficult situations with children is common practice, a practice which is supported by the Neo-vygotskian concept of using the language of storybooks to think and communicate (Mercer, 1996) and Bandura’s SLT (1977). SLT supports such an approach as it affords children the opportunity to observe behaviour, in this instance by the characters in the book. Observing these behaviours and the potential consequences of that behaviour in a safe environment supports children to develop an understanding that there are behaviours which result in positive interactions, and less desirable behaviours which can have a negative impact upon interactions and relationships. Books are particularly helpful and a safe way of discussing challenging behaviours as the behaviour is not being linked to the children. The excerpt below, captured in phase three of the research, provides an example of the use of books to support the development of children’s social competencies at Bumbles.
Beth has just finished reading a book to the children. The book tells the story of a lady who is very kind and shares all she has with her family but, because her family takes advantage of her kindness, she becomes angry and stops sharing with them.

**Beth:** Do you think they were being very kind to her?

**Jack:** No, they didn’t help her; they didn’t help with the weeds.

**Geroge:** But she wasn’t kind to them at the end...

**Beth:** You’re right she wouldn’t let them have any of the bread. Why do you think that was? [pause] Why do you think she stopped being so kind?

**Alice:** Because they weren’t kind to her.

**Beth:** I think you’re right, she said that they didn’t help her make the bread so she didn’t feel like sharing it with them... I think if we aren’t kind and helpful to other people, then they may not feel like they want to be kind and helpful to us, what do you think?

**Malachy:** I don’t like playing with my brother when he won’t share with me...

**Beth:** No, oh dear, well perhaps you can talk to him about that and explain how you feel. I see lots of kind and helpful things at Bumbles. Have you seen anybody being kind and helpful today?

**James:** Isaac helped to put the train track together so we could all play trains.

**Beth:** Well that is kind, and how lovely to help each other and then you all had the track to play with.

This conversation demonstrates how Beth used the story to encourage the children to engage in ideas about how they could think about their relationships and interactions with others. Beth used the actions of the characters in the book to facilitate cognitive modelling, i.e. she used the behaviours demonstrated within the story to discuss thought processes
with the children and make links between actions/behaviours and consequences. The conversation moved from discussing the characters in the book to discussing the children’s lives and how they may approach challenges in their relationships, e.g. Malachy and his brother.

**Practitioner modelling: supporting children to practice the skills learned**

During the analysis of the observation data I noted a number of instances of practitioners supporting children to practise behaviour which they themselves had modelled to the children. Bandura (1977) identified within SLT a need for moteric reproduction processes, i.e. a need to provide opportunities for children to practise the behaviours they have modelled to them and to have opportunities to develop their application. Instances of this support for the application of modelled behaviours were seldom observed in phases one and two, it did, however, become more commonplace in phase three. The excerpt below provides an example of this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In preparation for playing outside, protective sun cream is being applied to the children’s arms and faces etc. Clare is rubbing cream into James’ arms. Tabitha comes to help, she doesn’t speak and she starts to rub James’ arm. James jumps.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clare:</strong> <em>Oh did that make you jump, James?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James pulls his arm away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clare:</strong> <em>Tabitha, I think you gave James a fright then. Remember we talked about touching people and asking them first in circle time? And what could you say, James?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>James:</strong> <em>I didn’t like that, you gave me a fright.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tabitha:</strong> <em>Sorry</em> [very quiet, and moves away].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clare:</strong> <em>It is OK Tabitha; just think next time that it’s a good idea to ask first, my lovely.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha nods and smiles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clare: What might you say next time?

Tabitha: James, can I help you rub the cream in?

Clare: That would be great way to ask wouldn’t it? And then he won’t get a fright!

Here Clare uses the interaction between James and Tabitha to support the circle time session activity. This is an example of how a child (or novice) is supported to apply the previously modelled behaviours with support from the practitioner (or expert), and how the practitioner may have a crucial role to play in moteric reproduction processes. I also posit that this is further evidence of a change in the environment at Bumbles. The expected and desired behaviours have altered and are being made explicit to the children.

Incidental modelling of social competencies during practitioner-led activities

Analysis of the video data also revealed numerous instances of incidental modelling. These instances were always behavioural — the thinking processes behind the action were not discussed.

I stated previously that incidental modelling has the potential to impact either positively or negatively on children’s behaviour. Occurrences of incidental modelling which have a negative impact on children’s behaviour highlight how the actions of the practitioner can impact on children’s actions, as discussed by Sheridan (2007). The following exchange demonstrates an episode of incidental modelling by Clare during phase two of the research.

Clare is organising the seating for story time.

Jack: Is there a chair for me?

Clare: No, I asked you to sit there [Points to the floor].

James stands up to move to the chairs.

Clare: Sit down, James.

James: But you pointed at me.
Clare: I did not point at you, James now just sit down.

Clare: Right, Izzy, George, Isaac your next [ briskly].

James: Are we going to begin the story?

No response.

In this excerpt Clare is short tempered with the children. She demands obedience from the children and she ignores their questions. This is in direct contrast to the philosophy of the Relational Approach, which is being repeatedly reiterated to the children, for example through the use of the relational activities. This demonstrates how practitioner behaviour can provide the children with mixed messages about expected and valued behaviours. An unintended consequence of this incidental modelling could be that the children learn that if they exert power and dominance over other children, younger children perhaps, that they could achieve their intended outcomes quickly; aligning with the claim made by Sheridan (2007).

Analysis of the video data revealed that organising the seating arrangements for story time sessions frequently led to challenging behaviours and incidents of incidental modelling which could lead to unintended outcomes related to children’s behaviour. I posit that as the practitioners become less outcomes focussed and more process focussed time could be spent supporting the children to find ways of organising themselves before story time sessions. The Relational Approach advocates children being involved in decision making; encouraging greater independence amongst the children and supporting them to take greater responsibility for their behaviour.

Such observations are a reminder of the effort that it takes to develop children’s group work skills and for practice to change (Stevens, 2008). It will take an investment of time and effort to support the children to develop the skills to arrange themselves. The SPRinG research shows that in the longer term this investment would have numerous positive outcomes,
including less time being spent on organising the children and more time on the planned activity (Kutnick, Ota and Berondini, 2008).

There was further evidence in the data that having an outcomes focussed pedagogy led to instances of incidental modelling behaviours incongruent with the Relational Approach being developed. The following excerpt illustrates this well.

During phase two, Tabitha is painting a Mother’s day card. Practitioner Kate stands up with Tabitha’s picture and begins to walk to the door.

**Kate:** I’m just going to show this to Malachy.

**Tabitha:** I don’t want you to.

**Kate:** Well I really wanted to show him so he will see how good it is and then he’ll do one. Ok. Thanks.

Tabitha nods rather reluctantly as Kate leaves the room without giving Tabitha an opportunity to refuse.

**Kate:** Malachy, look at this great picture Tabitha has done for her mum. Would you like to come and do one please, its Mother’s day on Sunday and you’ll want to give mum a card.

**Malachy:** Er, we’re just playing. [points]

**Kate:** Well if you come and do this now with me you can come and play that again later.

I believe the outcomes focussed nature of the task led to this interaction. There is a plan in place at Bumbles for every child to complete a card for Mothering Sunday which they will need to take home before the weekend. It is common practice for pre-schools to adopt such an approach for special occasions, such as Mothering Sunday and Christmas. This form of activity planning can be incongruent with the philosophy of the Relational Approach. The philosophy of the Relational Approach is one which states that you should value the opinions of others, give everybody time to speak and listen to and respect what others contribute. The excerpt above is evidence that when there is an outcome to be achieved
practitioners focus upon reaching that outcome rather than the process. In the excerpt, practitioner Kate used Tabitha’s card, which Tabitha did not want to share, to persuade Malachy to come and join the card-making activity. This took place during the children’s free play time, yet the notion of free time is ignored and Malachy was cajoled into leaving the activity he was engaged in with his peers to join the art activity. I believe that if the Relational Approach had been fully adopted at Bumbles, Tabitha would have been asked why she did not want to share her card and her concerns addressed and respected. I also believe that Malachy would not have been taken away from his free play time to complete a planned activity. I speculate that parents have an expectation that all children will all bring home a card or picture. As such, if practitioners change their practice and no longer insist that a child participates in an activity such as card making, they would need to consider explaining these changes in practice to the parents to maintain positive relations.
6.3 Practitioner modelling of social competencies – child-led activities

As highlighted previously, children experience two distinct social worlds when at pre-school those of practitioner-led and child-led. In the following section I consider the use of practitioner modelling within child-led activities. As I began this phase of analysis I expected there to be fewer incidents of modelling in this context as I have argued throughout this thesis that children spend more of their time with their peers than with practitioners and, as such, I expected the practitioner to be absent from many of the child-led context observations. Scrutiny of the video data collected during the child-led sessions led me to conclude that this assumption was founded and that there were fewer incidents of practitioner modelling within the child-led context than the practitioner-led context. I did, however, find numerous incidents of practitioner modelling within the child-led context and that the number of these incidents increased over the duration of the research. I again observed examples of both explicit and incidental modelling and of behavioural and cognitive modelling. As with the practitioner-led context this modelling occurred in a number of different ways.

Explicit cognitive modelling of social competencies during child-led activities

The excerpt below provides an example of explicit cognitive practitioner modelling during child free play activities observed in phase two of the research project.

A group of children are playing a simple board game with practitioner Kate. Kate is playing with the children and is modelling turn-taking to the children. As they move around the circle one child – Conrad – has left the group.

Kate: OK, it’s Conrad’s turn.

Malachy: He’s not here.

Kate: We can ask him to take his turn; he is just over there with the book. Conrad, would you like to come and take your turn now?
They all wait for Conrad, who comes back to the table to take his turn.

**Kate:** Great, we’re all playing very well together, that was kind to make sure everybody gets to take their turn. I know I wouldn’t like it if you carried on without me if I had to leave for a moment. It would have made me sad.

In this excerpt Kate models the act of turn-taking to the children. The modelling becomes cognitive as she explores with the children how it would feel to be left out. She also praises the children for including Conrad, making explicit the desired behaviour and potentially motivating the children to engage in this behaviour in the future.

**Moteric reproduction within child-led activities**

As noted previously, there is a need for practitioners to provide opportunities for moteric reproduction processes (Bandura, 1977), that is, opportunities for the children to practise the social competencies modelled to them. Examples of practitioners providing this support within the child-led context are provided within the following two excerpts. The first is taken from an observation made at the end of phase one, and the second is taken from an observation made in phase three. These excerpts demonstrate how the language of the practitioners has altered following the Relational Approach training and also how the responsibility for finding resolutions has moved to the child as the Relational Approach has become embedded in practitioner practice.

During a phase one free play session Malachy and Adam are becoming irritated with each other as they try to play in the same space. Malachy becomes upset when Adam shoves him out of his way.

**Clare:** If you don’t want Adam to touch you, you need to say, ‘Adam, please don’t touch me like that’, and Adam you need to listen and think about what he saying and then stop touching him. We don’t want anybody getting sad and if anybody gets hurt they will get very sad. [Brisk exchange]
In this excerpt Clare is explicitly modelling to the children what they could say to each other and how they could respond to the situation. She does not, however, provide them with an opportunity to reach their own resolution, nor does she provide them with a space in which to practise the behaviour or resolution she has modelled or suggested. This interaction aligns more with behavioural modelling than cognitive modelling as there is no discussion about the thought process or why this may be a positive way to interact, though there is some evidence of encouraging the children to think about the potential consequences. There is evidence that her practice has altered in phase three.

During phase three, George and Josie are running inside the pre-school.

**Clare:** *One moment George and Josie, what do you need to think about when you’re playing a game like that... chasing each other?*

**Josie:** *We’re just playing.*

**Clare:** *I realise that, my darling, but what do we need to think about when we are running and rushing... I want you to be very careful of all your friends at Bumbles, what will happen if you rush around a corner and bump into somebody?*

**George:** *It would hurt them.*

**Clare:** *Exactly, and I don’t want anybody getting hurt because then we will all be sad, I’ll be very sad if anybody gets hurt. So I don’t want to ruin your game but you have a think about another way you could play for now whilst I finish this and in a little while I will take you out into the garden for a runabout.*

This interaction shows Clare supporting the children to think about how their behaviour may impact upon others and the potential consequences, for example, a child getting hurt. She also builds upon this by discussing how it would make each of them feel if somebody did get hurt. This demonstrates a change in approach from the phase one excerpt and is suggestive of a change in Clare’s expectations of the children. In this excerpt she expects them to be able to think about and understand the relationship between actions and consequences. In
this second excerpt Clare invites the children to recognise what the consequences of their actions may be rather than informing them of the possible consequences and offering them a potential resolution as she does in the first excerpt. In addition, Clare recognises that the children are demonstrating that they need an opportunity to expel some energy and that going out into the garden would offer them a safer opportunity for doing this.

Opportunities for practitioners to support children to practise the application of behaviours they have had modelled to them by the practitioners also arise spontaneously during children’s interactions with their peers. This is illustrated in the excerpt of a phase three observation given below.

Tomas and George are playing in the same room near each other. Tomas is playing trains and George is playing farms.

Tomas extends his train track into the area where George has the farm laid out.

George pushes Tomas’ hand away.

**Beth:** Oh dear, maybe there is a way we can have a farm and a train track. Trains pass by farms all the time. What do you think?

**Tomas:** Yes, let’s have a track on the farm.

**George:** No, it will get in the way of the tractor.

**Beth:** Well, what other way do trains pass over things.

**George:** We could build a bridge.

**Beth:** What a great idea. I’m sure if you asked Tomas he would help and you could build a bridge together.

**Tomas and George:** Yeah, let’s build a bridge.

This continues and Beth helps them every now and then with suggestions, such as ‘if you move it around here you can both reach into the box so you can build together’.
The support Beth provides here is a crucial element of supporting the children to practise the behaviour modelled and lead to a change in their behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Following this exchange George and Tomas are seen playing together more often and Tomas engages in a little less solitary play. This example of support for the children to resolve issues together appears to have had a positive impact upon on their ability to play well together and enjoy each other’s company, a point explored further later in this chapter.

**Behavioural modelling practitioner-peer interactions**

Further occurrences of incidental modelling captured during the analysis of the child-led activities relate to the practitioners interactions with each other. During phase one I frequently observed the practitioners speaking to each other in front of the children in a different manner than they would speak to the children. I recorded such instances as episodes of incidental behavioural modelling. By phase three it appears that the practitioners have considered how the way they interact with each other may influence the children’s behaviours, as I witnessed a change in their interactions with each other. In some instances they began to use their interactions as opportunities for explicit modelling. On a number of occasions during phase three of the research, I observed practitioners using their conversations with their peers to model the social competencies to the children. An example of such an exchange follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During free play activities there are several small groups of children engaged in activities and four practitioners moving from room to room.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beth</strong>: <em>Irene did you get the phone?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irene</strong>: <em>Yes, it was for Anita so I passed it through.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beth</strong>: <em>Thank you, that was really helpful, I couldn’t get to it as I had paint on my hands. I would have missed the call if you had not helped, so thank you.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In phase one the practitioners would have thanked each other for getting the telephone, or passing a book, for example. However, the social competencies being modelled in those exchanges would not have been made explicit to the children in this way. In an informal discussion with Clare this topic was discussed and recorded in my research journal. Clare said to me, ‘the children pick up on what’s around them, if we are asking them to behave in a particular way then we must be seen to be acting in that way as well, it’s obvious really’. It is not my intention to claim that Clare’s involvement in this research has led to her thinking about the environment or the way her behaviours may impact upon the children for the first time. However, I do believe that the focussed attention given to the development of children’s social competencies and the detailed conversations about the significance of relationships on children’s social and cognitive development has impacted on her practice and her interactions generally at Bumbles. This may be related to the statement by Pollard (2008), drawn upon in the previous chapter, that reflecting upon practice leads to an increase in the quality of practice.

**Practitioner modelling – problem-solving skills**

Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the role of the practitioner in supporting the development of children’s social competencies and this chapter is focussed upon the modelling of social competencies, it is pertinent to note that I also observed an increase in the modelling of cognitive problem-solving skills in phase three of the data collection. I concluded previously that the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles had focussed on the trust and communication elements of the programme with the problem-solving aspect not being progressed. I speculated that this was related to the children’s ages. As I observed practitioner modelling I noted what I will describe as a precursor to group problem-solving activities as the practitioner supported the children to develop the skills required for such group work tasks. An example of this is provided in the following excerpt.
Ben is trying to do a simple jigsaw. Beth is sat with him.

She allows him to try to fit the pieces into the spaces but he is not managing to progress with the task. Beth takes a piece and tries it in each of the different holes.

Beth: *No it doesn’t fit this way. How about if I turn it and try now....oh nearly, maybe I could turn it a little bit more what do you think? Would you like to have a try?*

She is modelling the actions of finding the correct space and talking him through the process.

Ben then tries to do the same and with a little encouragement he manages to add a piece to the puzzle.

This excerpt demonstrates Beth’s use of modelling of cognitive processes for problem solving. I assert that as the practitioners have developed their skills of modelling social competencies to children this has also had a positive impact on their skills of modelling cognitive problem-solving processes. The SPRinG research data concluded that the implementation of the Relational Approach led to positive gains in pupil attainment – in reading and Mathematics scores (Blatchford et al., 2005). Whilst this gain is attributed to the children’s new found abilities to support each other in their learning I speculate that the development of the practitioners modelling skills may also have a play a role in this. As I have concluded previously, there is evidence that the quality of the practice increases in many areas, for example, within SST and formative feedback, not just within social competency development.

Analysis of the interactions which occurred between the children and the practitioners across the distinct contexts of practitioner-led and child-led activities has led me to conclude that practitioners do model social competencies to children. I found the modelling to be either explicit or incidental in nature. The incidents of explicit modelling were most often found to be cognitive in nature and the incidental modelling behavioural in nature.
This is perhaps unsurprising given the explicit modelling is planned and/or conscious and that incidental modelling occurs without an awareness that modelling is occurring.

As the practitioners became more familiar with the Relational Approach the instances of explicit and cognitive modelling increased. Concurrently, the instances of the incidental modelling, which may have had an undesirable impact upon the children’s behaviour, decreased. This seemed to relate to the practitioners becoming more aware of the impact their behaviour could have on the children’s peer interactions.

In addition to modelling social competencies I found that the practitioners also provided moteric reproduction processes (Bandura, 1977), i.e. they supported the children to practise the social competencies they had modelled to them. Evidence of the provision of moteric reproduction processes grew as the research progressed and the practitioners became more familiar with the Relational Approach.
6.4 Children’s social competencies and peer interactions

Research question eight: Is there an increase in the social competencies displayed by children?

In this section I draw upon data collected through observations, the practitioner interviews and my research journal.

I have concluded thus far that at Bumbles there has been a change in practitioner pedagogy and practice which has led to a change in the children’s pre-school experience. In chapter four I noted that there had been an increase in the children’s social networks, and that there was evidence that their social networks had extended as they interacted with children of a different age and sex to themselves more often than they had done previously. In the following section I seek to understand if these changes related to changes in the social competencies displayed by the children and how, if at all, these changes led to changes in their interactions.

To address these questions I focussed on three embedded case children. The three children were selected in consultation with the practitioners and with reference to the results of the sociometry described within the Methodology and Methods chapter. Child one, Izzy, was selected as a high social status child; child two, Tabitha, as a medium social status child; and child three, Tomas, as a low social status child. I believe that selecting children with different social standings in Bumbles provided me an understanding of how children’s pre-school experiences differ. In addition, this provided me with the opportunity to consider the potential impact of the Relational Approach on children with different social experiences and different levels of social competency development.

Each of the three focus children were observed for eight minutes on four occasions during each of the three phases (12 observations per child, 36 observations in total). For each child I repeatedly scrutinised their interactions and have coded this into information which I have
presented in four tables, each of which focuses upon different aspects of the child’s behaviour. The first table provides general information regarding the child’s interactions with their peers, i.e. number of children interacted with and their use of group activities. The second table provides information about the number and type of positive interactions the child is observed engaging in across the three phases of the research, and the third is focussed on the number and type of ‘challenging’ behaviours and interactions the child is observed engaged in. Included within the ‘challenging’ behaviours category are those behaviours which were viewed negatively in exchanges with others, including snatching, aggressive physical contact such as hitting or kicking, negative body language such as glaring, and behaviours which exclude others from joining an activity. Both the positive and challenging behaviour lists are taken from work by Costabile et al. (1999). More detailed information is provided in Appendix 12.

I recognise that challenging behaviours result from many different reasons. For the purposes of this research I am solely concerned with whether these behaviours reduce as the children receive increased support to develop their social competencies through the development of the Relational Approach.

The final table provides information on the quality of the children’s interactions with practitioners. As with the practitioner analysis I have used categories from the CCIS (Carl, 2007).

Together, the four tables provide a partial story of the child’s social competencies. To increase the depth of this analysis this data is supplemented with excerpts of observations of the child’s interactions during each of the three phases of the research. These excerpts are illustrative of their interactions with both their peers and the practitioners.
Child One: Izzy

Izzy is a high social status child. Within the sociometry she received the greatest number of play choices and reciprocal play choices of all the children. At the beginning of the project she was 46 months old and had been attending Bumbles for one year.

Izzy takes on an organising role within the pre-school. She has a male friend, Isaac, who she interacts with during each of the observations in each of the phases. She is a very capable child; she reads some words and can write her name along with some other simple words, including the names of some of the other children. She has a good memory and she enjoys acting and recreating scenes from films she has watched, including Peter Pan. Whilst Izzy has been identified as having a high social status in Bumbles she has a tendency to become irritated with the other children if they do not follow the procedure of the game/role play. This leads to her bossing, and on occasion, shouting at the other children as she wants them to do things properly.

Izzy also has a tendency to dominate practitioner time. She is very confident and frequently asks the practitioners questions and involves them in her play. She seems to enjoy practitioner attention. If another child takes a toy she believes she was playing with first she will cry loudly until a practitioner provides her with attention and ultimately resolves the situation.
Table 22 below provides information on the groups Izzy was observed within and her interactions within those groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of group activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of child-practitioner interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner interactions</td>
<td>8 x respond to child</td>
<td>6 x respond to child</td>
<td>3 x respond to child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 x direct</td>
<td>1 x direct</td>
<td>1 x directing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 x intervene</td>
<td>1 x act/play</td>
<td>3 x act/play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 x intervene</td>
<td>1 x intervene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of child-peer interactions</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with friends</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with non-friends</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with same-aged peers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with different age peers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean activity relational rating</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean observation relational rating</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean child engagement</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22 Information on the groups Izzy was observed within and her interactions within those groups across the three phases

The data provided in table 22 shows that for Izzy:

- there is no change across phases in the number of group activities in which she is engaged, she is engaged in a group activity in every session observed
- the number of interactions she has with practitioners remains relatively stable, decreasing from a mean of 3 in phase one to 2 in phase three
- she has a stable number of peer interactions across the observations
- the number of interactions she has with non-friends increases across the phases (from 2 in phase one, 3 in phase two and 5 in phase three)
- she increases the number of interactions she has with children from different age groups across the phases (from 0 in phase one to 5 in phase two and 4 in phase three)
- the relational rating, that is the score given to the activity for its encouragement of peer interaction and collaboration, increases across the phases from 1.75 in phase one to 2 in phase two and 2.5 in phase three
- the relational rating of the observations made, that is the score given for the quality of the interactions and whether the interactions are cooperative, increases across the phases from 1.75 in phase one to 2 in phase two and 3.25 in phase three
- her level of engagement in the activity, that is the score given to the attention she pays to the activity and her level of distraction, increases from 2.25 in phase one to 4 in both phases two and three.

The groupings which Izzy was observed in remained stable across the phases of the research. However the nature of these has altered. Specifically, whilst Izzy had a close group of same age, predominately same sex peers at the beginning of the research, her interactions with her peers developed to include younger children. In addition, the interactions observed suggested a qualitative change in these interactions as the relational rating increased and Izzy was noted as being more engaged in these interactions. Such findings suggest that Izzy is developing greater tolerance towards her peers. To investigate this further Izzy’s prosocial and challenging behaviours were also recorded; these are presented in the following two tables.
Table 23 Information on Izzy’s prosocial interactions with her peers across the three phases

The data in table 23 shows that Izzy is involved in a number of positive interactions with her peers. Notable points include:

- her enjoyment displayed through laughing and smiling increases across the phases (from 6 in phase one to 17 in phase two and 20 in phase three)
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her being inclusive from 0 in phase one, 1 in phase two and 4 in phase three
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her mediating other children’s disputes from 0 in phase one to 2 occasions in phases two and three.
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her sharing from 0 in phases one and two to 7 in phase three.

Substantive changes were recorded in the prosocial behaviours Izzy was engaged in across the three phases. The observations suggest Izzy has a more enjoyable pre-school experience evidenced by her laughing and smiling. She is also engaged in more inclusive behaviours, including sharing with her peers. Interestingly, she adopts the role of mediator
when her peers become engaged in challenging interactions. The table below shows this correlates with a decrease in the number of challenging interactions she herself is involved in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Child-Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pushing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snatching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying/shouting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaring</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 Information on Izzy’s challenging interactions with her peers across the three phases

Table 24 shows Izzy is involved in some challenging exchanges with her peers. Notable points include:

- in phase one Izzy displays a number of challenging behaviours, including 1 incident of pulling and pushing, 4 instances of excluding others, 4 instances of ignoring, 4 of snatching, 2 of crying and 6 of glaring
- Izzy continues to boss her peers through the phases although this peaks in phase two with 20 instances observed; this reduces to 6 instances in phase three
- the number of negative interactions decreases over the three phases from 37 in phase one to 8 in phase three. Instances of pushing, pulling, excluding, ignoring and glaring diminished completely.
The number of challenging interactions recorded for Izzy was substantial at 37 in phase one and 41 in phase 2, with the phase one data recorded more challenging than positive interactions 37 compared with 36. This compares with just 8 challenging and 77 prosocial interactions in phase three. The possible reasons for these changes will be discussed later in this section.

I will now move on to consider whether the changes observed in Izzy’s behaviour correlate with changes in Izzy’s interactions with the practitioners. The SPRinG research data suggested that as children’s social competencies increase and they are equipped with the skills to support each other and resolve their own disputes, they demand less teacher time (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008). The table overleaf provides the mean scores across the phases for Izzy’s interactions with practitioners. The categories used are adapted from the CCIS (Carl, 2007) (Appendix 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner-Child Interactions</th>
<th>Mean Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Mean Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Mean Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean Number of Interactions</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Practitioner Interaction</strong></td>
<td>8 x respond to child 1 x direct 3 x intervene</td>
<td>6 x respond to child 1 x direct 1 x act/play 2 x intervene</td>
<td>3 x respond to child 1 x directing 3 x act/play 1 x intervene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 The mean scores for Izzy’s interactions with practitioners across the three phases
The number of practitioner-child interactions I observed involving Izzy were relatively stable across the three phases, with a slight decrease in the number of interactions across the phases from 3 to 2. I observed some changes in the nature of these interactions with a slight increase in the support given to develop prosocial skills and communication skills, including by helping her to understand her feelings and emotions by labelling communication.

This suggests Izzy is benefiting from the changes in practitioner practice discussed previously.

It is noteworthy that there is a decrease in the number of times the practitioner became involved in Izzy’s disputes (from 3 in phase one to 1 in phase three). Furthermore, there is a decrease in the number of times the practitioners are required to directly respond to Izzy (from 8 in phase one to 3 in phase two). This data provides a picture which suggests that, though the number of interactions Izzy is involved in with practitioner remains stable, the nature of these interactions has changed. The practitioners are now more involved in Izzy’s activities – shown through the increase in instances of acting and playing and they are no longer responding to her requests. These changes marry well with the changes noted in the quality rating and the increased use of SST and open-ended questioning. Here the practitioner is seen to be engaged with Izzy and the task in hand.

To further explore these suggestions and to illustrate how these changes in behaviour play out in everyday interactions I considered excerpts of observations made during each of the three phases of data collection. The interactions between Izzy and her peers, and Izzy and the practitioners are considered within each of the phases of data collection.

Izzy, phase one (September)

The dominant theme of these observations was Izzy bossing other children.
**Peer interaction phase one: Izzy and Alice**

There are a number of children playing during free play time. Some of the children are playing with cars whilst others are dressing-up. There are two real telephones, which are not connected. Alice has one and Izzy has the other. They are separated by around 5 metres.

**Izzy:** Alice, I am going to call you, OK? OK, Alice, I am going to call you.

Izzy holds the telephone

**Izzy:** Alice... ALICCEE... what’s your phone number?

Alice continues to play

Izzy looks around the room.

**Izzy:** Alice, what’s your phone number? [Irritated tone]

**Alice:** Er 7 and 8...

Izzy presses 7 and 8 on her key pad and looks up waiting.

**Izzy:** And what else?

**Alice:** Erm and 7 and er 8 [hesitantly andquestioningly — her voice raises at the end]

**Izzy:** Actually what’s the whole of your phone number?

**Alice:** Hello [she says down the telephone]

**Izzy:** NO! I need to call you first so I need to know your real number, the whole of your phone number. [Exasperated, pushing hair from face]

**Alice:** 7

**Izzy:** 7 [pushes button]

**Alice:** 8

**Izzy:** 8 [pushes button]
Alice: 9

Izzy: 9 [pushes button]

Alice: 10

Izzy: No Alice, there is no 10 on my phone, I'm afraid. I could do zero and one to make 10.

Alice comes to Izzy and looks at her phone.

Izzy: You'll have to go and answer your phone.

Alice: [moves back to her phone] Hello

Izzy: NO! ALICE, I've got to ring you.

This continues with Izzy becoming increasingly exasperated and short tempered with Alice. It ends as they are called by one of the practitioners to take part in another task.

This interaction provides an insight into Izzy's experience with her peers during phase one of the research. She is a bright child and expects other children to have the same level of understanding as she does. She wants to play with Alice but she wants this to be done properly and so is impatient with Alice. This may explain why she is not observed interacting with children younger than herself in phase one; she may find these interactions too challenging as she lacks the sensitivity and awareness of others to engage in and enjoy these interactions.

I have asserted in this chapter that, prior to the Relational Approach becoming embedded in practice at Bumbles, Izzy was demanding of the practitioners and required their attention to support her to resolve challenging interactions. The excerpt below illustrates this.

Izzy practitioner interaction phase one

Izzy and Isaac play with two wooden jigsaws which allow the children to select different outfits for people.
Izzy leans into Isaac.

**Izzy:** *Actually, can I can put those in there please?* [Places pieces in, leaning across Isaac]

They continue to place the pieces in the frame.

Tomas, a younger child, runs to the table, playing a chasing game. He leans on the table. Izzy quickly clasps the pieces moving any away that are within his reach. She looks but she says nothing.

**Isaac:** *This goes in here* [smiles].

**Izzy:** *Yes* [smiles and looks for other pieces].

Alice approaches the table and picks up the jigsaw box.

**Izzy:** *I’m doing that* [takes box from Alice].

Izzy takes a piece from Alice.

**Alice:** *Look that face goes in there* [points].

Izzy takes the piece.

Alice, chatting happily, picks another piece.

**Izzy:** *I want it* [increasing volume]. *I want it No NO NO!* [begins to cry]

Isaac initially leans away from the table, then leans in, and places a protective hand over the pieces he is using, looking from one girl to the other.

Izzy continues to cry rubbing her eyes, it is a whining cry and she repeats:

**Izzy:** *I want it, no I want it.*

Alice continues to do the jigsaw. Isaac watches her; he looks shocked, wide-eyed.

**Alice:** *I can give it back to you in a minute. Let me have a go.*

**Izzy:** [between sobs] *it’s not fair... me... I was...*
Izzy stops crying and looks around, she sees me and looks, then she sees practitioner, Irene, and considerably increases the volume of the cry. **Isaac: I’ll come and play with you** [starts putting the jigsaw away].

**Irene:** Oh, Izzy, what’s the matter? [crouches to her level]

**Izzy:** Alice has got the girl [sobs, points].

**Irene:** Oh, is that all [kind tone]. *She can have a go at dressing the girl, you have done it so many times now, haven’t you* [no time to respond] dressing her as a princess and a ballerina?

**Izzy:** But I want to dress her up [sobs].

**Irene:** Maybe you could say to Alice ‘when you’ve finished can I have a try’. *There is no need to be upset really, is there? You could both have a go and then we could put them back in their boxes* [moves to pick something off the floor].

**Izzy:** Alice can I do that then [slight muffled cry].

Alice finishes her jigsaw. Puts the pieces back in the box and hugs the frame tight to her chest.

**Izzy:** Can I have it?

**Irene:** Can you let Izzy have a go now? *You are just holding it.*

**Alice:** No.

**Irene:** Yes, you’re just holding it now so give it to Izzy for one last go before we tidy up.

Irene takes the frame and passes to Izzy who promptly fills the spaces. Another child comes over to the table and sticks his tongue out at Izzy and she pushes him away.

**Izzy:** NO.

Izzy starts putting the jigsaw away and the practitioner is involved with another child.

There are a number of issues raised in this excerpt. Initially Izzy is controlling the activity and is very protective of her pieces, ensuring other children cannot take any of the pieces from
her. For example, she ignores the younger child (Tomas) and protects her pieces from his reach. This theme continues when Alice approaches. Izzy is not inclusive and when she is not in control of the activity she begins to cry. Her glance around the room to see if there are any practitioners available who will come and resolve this issue is interesting. She is, I believe, looking for a practitioner who can resolve this issue. Rather than asking for practitioner help, I also believe she deliberately increases the volume of her crying to gain their attention. She is successful in her aim. Irene comes to the table and intervenes. The dialogue in the excerpt illustrates how they are not expected to be able to resolve the dispute. In addition, despite Irene asking them questions, the children are not given any chance to respond and ultimately it is the practitioner (Irene) who provides a solution. Here there is very little evidence of support given to children to develop their social competencies.

**Izzy, phase two**

The data presented in tables 22 to 25 suggested that, in phase two, Izzy widened her social network to include children younger than herself, however, this was accompanied by an increase in the challenging behaviours she displayed, particularly the bossing of other children. The following excerpt provides a picture of her interactions during this period. Izzy is playing with Isaac. I frequently observed Izzy and Isaac playing well together, engaged in activities which demonstrate turn taking skills. However, when a third child (George) asks if he can join the game, Izzy is initially reluctant but then invites him to play.

**Peer interaction phase two: Izzy, Isaac and George**

Izzy and Isaac are playing a matching pairs game. First, you must spin an arrow on a card, which points to the colour piece you must turn over to try to find a pair.

**Izzy: Ok, my turn first Isaac... my turn first...** [she places the pieces on the floor and spins the wheel] **Not a pair.**
Isaac spins the wheel and turns the pieces over.

**Izy:** *Not a pair.*

**Izy:** [Taking her turn] *Not a pair.*

Isaac takes his turn but the arrow lands on the line in between two colours.

**Izy:** *Try another spin, Isaac, that was in the middle. I’ll hold it for you.*

They continue playing. George looks at the counters and turns one over.

**Izy:** *No don’t do that, you’ll ruin it.* [She takes the piece and puts it back. She looks at me for a moment, then pauses.] *You could play if you like, couldn’t he Isaac?*

**Isaac:** *Yep. Not a pair, here you go. You spin the wheel and then turn the pieces over to try and find a pair.*

George has his turn; Izzy holds the wheel so he can take a spin.

**George and Isaac:** *Not a pair* [laughs].

Izzy takes her turn.

**Izy:** *SNAP!* [They all cheer and giggle]

Isaac takes his turn. He is thinking about which counter to select.

**Izy:** *Try that one.* [She points to a piece]

Isaac does as he is told and turns the selected piece.

**Izy and Isaac:** *Not a pair.*

Whilst at the end of this exchange Izzy shows she is impatient and wants Isaac to hurry, she is welcoming to George; a child not named by her as somebody she liked to play and work with when asked during the sociometry. Interestingly, though, she welcomes his involvement after she looks at me. I speculate that she knows that this inclusive behaviour would be expected and valued and that this influences her decision. It is possible that is an indication that the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles is having an impact.
on Izzy’s behaviour and that practitioners being explicit about the expectations they have of them has been noted.

**Izzy practitioner interaction, phase two**

Beth is reading a story to the children.

Part of the story involves the dad in the story trying to get some peace; he enters his son’s room. His son is pretending to be an aeroplane. The children are clearly familiar with the story and they all being to make pretend aeroplane noises. In the story the dad can’t stand the noise and so he leaves the room.

**Izzy:** [puts her hands over her ears] *I can’t stand it either, it is very noisy.*

**Beth:** *It is, isn’t it, don’t worry that noise has stopped now.*

The story continues. Beth asks the children what in the kitchen is making the humming noise. Several children answer ‘the fridge’.

**Beth:** *That’s right, the fridge.*

**Izzy:** *Actually it’s a refrigerator.*

**Beth:** *Well, yes, you’re quite right but we call it the fridge for short.*

This exchange is interesting in that this is a whole group activity and Izzy engages in a one-on-one discussion with the practitioner on a number of occasions. This is peculiar to Izzy, the majority of the other children do not engage in any one-on-one interactions with the practitioner. The tone adopted by Izzy in these exchanges is one of ‘teacher’, she takes on a role of ensuring the other children are quiet and are sat *correctly* and are answering the questions *correctly*. There is no attempt by the practitioner to support Izzy to mediate or alter her behaviour.

**Izzy, phase three**

The quantitative data revealed that, by phase three, Izzy’s bossing role has reduced substantially from 20 observations made in phase two to six in phase three. It is also
noticeable that, rather than shouting and crying, if another child takes a toy she states clearly that she wants to keep it as she had it first. The following excerpt illustrates an incident in which Izzy mediates between George and Alice, which is illustrative of a different approach to peer relationships for Izzy.

Peer interaction phase three: Izzy, Alice and George

The children are waiting to be called to play in the garden. Whilst they are waiting, Izzy and Alice are pretending to drive a car. They are giggling. Alice leaves her chair to locate a circle she can use as a steering wheel, but when she returns George has sat in her chair. Alice tries to sit on the chair, pushing George. They are making grunting noises but not saying anything clearly. Izzy watches for a moment.

Izzy: Alice, you know you are pushing George, don’t you... George, why don’t you go and get that blue chair there [pointing], the blue chair.

George gets the chair Izzy has pointed at. He places the chair in front of Izzy, facing away, and starts to imitate driving.

Izzy: Are you all having fun now? [They all giggle and continue the game together] Let’s go!

Izzy practitioner interaction phase three

The final excerpt provides an insight into how Izzy’s interactions with the practitioners also changed.

Practitioner Irene is sat at a table and the children are entering the room to sit with her and join in a craft activity. The activity involves hammering shapes into a board. Irene already has Tomas and Alice sat with her and is engaged in discussion with them. Izzy joins the group.

Izzy: Hello Irene. I’m going to have this one.

Irene: Hello Izzy [smiles], are you coming to do some hammering?

Izzy: Yes [collects some pieces].
Irene: We have learnt a song about hammering, haven’t we, do you remember?

Izzy: Oh yes [Izzy begins to sing].

Izzy and Irene sing the song. The other children watch and continue with their pictures.

Izzy: I need a semi-circle for here.

Irene: Tomas, can we help Izzy find a half circle for her picture?

Tomas looks at Irene and Izzy. Irene finds a circle and pushes it across the table.

Irene: Here you go, Izzy.

Izzy remains a dominant force in the interactions with practitioners. This excerpt shows how she immediately becomes the centre of the conversation as she joins a group and provides evidence of how Izzy’s presence moves practitioner attention away from other children. However, as is shown here, by phase three Izzy’s interactions with practitioners are longer and are less focussed on resolving disputes. Whilst Izzy is dominating the conversation, I speculate that this change has the potential to support the development of the other children’s social competencies. If modelling is as beneficial as claimed within the literature it is likely that observing these interactions, and the language used by Izzy in these exchanges, could be beneficial to the other children. As discussed within the literature review, Gillies and Boyle (2005) demonstrated that children model the verbal interactions they have seen demonstrated by each other during cooperative group work and suggest that teacher modelling is less significant. Izzy’s skills may therefore be beneficial to the other children, so long as they have the opportunity to practise these skills (Bandura, 1977).

Overall, the data for Izzy suggests that the changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice, noted in the previous chapter, align with changes in Izzy’s behaviours, including her peer interactions and her interactions with the practitioners. These changes have led to Izzy widening her social network and engaging in fewer challenging behaviours with her peers. This correlates with the practitioner intervening less in Izzy’s disputes, and the practitioners
engaging in more detailed and prolonged discussions with Izzy. Within the literature review I claimed that a widening of children’s social networks was likely to be beneficial for their social and cognitive development. I also noted the importance of the role of the practitioner in supporting children’s learning (e.g. Vygotsky, 1962; Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). I therefore propose that these changes in practice and in the children’s experience of pre-school will be advantageous. These noted changes may explain the changes reported by the SPRinG research, that children’s academic scores increased following the implementation of the Relational Approach in schools.

**Child two, Tabitha**

Tabitha has been identified as a medium social status child. At the beginning of the research she was 42 months old and had been attending Bumbles for eight months. She is a quiet child and frequently hovers at the side of other children, but rarely engages in any direct conversation with them. She seems to lack the confidence and the skills to engage with the other children as they play; particularly the more dominant children like Izzy.

The table overleaf provides information on the interactions I observed Tabitha engaged in across the three phases of the research.
The data provided in table 26 reveals Tabitha is involved in very few peer interactions or group activities during the child-led activities. Notable points include that:

- she is seldom involved in group activities, there is a rise from a score of 0 to 2 between phases one and three
- the number of interactions she has with practitioners remains stable across the research with a score of 1 across the phases
- there is a decrease in the number of peer interactions she engages in during phase two but this raises again in phase three
- the number of interactions she has with children who she does not identify as friends increases slightly across the phases (from 2 in phase one and phase two to 4 in phase three)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of group activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of child-practitioner interactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of practitioner interaction</td>
<td>1 x respond to child</td>
<td>1 x respond to child</td>
<td>1 x encourage child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children interacted with (includes same child different observations)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with friends</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with non friends</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions same aged peers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions different age peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean activity relational rating</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean observation relational rating</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean child engagement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26 Information about the groups Tabitha was involved in during across the three phases
- the number of interactions she has with children from a different age group to her rises slightly across the phases (from 2 in phase one to 4 in phase three)
- the relational rating of the activities she is involved in increases from 1.5 in phase one to 2.5 in phase three
- the relational rating of the observations made increases across the phases from 1.25 in phase one to 3 in phase three
- her level of engagement in activities increases slightly from 2 in phase one to 2.75 in phase three.

The data highlights how Tabitha, as a medium social status child, is engaged in far fewer interactions than Izzy across the research phases. Despite the number of interactions Tabitha is involved in remaining relatively static, and decreasing from phase one to two, the data suggests that there has been a change in the quality of those interactions. This is evidenced by the increase in the mean relational rating given to the observation, which rose from 1.5 in phase one to 3 in phase three.

Tabitha’s interactions in these group activities were explored further through her prosocial and challenging behaviours across the phases. The data provided in table 27, overleaf, shows that although Tabitha was not engaged in more interactions between phase one and two, the quality of those interactions and the number of sustained conversations she engaged in increased substantially.
Table 27 The mean scores for Tabitha’s positive peer interactions across the three phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Child-Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laughs/smiles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks to others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks at others to engage with them</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive physical contact</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive behaviour – asking to join</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator role adopted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares with others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracts attention</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27 shows that during the observations Tabitha is involved in a number of positive interactions with her peers. Notable points include:

- her enjoyment, displayed through laughing and smiling, increases across the phases (from 4 in phase one, to 2 in phase two and up to 16 in phase three)
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her talking to her peers from 1 in phase one to 4 in phase two and 26 in phase three
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her being inclusive from 0 in phase one and two up to 2 in phase three
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her helping other children from 0 in phase one and two to 2 in phase three
- there is an increase in the number of observations of her sharing with other children from 0 in phase one and two to 9 in phase three
- there is a decrease in the number of observations of her following other children from 6 in phases one, 7 in phase two to 2 in phase three.
Tabitha’s prosocial interactions lend further support to the claim that though the number of interactions she is involved remains relatively static, the quality of those interactions increases. The data in table 27 reveals that she is displaying greater enjoyment in those interactions; the number of observations recorded rose from 4 in phase one to 16 in phase three and she is talking more within those interactions, rising from just 1 in phase one to 16 in phase three. As the length of these interactions increased, Tabitha displayed a greater number of prosocial behaviours including sharing and helping. However, as the length of the interactions she was engaged in increased, so did the opportunities for challenging interactions, as can be seen in table 28, below. As Tabitha becomes less lonely and more engaged with her peers, there is an increase in the number of challenging behaviours she displays, for example snatching and pulling, though these are isolated incidents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Child-Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pushing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snatching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying/shouting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28 The mean scores for Tabitha’s challenging interactions with her peers across the three phases

Table 28 shows Tabitha is involved in some challenging exchanges with her peers. Notable points include:
- in phase one Tabitha is observed bossing her peers, this is not seen in either phases two and three
- she excludes one child in both phases one and three
- she is observed threatening a child once and snatching from a child once in phase three
- her episodes of loneliness decreases from 4 in phase one to 1 in phases two and three
- The number of challenging interactions Tabitha is involved in drops in phase two and rising again in phase three.

This data reveals that Tabitha’s social network widened slightly over the course of the three phases of the research. This included Tabitha playing with children of a different age to herself (this was a mix of older and younger children). Whilst the number of interactions Tabitha is engaged in dips in phase two and then increases in phase three to the same level as phase one, the characteristics of these interactions differ greatly. This may also explain the dip in the number of challenging interactions Tabitha is observed engaged in phase three. The data in table 28 shows that observations of her laughing, smiling and talking increase over the three phases. She is more engaged in the activities, and the instances of her following other children as an outsider to an activity decreases. As the number of positive interactions she is engaged in increases, the number of challenging interactions I observe her engaged in decreases (from phase one to phase three). In phase three it seems as though Tabitha has moved from being a child on the periphery, watching other children, to a child who is engaged with her peers. I assert that the sustained focus on the building of social competencies at Bumbles, led by the development of the Relational Approach, has made a substantial contribution to this development.
Whilst Tabitha has been observed engaging in more positive and fewer challenging interactions with her peers, the number of interactions she engaged in with practitioners did not change substantially across the three phases of the research, as table 29 shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner-Child Interactions</th>
<th>Mean Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Mean for Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Mean for Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Child-Practitioner Interactions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Practitioner Interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>1 x respond to child</td>
<td>1 x respond to child</td>
<td>1 x encourage child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29 The mean scores for Tabitha’s interactions with practitioners across the three phases

The number of interactions Tabitha has with the practitioners remains stable at 1 across the three phases of the research, however, the quality of these interactions is different with the practitioner encouraging Tabitha in phase three, rather than responding to her as in phases one and two. In addition, the mean quality scores of the practitioner-child interactions also increase by one point (where applicable) from phases one and two into phase three. I posit that this is further evidence of a change in practitioner practice, which is impacting positively on the children’s experiences at Bumbles. Notably, Tabitha does not seem to be benefiting from the increased level of practitioner input, demonstrated through increased use of SST and open-ended questioning, as Izzy. This may lend support to the argument that supporting children’s peer interactions to ensure they themselves can engage in learning.
conversations and episodes of SST is a vital support for children’s learning and development. The child-peer learning context is more likely to be available to all children across a pre-school session than one-on-one interactions with a practitioner (e.g. Layzer, Goodson and Moss, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog and Kontos, 1998).

Excerpts taken from the observations of Tabitha’s interactions with both her peers and the practitioners are provided below. These give further insight into Tabitha’s experience at Bumbles and how this changed over the three phases of the research.

**Tabitha, phase one**

**Tabitha peer interactions phase one**

The excerpt below is taken from an observation made during phase one of the research. The excerpt demonstrates how Tabitha is seldom involved in any dialogue with her peers and how she is observed hovering at the edge of a group.

Tabitha is sat playing alone with a doll and some dressing-up clothes. There are a group of children playing with dressing-up clothes next to her. She watches the other children and smiles when they laugh, but she does not join the activity. The other children do not seem aware of her presence. Occasionally, she seems to talk very quietly. I am unsure if she is trying to join the conversation her peers are having or whether she is talking as part of her play. The other children do not seem to notice. As the group of children leaves the room, Tabitha follows a few paces behind, smiling.

**Tabitha practitioner interaction phase one**

Tabitha seems to enjoy the practitioner–led art activities which are available to the children during free play.

Tabitha is painting with practitioner Kate. She is focussed on her painting but she is also watching what the other children in the room are doing. Tomas comes to sit at the table and begins to use the glue.
Tomas is spreading glue on the card, he sticks a star on the paper and then he adds more glue.

Tabitha: No... [looks around] no look [taps Kate on the arm] he’s using too much [quietly].

Kate encourages Tomas to only glue onto the card and to choose things to stick.

Time passes and Tomas begins to glue the protective paper on the table.

Tabitha: [To Kate] Look...

Tabitha: [To Tomas] No you’re not supposed to do that...[smiles].

It appears that, during phase one, Tabitha is struggling to find a way to develop her peer relationships, she lacks the confidence and the social competencies to engage in the activities and the other children do not invite her to join their games. Within the practitioner-led activity she adopts a role of supporting the practitioner. Like Izzy, Tabitha seems concerned that things should be done *properly* and is seen to be bossing Tomas, a child younger than her with a lower social status. Practitioner Kate does not provide Tabitha with any support to engage in a conversation with Tomas. This is typical of the phase one observations I made of Tabitha’s interactions with practitioners; there is little evidence of any support for her to develop her skills for interacting with her peers in this phase. I speculate that the roles I have observed Izzy and Tabitha in, where they show concern for doing things *properly*, may relate to behaviours unintentionally modelled by the practitioners. As I suggested in the previous chapter, the concern with activities being completed – being outcomes focussed rather than process focussed – may be extending into the children’s behaviours.

**Tabitha, phase two**

Tabitha is often observed taking a position at the periphery of a group during the phase two observations. As the excerpt below highlights, she seems to lack the skills to engage in any sustained peer interactions. On the one occasion I see her engaged in a sustained
interaction with another child, at the sand pit, she is called by a practitioner to make a card at the art table.

**Tabitha peer interaction phase two**

Izzy, Isaac and Alice are playing dressing-up and acting out a play. Izzy is dancing and is dominating the activity, directing the other children into their roles. Tabitha sits on her knees at the side watching them. As they finish arranging their costumes she runs to the dressing-up box and finds a dress similar to Izzy’s. She puts it on over her clothes and then stops. She stands in a corner of the room watching them play. As the dance takes Izzy, Alice and Isaac into another room she runs behind them. As they laugh, she laughs, it looks as though she is talking but she is talking very quietly and there is not anybody near enough to hear her. It appears that she wants to join in but she lacks the skills or the confidence to approach the children. The other children do not give her any attention; it appears they lack the skills to recognise that Tabitha is alone and wants to join in or that they are unconcerned if they have noticed.

This observation is very similar to the phase one observation and is illustrative of the fact that Tabitha is struggling to engage in interactions with her peers. Given that research has shown that young children with poor peer relationships have an increased risk of school failure (Janes, Hesselbrock, Myers and Penniman, 1979; Roff, Sells and Golden, 1972), this pattern of behaviour is a potential cause for concern.

**Tabitha practitioner interactions phase two**

Tabitha has taken a dress from the dress-up box. She is struggling to get it over her head so she takes it across to Beth who is sat on the floor.

**Tabitha:** *Can you help me get this on here?* [quietly, pulling the dress towards her head]

**Beth:** *Oh yes [begins to help] isn’t this a lovely dress, what are you going to be? The princess?*
Tabitha nods and smiles. As Beth finishes fastening the dress Tabitha dances away.

This interaction is illustrative of the short procedural interactions Tabitha engages in with the practitioners. Given the previous excerpt demonstrated that Tabitha is not engaged in positive interactions with her peers, I assert that this shows Tabitha is engaged in very few interactions with either her peers or practitioners whilst at Bumbles. I assert that this is problematic. The literature review provided a clear indication that children learn through their interactions with others (e.g. Piaget, 1928; Vygotsky, 1962; Sylva et al., 2004) and that for children to gain the most from their play that practitioners must support and Scaffold the children’s learning (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992; Gura, 1992).

**Tabitha, phase three**

During these observations, as the Relational Approach has become embedded in practice at Bumbles, Tabitha is engaged in many more interactions than I observed in the previous phases of the research. She is observed as a member of a group rather than being on the periphery. She seems happier and less lonely. The following excerpt highlights how her interactions have developed.

**Tabitha phase three peer interaction**

Tabitha has set out a game on the floor which involves placing pieces into differently shaped holes as the timer runs. When the timer hits zero the frame jumps and the pieces are thrown out. Benjamin approaches. She looks at him and laughs as the pieces all jump out. He laughs.

**Ben:** I’ll have a turn now.

**Tabitha:** It’s my turn.

**Ben:** I’ll have a turn after you.

**Tabitha:** Ok, watch... [giggles as pieces jump]
They play, taking turns and turning to each other and laughing as the pieces jump out, which is approximately every 20 seconds.

Charlie arrives.

**Charlie: Can I play with you?**

They both manoeuvre their positions so there is a space in the middle. Tabitha smiles.

**Charlie: Would you like one of these?** [offers them both an ice cream he has made out of paper]

Both take an ice cream.

**Tabitha: Yum.** [takes a paper ice cream and pretends to eat it]

**Jack: Finished.** [Jack places the ‘ice cream’ back in the tray]

**Tabitha: Finished.** [Tabitha also places the ‘ice cream back in the tray]

*They continue to play, giggling and discussing the shapes.*

This illustrative case demonstrates a stark contrast to the earlier observations. Here Tabitha is engaged with her peers and is seen to be enjoying their company. The observation in phase three alleviates the concerns I had following the phase one and phase two observations.

**Tabitha practitioner interaction phase three**

Tabitha is painting with practitioner Kate. She is focussed on her painting but also on the conversation.

**Tabitha: [Quietly] I’d like to do another one...**

**Kate: Sorry, Tabitha, what was that, I can’t hear you for all the chatter.** [smiles]

**Tabitha: Can I do another one of these, please?**
Kate: Of course, let’s put that here to dry. [moves painting] OK, here’s another piece, is this painting for anybody in particular?

Tabitha: [Shyly] Malachy.

Kate: Malachy, how very kind and thoughtful. He does like pictures, doesn’t he? What are you going to paint?

Tabitha: The beach and sea.

Kate: What a great idea, shall we have a look for some things for you to stick on there?

Tabitha: Yes please.

They continue to discuss the painting and what Tabitha may stick onto the picture that she has seen at the beach.

This interaction is the longest practitioner interaction Tabitha is observed engaged in, she appears to enjoy the interaction. This is, again, a stark contrast to the observation made in the earlier phases. I posit that, as with Izzy, this excerpt provides further evidence of a change in practitioner practice which is beneficial to the children. Kate engages in an episode of SST with Tabitha as she discusses with the painting and the things Tabitha has seen at the beach. This is indicative of Tabitha receiving increased support for learning, again alleviating my earlier concerns.

The data provided for Tabitha presents a picture which suggests that the development of the Relational Approach has had a positive impact on Tabitha’s experience at Bumbles. She is seen engaged in more high-quality interactions with both her peers and the practitioners during phase three than in phases one or two. Research has shown these interactions play a crucial role in children’s learning and development (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) and future academic success (Rosegrant, 1992; Gura, 1992). Tabitha may have developed strong peer relationships without the development of the Relational Approach, as she matured and became more confident in Bumbles. However, the changes came fairly rapidly following the
sustained development of the Relational Approach. Furthermore, the practitioners themselves felt that the changes related to the changes in the pre-school, which had resulted from the use of the Relational Approach.

**Child three, Tomas**

Tomas has been identified as a low social status child through analysis of the sociometry and the discussions with the practitioners. At the beginning of the project he was 38 months old and had been attending the pre-school for three months.

Tomas is a quiet child, he has an older brother who has been diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Conversations are ongoing between his parents and the practitioners at Bumbles as to whether Tomas may also have an ASD. The view is that he needs to be monitored but that they do not think he has, rather that he has learned a number of behaviours from home which distinguish him from the other children at Bumbles. For example, as Tomas’ brother will not eat with anybody else in the room, Tomas often eats alone and is not used to eating with other children.

Tomas does not display many social competencies; he frequently seems unaware of those around him. He does, however, appear to have well-developed cognitive skills for his age. He recognises and uses numbers up to 9 and possibly beyond (only numbers 0-9 are shown on the poster I observe him reading) and also recognises colours.
Composition and use of groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of group activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of child-practitioner-interactions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of practitioner interaction</td>
<td>1 x support learning 1 x care giving</td>
<td>1 x support learning 1 x intervene</td>
<td>1 x questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children interacted with (includes same child different days)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with non friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions with same aged peers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of interactions different age peers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean activity relational rating</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean observation relational rating</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean child engagement</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30 The mean scores for Tomas’ use of groups across the three phases

The data provided in table 30 shows that Tomas is engaged in few group activities. Notable points include:

- there is a slight increase across the phases in the number group activities in which he is engaged, 1 in phase one and 0 in phases two and 2 in phase three
- there is a relatively stable number of interactions with practitioners, 2 in phases one and two and 1 in phase three
he has a relatively stable number of peer interactions across the observations, 7 and 8 in phases one and three respectively, and 5 in phase two
he increases the number of interactions he has with non-friends across the phases from 1 in phase one and 0 in phase two to 4 in phase three
he increases the number of interactions he has with children from a different age group across the phases from 0 in phase one and phase two to 4 in phase three
the relational rating of the activities he is involved in increases slightly across the phases from 1.25 in phase one to 1.5 in phases two and phase three
the relational rating of the observations made increases across the phases from 1.25 in phase one to 3 in phase two and 2.75 in phase three
his level of engagement in activities decreases from 2.75 to 1.5 in phase two but increases back to 2.75 in phase three.

Overall, this data suggests that Tomas is engaged in few group activities and is, in the main, observed in interactions with a single peer partner. He has a relatively stable number of peer interactions, though his social network increases to include some of the older children at Bumbles following the introduction of the Relational Approach. Again this data reveals how a child with high social status, such as Izzy, is involved in a greater number of interactions than a lower social status child. The data for Tomas in this table is much less indicative of change than for either Izzy or Tabitha but it is suggestive of a widening of his social network and his ability to engage with a wider group of children.
The table below provides further information about the nature of those interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Child-Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laughs/smiles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks to others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks at others to engage with them</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive physical contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive behaviour – asking to join</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator role adopted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracts attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31 Tomas’ positive peer interactions across the three phases

Table 31 shows that during the observations Tomas is involved in a number of positive interactions with his peers, notable points include that:

- his enjoyment displayed through laughing and smiling increases across the phases (from 6 in phase one, and 7 in phase two to 11 in phase three)
- there is an increase in the incidents of him looking at his peers (from 0 in phase one, 5 in phase two to 21 in phase three)
- there is an increase in the number of observations of him talking to his peers (from 10 in phase one, 4 in phase two and 15 in phase three)
- there is a move towards more inclusive behaviours with a slight increase from 0 to 1 of both inclusive actions and helping behaviours and an increase in sharing from 1 to 4 instances
- there is an increase in the following of other children (from 0 in phases one and two to 2 in phase three)
there is an increase in his efforts to attract the attention of peers (from 1 in phase one to 7 and 6 in phases two and three respectively).

This data shows that Tomas’ engagement with his peers increases across the research phases. This includes looking at (which increased from 0 to 21 occasions), talking to (which increased from 10 occasions in phase one to 15 in phase three, though it did decrease in phase 2) and following his peers. This differs from the lone playing I observed in phase one. It is unclear whether this relates to the development of the Relational Approach or whether Tomas has now settled into Bumbles and has become more comfortable and confident in this environment. He may have benefited from the interactions with peers given the complex relationship he has with his brother (who has an ASD). The following table provides data regarding Tomas’s challenging behaviours. There is very little to report from this table. In phases one and two Tomas did not demonstrate any of these behaviours as he seldom engaged with his peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging Child-Peer Interactions</th>
<th>Phase One Total (September)</th>
<th>Phase Two Total (January)</th>
<th>Phase Three Total (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pushing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snatching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying/shouting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32 The mean scores for Tomas’ use of groups across the three phases
Table shows Tomas is involved in very few negative exchanges with his peers. Notable points include that:

- there is an increase in ignoring peers (from 0 in phases one and two to 2 in phase three)
- there is an increase in the instances of glaring at his peers (from 0 in phases one and two to 2 in phase three).

The rise in the challenging behaviours exhibited by Tomas in phase three may be representative of the fact that Tomas is now interacting with a larger group and that the complexity of these interactions has increased. Whilst Tomas was previously observed in exchanges involving only one word or a simple sentence, this progressed into him being observed engaged in full conversations and problem-solving activities. Further insight into the development of Tomas’ interactions across the three phases of the research is provided in the observation excerpts.
The following table, table 33, provides information regarding the quality of Tomas’ interactions with practitioners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner-Child Interactions</th>
<th>Mean Phase One (September)</th>
<th>Mean Phase Two (January)</th>
<th>Mean Phase Three (July)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Child-Practitioner Interactions</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Practitioner Interaction</strong></td>
<td>2 x support learning</td>
<td>1 x support learning</td>
<td>1 x questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys and Appreciates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogic Style</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 33 The mean scores for Tomas’ interactions with practitioners across the three phases

The data in table 33 reveals that:

- Tomas has very few interactions with the practitioners, decreasing from 2 in phases one and two to 1 in phase three
- there were small increases, from 2 in phase one to 3 in phase three, seen in the mean score for the quality of interactions and behaviour management
- there were larger increases, from 1 in phase one to 3 in phase three seen for respect, enjoys and appreciates, communication, prosocial skills and pedagogic style.

This data suggests that, as with Tabitha, Tomas is benefiting from higher quality interactions with the practitioners in phase three; though the number of interactions in which he is engaged is small and further highlights the needs for positive peer interactions to support
Tomas’ social and cognitive development. The excerpts below provide greater insight into these interactions.

**Tomas, phase one**

In phase one Tomas is most often observed alone. During one of the observations he does not speak to any of his peers and he appears to have very little awareness of the children around him. In the final observation I made in this phase he is engaged in a play activity with another child. The play, described below, is rather low-level in terms of the social competencies demonstrated as it is very repetitive and involves little conversation, however, they are cooperating, and both boys are laughing and smiling.

**Peer interaction, phase one: Tomas and George**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tomas and George are holding a large beanbag – one each side. They are giggling.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas and George: Up and down</strong> [Repeat this five times, as they lift the beanbag up and down to the floor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>George: Up and...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas and George: and down.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>George: Up and...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas and George: and down.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>George: Up and...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas and George: and down...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George strokes Tomas as he lays on him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas: Up...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George lays on the bag, Tomas tries to lift the side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tomas: Up... up [tugs the beanbag] up... up.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
George rolls off the bag onto the floor.

**Tomas:** *Up and...*

**Tomas and George:** *Up and down.*

**George:** *Up and down.* [As Tomas is not watching, George continues to push the bag and Tomas bangs into the wall. Tomas looks at George and smiles]

**Tomas:** *And down.* [they collapse onto the floor]

Tomas tries to lift the bag.

**George:** *Can you... don't push me off* [George gets on the bag before Tomas can lift and sits on it. Tomas tries to continue to lift the bean bag; he strains his face and teeth as he tries]

**Tomas:** *Up... up... up.* [tugging bag upwards]

George stands up on the bag and lifts the part in front of him.

**George:** *See, I lifted it up.*

They giggle.

Tomas and George are having fun in this excerpt. They are investigating a way of working together to make the bean bag go up and down. However, the conversation they have is minimal, involves few words and there are no extended conversations, though the activity takes place over time. The excerpt demonstrates how, as Tomas wants to lift the bag when George is laying on it, Tomas does not have the necessary competencies to ask George to step off the bag or to help him lift it, rather he pulls the bag repeating the word ‘up’ until George moves. This is interesting as Tomas has a wide vocabulary and I have observed him forming complex sentences. This suggests though he may have the language to ask George to move off of the beanbag, he doesn’t know how to use it, or that he may not have any experience which allows him to understand the benefits of asking explicitly in a more complex manner.
In phase one it was clear that the practitioner’s recognised they had a role in supporting Tomas’ development. On two occasions they are seen to join his play and make attempts to support his learning, though, as seen in the transcript below, this is not always successful.

**Tomas, practitioner interaction phase one**

Tomas is playing with a set of bear weights and scales. He is holding the bears and talking to them, bouncing them on and off the scales.

**Tomas:** *Green bear* [to a green bear] *come here...* Ohhh. [bashes bear onto scale]

Clare is at another table but looks and sees him playing.

**Clare:** *Tomas, what would happen if you put another bear on the other side?*

**Tomas:** *No.* [unintelligible babble...he holds the bears]

**Clare:** *If you put another bear in the other side will it go up? Shall I come and show you?*

No response, Clare joins Tomas at the table.

**Clare:** *Look Tomas, look what will happen if we put one in this side.*

As she joins Tomas George joins him and lifts the large pot of bears.

**Clare:** *No George, Tomas was playing with that.* [George puts them back and moves away]

Tomas bangs bears in the other side of the scale.

**Clare:** *No Tomas, look, look what happens...* [Tomas continues to talk to the bears and bash them] Look, this side has gone up now. George, darling, can you take your hands off please? [removes his hand from the scales, Tomas bashes more bears into the same side of the scale] *No darling you’re going to break it if you are not gentle.*

Tomas takes the bears he has and plays the same bashing game with them on the table so he is not touching the scales. This is the only reaction he has which shows that he can hear what is being said and that he has some understanding. George places the bears in the scales.
Clare: *George, can you not do that, you are stopping Tomas from weighing the bears.*

[George moves away]

Tomas starts to bash the bears in the scales again.

Clare: *Oh gentle, Tomas, gentle,* [she rubs his hand gently], *gentle.*

This phase one interaction reveals that Clare is trying to support Tomas’ learning. There is no evidence that this is successful as Tomas continues to play, largely ignoring Clare. This is typical of Tomas’ behaviour during phase one as I often observe him ignoring those around him whilst he is involved in his own play.

The excerpt also demonstrates how Clare is yet to fully develop the use of the Relational Approach within Bumbles. There was, for example, the potential of engaging George’s interests which could have served two functions – supporting George, who is sidelined in this exchange and potentially engaging Tomas in the activity through her exchanges with George, and supporting the children to look at the bears and the scales together.

**Tomas, phase two**

In these observations Tomas continues to demonstrate a lack of awareness of his peers. For three of these observations he is predominantly playing alone. He appears happy when alone, this is illustrated through smiling, talking to himself and his toys, and a high level of engagement in his activity. On one occasion, another same-age female sits next to Tomas as he plays cars. He does not interact with her. He does not look at her and, although he must know she is there, he does not show any sign he knows she is other than not rolling the cars into her space.

As Tomas is not observed in any extended interactions I have provided one excerpt below which is illustrative of his interactions during phase two. The excerpt illustrates both Tomas’ lack of attention to his peers and how the practitioners are trying to support the development of his peer relationships.
Tomas peer and practitioner interaction phase two

Tomas is with several other children in the role play area which is currently set up to be a flower shop. As I start the observation Beth is talking to Jack, as Jack has shouted at Tomas for entering the ‘flower shop’.

**Beth:** Jack, would you like to be shouted at in that way? It was a bit harsh, wasn’t it? [leaving time for a response]

**Jack:** But we’re not open yet.

**Beth:** Oh, I see, well let’s not shout at each other. Is it time to open now? It’s daytime here and all the shops are open. Tomas could help... Tomas, would you like to...

Tomas grabs a doll’s buggy he frequently plays with and dashes off into another room, pushing the buggy and making the noise of a car. There are other children playing in the doorway. He does not look at them or speak to them as he tries to manoeuvre around them, lifting the buggy so he can carry on with his game. As he goes past again he catches Alice and she holds the wheel.

**Beth:** Tomas, if you’re trying to pass by perhaps you could ask Alice if she could let you through?

He says nothing, tugs the buggy out of the child’s hand and dashes off into another room.

Beth is trying to support Tomas’ interactions with the other children in this excerpt with no obvious success. Playing alone can be very valuable but Tomas made the first move to join the children in the ‘shop’ and, as this does not progress well, he dashes away only to have a potential interaction with Alice, whom he also ignores despite catching her with the wheel of the buggy.

**Tomas, phase three**

There is a noticeable change in Tomas’ interest and attention in the other children in the phase three observations. He appears to be much more aware of the other children playing around him; he looks more intently at what they are doing and engages in their
conversations smiling when appropriate, for example. I also observe him playing with George on a number of occasions and they are both smiling and laughing. This relationship appears to have developed; they move together to new activities and they share items in the sand tray. These interactions are more complex than those which I observed in phase one. The most notable change is in Tomas’ ability and willingness to make his position heard. The following excerpt typifies this development.

**Tomas peer interaction phase three: Tomas and Louis**

The entire group is outside playing in the garden. There are a number of spades and eight children are playing, digging and running tractors through the sand pit. They converse in groups no larger than three. Tomas is playing alongside; he is not engaged with any of the other children. Louis digs sand with a flick that lands in Tomas’ face, who is stood behind him. Tomas looks up.

*Tomas:* *Please don’t do that Louis, it hurts.* [looks at Louis]

*Tomas:* [Louder] *Please don’t, Louis... it hurts.*

Louis looks at Tomas and moves his lips to one side of his face.

*Louis:* [Pointing] *Could you play here and I’ll move there?*

*Tomas:* *OK.* [moves]

*Louis:* *Thanks.*

Tomas then joins a group of boys who all begin digging a hole together.

This excerpt illustrates that there has been a substantial change in Tomas’ behaviour from phase two when Tomas did not ask Alice if he could pass by with the buggy. There appears to be an increase in his confidence and in the social competencies required to engage with his peers. This may in part be as he is now more settled in Bumbles and has had time to become used to interacting with children. As discussed previously, Tomas’ interactions with his brother at home are shaped by his brother’s ASD. The interaction also shows how the
children are able to resolve an issue quickly and calmly without adult intervention. A key finding of the SPRinG research was that children can become more able to resolve their disputes (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008); this may lend support to my claim that the Relational Approach has the potential to realise the same benefits within pre-schools as it did within the SPrinG schools.

During phase three there is also a noticeable change in Tomas’ interactions with the practitioners. The following excerpt demonstrates both this and a shift in the quality of the art activity. Rather than the art activity being a task that needs to be completed it is focussed upon the children’s interests and becomes a genuine free play option for the children.

**Tomas practitioner interaction phase three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tomas sits in an empty seat at the art table. The children are completing self-portraits.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irene: <em>Tomas, I’ll get you some paper, my darling. There we are</em> [places paper in front of him] <em>Are you doing a big face, Tomas?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Tabitha speaks to Irene, inaudible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene: <em>Just one moment, Tabitha, please, I am just helping Tomas. Tomas, are you going to paint a picture of your face? Shall we look at your face in this mirror?</em> [places mirror in front of Tomas so he can see himself. He looks up but he can’t see as he has a police helmet on.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene: <em>Tomas is it OK if we take your hat off so you can see?</em> [Tomas removes his hat with a smile]. <em>Great. What colour are your eyes, Tomas?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomas: <em>Blue, blue.</em> [scoops blue paint with his brush]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene: <em>Yes. Tomas they are blue. Where do your blue eyes go on your picture?</em> [holds mirror] <em>Are they your lovely blue eyes? That is lovely, Tomas. Now let’s have a look at your mouth? Have you got pink lips? Would you like to put pink lips on? Where do they go? Fantastic.</em> [enthusiastically]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He paints.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Irene: *What else can you see?*

Tomas: *My nose.*

He continues to paint and Irene watches him.

Irene: *Is that your hair Tomas, oh that is lovely.*

He smiles and continues to paint. He is looking at his face in the mirror. Then he takes green paint and spreads it onto the picture across the face he has painted.

Irene: *And you’ve put some lovely green on, that is a lovely picture, Tomas.*

He looks at it and then puts his brush down and starts to remove his apron.

Irene: *Have you finished, Tomas?*

Tomas: *Yes.*

Irene: *It’s lovely, don’t you think it’s lovely?* [to all at the table]

A chorus of positive comments from the other children and he rushes off with the buggy.

There have been a number of changes in Tomas’ interactions, and the examples given show how his social competencies have developed across the three phases of the data collection. Tomas shows an increased awareness for the children around him in phase three, which results in both an increase in the number of interactions he has with his peers and the challenging behaviours he displayed. I suggest that this is not a cause for concern as these instances were minimal and I believe they relate to Tomas exploring his peer relationships and developing his social competencies.

In the case of Tomas I recognise that attending Bumbles alone was likely to have had an impact on his interactions with other children, particularly given the challenging relationships he appears to have at home with his brother. I asked Beth and Clare whether they believed Tomas’ social competencies would have developed regardless of their development of the Relational Approach. They took a few moments to consider this and agreed that, yes, Tomas would have developed his social competencies as a result of
attending Bumbles. However, they believed that their involvement in the Relational Approach training supported this and, as a result, they believed he had developed these skills more quickly than he would have otherwise. They felt that the changes in Tomas would have been more gradual without that support.

In summary, the data considered for question eight reveals that there was an increase in the social competencies displayed by children, and that these competencies were used within a variety of interactions with their peers, for example, during play activities. The children were observed in more positive interactions and working together to resolve their own disputes. This finding aligns with the SPRinG research, that as the Relational Approach is implemented and developed the children become better able to resolve their own disputes and demand less teacher time (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008).

The practitioners at Bumbles agree with my assertion that the children’s social competencies developed and that this resulted in a greater number of positive peer interactions. They recognise that there has been a change in the way the children interact and the ways in which they approach tasks together. I believe that this is true for the group and not just for the embedded case children. An observation I made in phase three supports this claim.

Towards the end of phase two, a group of four children sit together at a table with a book of their choice. For 16 minutes they look at the pictures of dinosaurs and discuss what happened to them and when they died. There is no attempt to hurry to the next page and everybody is given a chance to speak. When they can’t come up with an answer they ask me if I can explain to them why the rocks came and why they made the dinosaurs die.

This excerpt is interesting as the children are engaged in a group activity for an extended period of time, and they interact well and allow each other to ask questions. I had not observed the children conduct themselves in this way prior to this visit and I feel that the children are now becoming more used to this way of working; it is becoming natural to
them. The way in which they are involved in this task shows how their social competencies have developed and how they are able to work together as a group.
6.5 The impact of practitioner modelling on children’s peer interactions

Research question nine: Do children use language modelled by practitioners in their peer interactions? And, if so, what are these and when do they occur?

In this section I draw upon data collected through observations. I adopted an inductive approach to this stage of the analysis.

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that language modelled by Beth had been taken on by Isaac, and that he had used this to express himself to Izzy. Indeed, through review of the video data collected, I observed a number of instances where I believe the children took the actions and language modelled by the practitioners and applied this within their peer interactions. In some instances I believe that this is as a result of explicit (intentional/planned) modelling by practitioners, in other instances I believe it is as a result of incidental modelling – were practitioners were not consciously modelling to the children.

I have grouped these incidents of children using practitioner modelling within their peer interactions into two different categories: Imitation and Application. I will explore both in turn, providing an explanation and examples of each in practice.

Practitioner modelling: Imitation

I initially became aware of the children imitating, or copying, language modelled by the practitioners when I observed a circle time session (reported on page 154 phase two Practitioner-led Circle Time Activity: Clare). Within that observation the children took on the role of pressing their fingers against their lips and shh-ing at each other if they spoke. I believe that this behaviour developed as a result of incidental modelling, whereby children have observed practitioners pressing their lips and shh-ing the children when they want them to stop talking. As a result, I reviewed the video data looking for further examples of children imitating the practitioners to provide an insight as to whether the children do imitate the practitioners’ use of language and actions.
Analysis of the observation data revealed many examples of Imitation. These examples appeared to be situation-specific, in that the child used the language almost exactly as they had observed it being used by the practitioner, and in a similar situation to that which they had made the initial observation. The following short excerpts provide examples of Imitation.

**Practitioner Kate:** Please don’t sit there, George. Tables are not for sitting on.

Later that day, as Louis notices Alice sat on the edge of a table.

**Louis:** Tables are not for sitting on, chairs are for sitting on. Don’t sit there, Alice.

A number of the practitioners use terms of endearment such as darling.

**Irene:** Would you like to come and have your snack, my darlings?

During a game Izzy calls: Would you like to play parties, my darlings?

**Clare:** Goodness what a beautiful picture, you must have spent a long time sticking all of those feathers to make a bird.

Later on in the day.

**Isaac to Bethany:** That is a very nice card; it must have taken you a long time, well done.

Such examples demonstrate that the children are taking the language they hear modelled by the practitioners and, when presented with an opportunity, they apply what they have heard and use it within their own interactions. There is, however, very little adaptation of the language, and the situations in which Imitation is used are all similar to the situations in which the child heard the language being modelled. I propose that these incidents of Imitation result from episodes of incidental behavioural modelling rather than explicit cognitive modelling (Jonassen, 1999). The practitioners have not intentionally or mindfully modelled these actions to the children, rather, the children have observed the practitioners engaging in everyday interactions. I propose that behavioural modelling of social competencies, which I noted are most likely to occur during incidental modelling episodes,
may produce incidents of Imitation as the child does not gain an understanding through the modelling of how to take the meaning behind the message in the language and apply this in a different situation. I propose that cognitive modelling (Jonassen, 1999), whereby the practitioner models the cognitive processes to the novice in addition to the act itself, would be required to allow the child to adapt and apply the modelled behaviour in different situations. Indeed, I did observe many incidents of the children taking the language and actions they had cognitively modelled to them by practitioners and adapting this for use within their peer interactions. I have labelled such examples Application.

**Practitioner modelling: Application**

Application episodes differ from Imitation as they include an element of development by the child to allow the behaviour modelled to be applied in a different or new situation. I believe that Application is more likely to result from cognitive modelling than behavioural modelling as the process of cognitive modelling supports the child to develop their understanding of the concept being modelled, thus equipping the child with the knowledge required to apply the action as appropriate. An example of Application is provided in the excerpt below.

Alice and George are playing in the sand pit. George attempts to take the sieve from Alice.

**Alice:** No, George. [they begin to pull the sieve for a moment]

**Alice:** I know George, why don’t I take the plate and you take the sieve and then we can swap later. Yes?

**George:** Yeah, ok.

They continue to play, chatting happily.

**Clare:** Excellent thinking Alice, that was great sharing guys and look how you have been able to carry on playing your game.
I believe here that Alice has taken the idea of sharing, which has been discussed by the practitioners, and she is applying this in her own way in a situation which differs from any she has had modelled to her. Clare had discussed sharing in relation to the study of the *Selfish Crocodile* book and had used the actions of the crocodile to cognitive model the concepts of sharing and kindness, but she did not discuss how you could take a turn at using something and then swap later. It is impossible for me to know whether Alice has had such a behaviour modelled to her by an adult or a child at another time. Yet, the varied use of new social competencies by the children suggests that many have moved on from simple Imitation and have developed the ability to apply the competency as appropriate.

Further examples of children taking the behaviours modelled to them by practitioners and then applying them in more complex interactions are provided in the excerpts below.

**Malachy:** [to George] *No don’t do that, stop please.*

**Jack:** [to Gerorge] *Can’t you see you’re making him sad, why don’t you both come here and we can build this together.*

Here it seems that Jack is taking the language modelled by the practitioners and is applying it to help other children resolve their issue so that they can play together. I have no knowledge of the practitioners suggesting that the children should intervene in the disputes of others. I believe Jack is applying what he has learned through the practitioner modelling and the Relational Approach activities. Again, I believe this supports the anecdotal findings of the SPRinG research that the children were better able to resolve their own disputes after their teacher adopted the Relational Approach philosophy and implemented the Relational Approach (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008). Indeed, there are further examples which support such a claim. In the following excerpt, Isaac encourages Rosie to accept Izzy’s apology so that they can play together in a group.
Izzy ‘attacks’ Rosie with a toy spider on a string. There is a disturbance, Rosie is cross and her chair falls down. Izzy backs out of the room.

Rosie: Isaac, does your spider kill people?

Isaac: No, boing, boing. [he bounces the spider on the string]

Rosie: Well Izzy’s does.

Izzy makes her way back into the room.

Izzy: I was only joking, Rosie.

Rosie: I know but, well, I didn’t like it, I was looking at the butterflies.

Izzy: I’m sorry I won’t do that again, Rosie.

Rosie: [Folding her arms] Well it’s not nice Izzy.

Isaac: [to Rosie] Izzy said she is sorry and she won’t do it again, will you Iz?

Izzy: No.

Rosie: Ok… come and look at the butterflies in here...

In this example of Application it appears that the children are using the cognitive modelling they have observed to place themselves in the position of others. Indeed, through scrutiny of the video data I found many examples of Application in which the children are thinking about how others might feel. Such instances where not observed in phase one but began towards the end of phase two, with greater numbers observed in phase three of the research. This is a particularly interesting finding given the point made in the literature review that children of this pre-school age group are often considered too egocentric to participate in cooperative working (Kutnick at al., 2008). I assert that these extracts demonstrate that these children are not too egocentric to place themselves in the position of those around them. However, as such behaviours are only observed following the development of the Relational Approach I assert that, whilst the children are not too
egocentric to consider the position of others in this way, that they do require support to allow them to develop such a competency. This aligns with Piaget’s idea that children can learn to decentre when engaged in peer interactions (Piaget, 1951).

The excerpt below provides further evidence that the children are not too egocentric to think about others. It also provides a further example of how they are able to apply their new ways of thinking to consider how a child new to Bumbles might feel.

**Beth:** *Guess who is coming in a minute?*

**Dan:** *Josie.*

**Izzy:** *Yes, shall we ask her to play princesses; she might be a bit scared because she’s new.*

**Dan:** *We can say hello and ask her if she wants to play with us so she’s got friends.*

This excerpt provides evidence that, at the end of phase three, the children are thinking about how others may feel, unprompted by Beth. I propose that this is as a result of the cognitive modelling undertaken by the practitioners around thinking of others and how they feel. It seems that the children have learned that this behaviour is expected of them and that they know what this involves in day-to-day interactions.

Whilst the excerpts provided thus far are short, the data gathered through the observation data suggest that such changes in behaviour have become embedded within the children’s actions. My observations also suggest that such changes have the potential to have a long-term impact on the children’s peer relationships. In the following excerpt, Isaac notes the language being incidentally modelled by Beth to allow him to express his desires to Izzy. This appears to have an impact upon Izzy’s behaviour, as was demonstrated in her behaviour the following week.

During phase three Alice and Izzy are playing with Isaac. Isaac leaves the group and moves into the hall. He is still within earshot of the conversation.
Alice: [To Beth] Isaac doesn’t want to play with us anymore. [accusatory tone]

Beth: Well sometimes we like to go and have a look at the other things going on in Bumbles and maybe we might want to play some different games; it doesn’t mean we are being unkind.

Izzy wanders away and continues playing with Alice.

Around 10 minutes later Isaac returns.

Isaac: Izzy, I’m not playing with you today.

Izzy: Why not, Isaac? But I want to play with you.

Isaac: Well sometimes I want to do other things than what you want us to do.

This exchange is a key moment for Isaac. I have observed him being told by Izzy which games they will play and how they will be organised on many occasions. Throughout the previous observations he has been observed as a willing participant, however, through this exchange it would seem as though he wishes to express to Izzy that he doesn’t always want to do what she wants. The language used by Isaac suggests that he is attempting to use the language modelled by Beth.

The following week I observed Izzy and Isaac playing on the computer. They are playing happily, taking turns on a shared task.

Isaac: Shall I put that on there? [points to screen]

Izzy: You don’t have to ask me, Isaac, it’s your turn.

This exchange suggests that, by using the language he has had modelled to him by Beth, Isaac has been able to express his desire not to ‘bossed’ by Izzy and that Izzy has taken on board the message conveyed by Isaac. This may have led to a substantial shift in their relationship, as I have stated that the relationship, up to this point has been one in which Izzy has dominated the decision-making. As this observation was made at the end of the research I have not been able to follow up on whether this has been the case.
I believe that there is sufficient evidence to claim that the children do use the language modelled to them by practitioners within their peer interactions. I propose that there are two distinct elements involved in this: Imitation and Application. Imitation, being where the children directly copy language and apply it in a situation almost identically to the one in which it was originally modelled to them, and Application being where the child is able to take a concept which has been modelled to them and then use that language within their interactions with their peers as appropriate. Application seemed most likely to result from cognitive modelling as opposed to behavioural modelling and, as such, I propose that cognitive modelling may be key to how the Relational Approach supports the development of children’s social competencies resulting in changes in their abilities to work together. As a consequence, I would suggest that this form of modelling is also crucial to the role the practitioner plays in the development of children’s social competencies.
6.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have explored: the impact the Relational Approach has had on the interactions of the three embedded case children; whether the practitioners at Bumbles model social competencies to children; how practitioners model social competencies to children; and whether this has an impact on the children’s peer interactions.

The data revealed that the embedded case children benefited from interactions of a higher quality following the Relational Approach training, with the children benefiting from a greater number of extended interactions, including periods of SST. As the children benefited from this change in practice. I also found that their social networks increased and that they engaged in a greater number of extended interactions with their peers. I concluded that these changes related to the development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles and that, as a result, children would be able to benefit more from their interactions with their peers, as children’s peer relationships have been recognised as crucial in their social and cognitive development (e.g. Howe, 2010).

Through the analysis of the observation data, I have identified that the practitioners at Bumbles did model social competencies to children and that this modelling could be either incidental or explicit. I found that these distinct forms of modelling, related to the concept of behavioural and cognitive modelling identified within the literature review (Jonassen, 1999). Incidental modelling was more likely to be behavioural modelling and intentional modelling was more likely to be cognitive modelling, though this could also be behavioural. As the Relational Approach became embedded within practice at Bumbles there were increased opportunities for cognitive modelling to occur. These opportunities included modelling being used as a strategy within the pre and debrief sessions and within the application of the relational activities provided by the Relational Approach programme.
I found that the use of the Relational Approach and the development of practitioner modelling related to changes in the social competencies displayed by the children. Izzy, Tabitha and Tomas increased their awareness of those around them and how their actions impact upon others. I propose that the children’s experiences at Bumbles, following the introduction of the Relational Approach, support them to operate successfully within social situations (Crick and Dodge, 1994). I observed them using the language they have learned through the Relational Approach activities within their peer interactions to great effect, resulting in a greater number of extended interactions and joint activities. The use of language and/or actions modelled by practitioners appeared to take two distinct forms: Imitation, that is the copying of language, and Application, that is children taking the concept they have had modelled to them and being able to apply this within their own interactions as appropriate. I suggest that behavioural modelling is more likely to result in Imitation and cognitive modelling is more likely to result in Application. I therefore assert that cognitive modelling is key to how the Relational Approach supports the development of children’s social competencies and is a crucial element of the role the practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.

The following chapter will provide synthesis of the findings in each of the three Findings and Analysis chapters. These findings will be used to inform the development of a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.
7. Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the key findings of the research. To deepen the understanding of how the Relational Approach supports the development of children’s social competencies and, through this, inform the development of a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies. The discussion is shaped by the three key themes identified in the literature review: development of the Relational Approach, practitioner pedagogy and practice, and modelling and children’s peer interactions.

7.1 The development of the Relational Approach

Understanding how the Relational Approach was developed and implemented at Bumbles was crucial as this allowed me to determine whether its use at Bumbles led to findings which aligned with those of the SPRinG project, namely: a growth in children’s social networks (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008); higher levels of pupil engagement in classroom activities; and teachers being less directive (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009). This was important as this would indicate whether the Relational Approach was suitable for use within pre-schools and whether Bumbles was an appropriate environment for me to research the impact of developing the Relational Approach on practitioner pedagogy and practice. These findings would then be used to conclude whether Bumbles was a suitable environment in which to explore the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.

As I considered the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles a number of areas of interest were identified. These areas related either to the development of the Approach or its impact. These areas are discussed in the following sections.
The use of practitioner training to develop the Relational Approach to group work in pre-schools

The Relational Approach was introduced to the practitioners at Bumbles via Beth following her attendance at two training days held at the University of Brighton. Whilst this method of training one practitioner and assigning them with the task of training the other practitioners at Bumbles worked well, it also presented challenges. I found that the Approach and the guidance offered in the Relational Approach programme were not being followed by all staff, for example, I noted that the pre and debrief were being omitted from the circle time activities. This was of particular concern as I had noted that the pre-school environment did not provide many opportunities for the pre and debrief to be used compared with the school environment. My response to this was to arrange for additional training to be held at Bumbles. This training focussed on supporting the practitioners to implement and facilitate the pre and debrief sessions within the context of the theoretical frame which underpinned the work.

It was only following the additional training that the Relational Approach was fully implemented in a way which was congruent with the approach taken by the SPRinG research team. This raised a clear issue regarding the suitability of training being delivered to one staff member who then relayed the information to a staff team. An issue which was not wholly unexpected given that the literature reviewed was iterative in the need for all staff to be supported in the development and implementation of programmes to support the development of children’s social competencies for the greatest benefits to be seen (e.g. Banerjee, 2010). I believe that this may be particularly pertinent in pre-schools given the majority of pre-school staff lack a graduate level training (DfES, 2005) and, as a consequence, are likely to require clear guidance and support to allow them to understand, develop and implement new practices. In addition, those who attend the training experience the Relational Approach and the activities first hand, helping them to understand the
experiences of the children. I therefore assert that, wherever possible, training should be attended by all staff in a pre-school. Where attendance is not a viable option for all staff (as was the case in this instance), I propose that practitioners should receive input from colleagues who have attended training with the addition of regular follow-up sessions. In addition, training sessions could be offered on-site by qualified trainers who can support staff to address any challenges they encounter. This is an approach advocated by WWO.

**Developing the Relational Approach Programme for use in pre-schools**

A core aim of the funded research projects, to which this research is attached, was to develop the Relational Approach for use with pre-school children. This was necessary as it had only previously been used in schools with children aged five years and above. Whilst initial adaptations were made to the programme during the training process further adaptations came later as the practitioners used the activities in their settings. Detailed analysis of the development of the Relational Approach and its implementation at Bumbles provided further valuable findings.

The pre and debrief which, as noted above, required additional training to support its implementation at Bumbles, is an example of how the need for adaptations to the programme became apparent and evolved over time. Clare stated in phase three of this research that ‘the pre and debrief seems a bit advanced for the kinds of activities we do’. I considered Clare’s comment and, through further detailed analysis of the observation data, I concluded that in its original form the pre and debrief was too advanced for use in Bumbles; at least in these initial stages of developing the Relational Approach. I propose that there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the children needed more time to develop the communication skills necessary to participate in this activity than the older children who had participated in the SPRinG project. They required more input to extend their vocabulary, develop their communication skills, and increase their understanding of what it means to cooperate with others. The model of information processing within social interactions (Crick
and Dodge (1994) supports understandings of why this may be. As the children are supported to develop social competencies and as they become increasingly able to recognise and process social cues they will become more able to engage in such discussions.

This finding aligns with claims made by the SPRinG team that different children and different schools will need to spend different amounts of time on the building of trust and communication skills before they are ready to progress to problem-solving activities (Kutnick et al., 2008). I propose that within pre-schools the children will invariably need much more support to develop the social competencies required to engage in group work as, for many, their communication skills and their understandings of key concepts such as sharing, are in their infancy. This meant that the pre and debrief was adapted. Rather than being used as an opportunity to discuss the skills required for a specific task which had been set, it was used as an opportunity to explore fundamental aspects of group working such as sharing.

In addition, I recognise that the pedagogical difference between pre-schools and schools means that there are fewer opportunities for the use of a formal approach to the beginning and end of activities as priority is given to child-led free play. I therefore assert that the pre and debrief required adaptation to ensure its suitability for use with the children at Bumbles and, as such, that there is a need for a pre-school specific version of the Relational Approach Programme to be developed. This finding aligns with work conducted by Ota (2007) which has found that the Relational Approach Programme, as developed within WWO, required adaptation to ensure its suitability of use within pre-schools (Appendix 1).

**The time required to develop the Relational Approach**

It took time for the Relational Approach to become embedded in practice at Bumbles. This is unsurprising given that it is widely accepted that time is needed for practice to change ‘...[and that it] requires intensity and focus on specific changes with follow-up and coaching...’ (Stevens, 2008, p.107). At Bumbles, time was needed for the practitioners to
familiarise themselves with the underpinning theory to consider how they would implement the approach in practice and then develop the relational activities. As it took time for the practitioners to understand the Approach, the sequencing of the Programme of activities it took time for changes in their practice to occur and for the benefits of the Approach to be realised. Clare commented that changes in the children only became apparent towards the end of the research; ten months after the initial training took place. Kutnick et al. (2008) state that when considering use of the Relational Approach it is necessary to ensure that practitioners are aware that this is a long-term commitment which requires considerable effort, but that with this effort rewards will accrue. I agree and assert that all Relational Approach training should emphasise the need for long-term commitment and ensure that practitioners are clear that it will take time before the benefits are realised. This will help to avoid practitioners giving up, as they see the their work to develop the Relational Approach as additional work that leads to delays and disruptions which have little benefit (Huber and Huber, 2008). This may also be a useful finding for other programmes which intend to alter practitioner pedagogy and practice.

Having established that the Relational Approach was developed at Bumbles, although it differed to the Approach as used within the SPRinG schools, I considered whether its development had an impact at Bumbles which was congruent with the impact found within the SPRinG schools.

The impact of the Relational Approach: How children’s experiences of groupings at Bumbles altered

At the outset of this research the children at Bumbles were exposed to a range of grouping structures. I found that they were experiencing both small and whole group practitioner-led and child-led sessions, a combination which is generally accepted as beneficial to children’s development (Bowman et al., 2001). I found that the children were most likely to spend their time within child-led groups and that the practitioners were most likely to be absent
from these groupings. This supports the case presented in the literature review that children in pre-schools spend a greater proportion of their time with their peers than with adults (e.g. Layzer, Goodson and Moss, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog and Kontos, 1998); a key element for the basis of this research.

To understand whether the development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles had led to changes similar to those found by the SPRinG research, I first considered whether the use of groups within practitioner-led and child-led activities had changed. I found that, following the development of the Approach at Bumbles, the children were still exposed to a range of grouping structures but that there was a change in both the size and the composition of the practitioner-led groups. The size of the groupings increased and the groupings used by the practitioners were no longer determined by the children’s age. As a key constituent of the Relational Approach is not to separate children by age but to have mixed groupings which encourage children to interact with a wide range of children, I propose that this is further indication that the Relational Approach was implemented in Bumbles in a way congruent with the SPRinG research. I assert that this development will be beneficial to the children’s development as exposing children to those of a different age to themselves can have beneficial developmental consequences. This view is supported by the research of Howes and Farver (1987), who found that two year olds who engaged in play activities with five year olds displayed more complex forms of symbolic play than when playing with same-age peers.

In addition to changes in the composition of practitioner-led groups, I also found a change in the role adopted by the practitioners. During phase three the practitioners were no longer directing children but were most likely to be acting and playing with the children. I propose that this contributes to a change in the environment in Bumbles which is a key element of adopting the Relational Approach. As the practitioners developed the Relational Approach they were less likely to be observed adopting a position of authority and more likely to be
seen involved adopting a more facilitative democratic position, listening to the children and building upon their interests (a point explored further within theme two). This change in practice is, I believe, supportive of the development of children’s social competencies as research has shown that less directive practitioners correlated with more considerate and prosocial behaviours in young children (Sheridan, 2007; Philips et al., 1987). This is further indication that the practitioners at Bumbles did develop the Relational Approach.

Within the child-led groups I found there was an increase in the number of mixed-sex, mixed-age, mixed-friendship groupings across the phases, suggesting that the children were better able to interact with children less similar to themselves, thus increasing their opportunities for learning from others at the end of this research. However, I also found that there was a slight increase in the number of children acting alone and that, as such, the mean group size I observed decreased. I believe that it is important to consider this finding in relation to the needs of pre-school children. Playing alone is not necessarily a negative part of a child’s experience and may have an important developmental role (Henniger, 1994; Lloyd and Howe, 2003), as long as the children are also interacting with others at other times. As I found the children were experiencing a range of groupings at Bumbles I do not feel that this lone play is problematic. The fact that lone play did increase could be investigated further in any future research, but the research suggests for children of this age this would not impact upon the children’s social status amongst their peers (Coie, Dodge and Kupersmidt, 1990).

As a consequence of my findings, I claim that the development of the Relational Approach did have an impact on the children’s experience of groupings at Bumbles. Three core principles influenced the development of the SPRinG project ‘a relational approach, the nature of teacher involvement, and ways of structuring the classroom environment’ (Blatchford et al., 2006, p.751). Involvement in this project led the staff at Bumbles to develop a relational approach, change their practice and their interactions with the children, reconsider their use
of groupings, and revise the expectations they had of the children’s ability to collaborate and share their opinions. In these ways the Relational Approach, as used in Bumbles, aligns with the Relational Approach developed by the SPRinG team. Yet, the distinctive context of the pre-school and the particular needs of pre-school children led to key differences. The most fundamental of these differences being that groups were not yet being used as a pedagogic tool, though there were hints that this may develop over time. Rather, the focus was on supporting children to develop the skills necessary for them to be able to work together successfully. There is evidence within the analysis of the children’s interactions with their peers that they are developing these skills. Whether the practitioners will begin to offer the children collaborative group work activities, of a problem-solving nature, remains unclear.

**The development of the Relational Approach and the impact on children’s social networks**

Following the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles, the children’s social networks increased, more so for play than for work activities. This claim is supported by the aforementioned pre-school mapping data which indicated that the children increased their social networks by being observed in more mixed-sex, mixed-age and mixed-friendship groupings. I suggest that this represents a positive development, given I have argued in chapter two that for children to gain the greatest potential from their peer interactions these networks need to be as large as possible. After all, ‘children are each other’s resource’ (Barnes and Todd, 1977).

**How the development of the Relational Approach led to changes in the pre-school environment**

Both the development of the Relational Approach and its impact combined led to a change in the environment at Bumbles. I found that changes in the environment related to either the role of the practitioner or the children’s peer interactions. I assert that the changes in the children’s peer interactions resulted from changes in practitioner practice and will discuss this further under theme three within this chapter. The changes observed in
practitioner practice related both to the physical environment, e.g. they provided tasks which required cooperation (though, as noted, these were minimal) and also in the social environment, e.g. changes in the pedagogic style (an area discussed in greater detail under theme two within this chapter). Such changes led to a suitable environment for group work to thrive (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick, 2007). This included providing tasks which require group work (Blatchford et al., 2003), maintaining pupil motivation through recognising pupil’s efforts (Stevens, 2008) and adopting the Relational Approach and thus a relational pedagogy which focussed on the processes of learning rather than the outcomes. I propose that there is a reciprocal and dynamic relationship between developing the Approach, thus deliberately changing the environment, and the environment changing as the social context changes.

Conclusions – key factors in the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

The development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles provided two key outcomes. Firstly, the findings indicate that Bumbles was a suitable context in which to explore the questions I posed regarding the processes by which the changes observed in the SPRinG research were achieved and, secondly, they provided some insight into the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies, namely:

The need for practitioners to understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of relational programmes and activities – The literature reviewed is iterative in that, for group work training to succeed, practitioners need to have a clear conception of what they are doing and why they are doing it (Johnson and Johnson, 2007). The findings of this research support such a claim. I found that as the practitioners became more familiar with the Relational Approach, and as they understood why the programme was structured as it was and what the potential benefits of this, that their commitment and use of the activities, specifically the pre and debrief, increased. Staff who had not attended the training, but
received input from Beth, needed additional support to help them to develop and implement the Approach.

*The need for practitioners to provide a suitable environment in which positive relationships and the development of social competencies can thrive* – The development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles led to a number of changes in the pre-school environment. Changes in the physical environment included changes in how the practitioners organised groupings, i.e. no longer separating children by age, and through an increased use of group activities, specifically the relational activities provided in the Relational Approach programme. Other changes related to the social context, including aspects of practitioner practice. As the practitioners developed the Relational Approach they became more likely to adopt a democratic pedagogy and more likely to model prosocial behaviours to the children. Such an environment has been shown to promote prosocial behaviours and encourage children to be more considerate of their peers (Sheridan, 2007; Philips et al., 1987). Indeed, as these changes occurred I found that the children’s social network increased and that their prosocial behaviours increased.
7.2 Pedagogy and practice

Two areas are considered under theme two: changes in the pedagogic style and practitioner practice and how this aligned with changes in the quality of provision at Bumbles.

Changes in pedagogic style and practitioner practice

At the outset of the research, the practitioners at Bumbles commented that they saw the Relational Approach training and being part of the research project as a ‘formalising of what we do already’ (Beth, scoping phase). This comment is interesting. Whilst the practitioners felt they had something to learn from their participation they also felt that they were supporting the development of children’s social competencies prior to the research commencing. Yet, the findings revealed a number of changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice following their involvement in the Relational Approach training, indicating that their involvement in the project led to varied and substantial changes in their practice. Changes which varied for each of the practitioners observed.

From the outset of the research Beth adopted a position which was concerned with processes and leaned toward a relational pedagogy. This was evidenced by her focus on inclusive practices and supporting the children to get on well together. However, she did not have the knowledge or resources to fully realise this position or adopt a relational approach to her practice. Following the Relational Approach training I noted an increase in the level of support she gave to the children for the development of their social competencies and increased scores in each of the categories of child-practitioner interaction (adapted from CCIS (Carl, 2007), including: interactions, time, enjoys and appreciates, behaviour management, communication, prosocial skills and pedagogic style. I suggest that this is indicative of Beth becoming more flexible in her time management, following the children’s lead more and engaging in a greater number of discussions with the children as a result of reflecting on her role in supporting children’s social competencies development. I believe
this resulted from her engagement with the Relational Approach training and how the knowledge she gained from this experience supported her to reflect upon and develop her practice.

Across the phases of the research I observed greater change in Clare’s pedagogy and practice. At the outset of the research, Clare adopted a more outcomes focussed and directive pedagogic style. I propose that this related to her desire to equip the children with the behaviours she felt they would need to be ready for statutory schooling. This included sitting well, listening, and not talking when others are speaking. Analysis of Clare’s interactions with the children in phase one, using the categories adapted from CCIS (Carl, 2007) revealed that this focus led to relatively low scores for practitioner-child interactions being recorded across all areas observed. As Clare’s familiarity with the Relational Approach grew and as she began to see the benefits of adopting such an approach I began to see changes in her pedagogy and practice. Evidence for such a claim is substantiated through the observations made of Clare’s practice during circle time and the noted increases in every category of practitioner-child interaction observed. Clare commented to me that participating in the research had impacted upon her practice. She informed me that she had stood up in her own children’s school during a talk from the head teacher regarding the parents’ involvement in the children’s learning, and stated that the children ought to be more involved in planning their learning and working together to learn from each other.

The changes observed in Beth and Clare’s pedagogy and practice were realised in the latter part of phase two and in phase three. As with the findings discussed under theme one, this highlights the need for the practitioners to have time to engage with the programme for benefits to accrue. Given the implications of the changes identified, however, I believe that the Relational Approach has brought substantial change in practitioner pedagogy and changes in their practice with relatively minimal input from those external to Bumbles. Two day’s training with three half-day follow-up sessions is, I suggest, a limited input to achieve
such fundamental changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice. I believe a number of factors contribute to this, but at its core it is the attention given to developing the practitioners’ understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the approach, how reflection on their actions is a necessity when developing their practice and through the detailed explanation of why the challenges of changes are worth persevering. My presence at the pre-school may also have been a key factor in this, as I acted as a constant reminder and a source of information. I believe these changes in pedagogy and practice led to a change in the quality of the children’s pre-school experience, a notion explored in the following section.

**The impact of changes in pedagogy and practice on the quality of provision at Bumbles**

Prior to their involvement in the research Bumbles was recognised a providing a high-quality pre-school experience by Ofsted and was very well respected within the local community. Within the literature I reviewed there were a number of factors which had been shown to be features of high-quality pre-school provision, with the strongest evidence coming from the EPPE research (Sylva et al., 2004). The EPPE project identified that those pre-schools offering excellent or high-quality provision: have practice led by a graduate, offer a mixture of practitioner-initiated group work and learning through freely chosen play, engaged children in adult-child interactions that involve ‘Sustained Shared Thinking’ (SST) and open-ended questioning, and provided children with support to rationalise their conflicts (Sylva et al., 2004). To identify whether involvement in the research project led to changes in the quality of provision at Bumbles I considered each of those key features.

A graduate headed the team at Bumbles during the course of the research. This was atypical of pre-schools in England at the time the data was collected, a practice which has become more common since the dissemination of the EPPE research was acknowledged by the Labour Government (1997-2010) and developed into a policy plan which detailed that every pre-school setting ought to be led by a graduate (DCSF, 2006, 2008). Yet, it must be
acknowledged that whilst the staff at Bumbles where headed by a graduate that this did not translate into everyday practice being led by a graduate. I assert that for the role of leading practice to be fulfilled it is necessary for the graduate to be with the children supporting the practice of lesser qualified staff, rather than being placed in a management role which takes them away from the day-to-day activities with the children. Consequently, I believe that whilst the team did benefit from the support of a graduate and may have done so much more on the days I was not present in Bumbles (given Anita was not scheduled to be with the children on my day at the setting), its impact could have been greater had Anita been present in the pre-school with the children all of the time.

As noted previously, the children at Bumbles were exposed to a range of practitioner-led and child-led activities prior to their involvement in the research. It is noteworthy that the quality of those experiences increased following the Relational Approach training as the children interacted with a greater number of children and the quality of the child-practitioner interactions increased.

Specific attention was given to the use of SST, open-ended questioning and providing formative feedback (for Clare only), and increased support for children to resolve their own disputes. I found increases in the use of each of these activities over the course of the research. The only initiative or training being undertaken by the practitioners at this time was the Relational Approach training. I therefore suggest that the Relational Approach training led to a change in the practice of both Beth and Clare which, in turn, impacted upon the quality of the provision at Bumbles.

This change in the quality of provision was evident in observed practice, notably change was observed in the use of circle time, an activity which I critiqued in chapter four as lacking any clear link to systematic development, not being rooted in any specific theory of child development, and for often being used by staff with little or no training (e.g. Lang, 1998). Following the Relational Approach training Clare became less directive in her approach
during the circle time sessions and increased the opportunities for children to lead the conversation using open-ended questioning. As she gained an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the Relational Approach she was able to use this knowledge to improve the quality of the circle time sessions. This was as a result of the training and the knowledge gained from her participation in the research. Through her participation she gained the tools needed to develop this practice.

At the outset of the project, Clare did not believe that the children were capable of expressing themselves. As her pedagogy and practice altered, and Clare observed the children engaged in processes she thought they were incapable of, she came to expect the children to be able to express themselves indicating that her understanding of child development also changed. This occurred despite minimal input regarding child development in the training. This change in the expectations she had of the children led to her placing increased trust in the children and their ability to lead activities. Rather than them only being allowed to speak when they were holding the toy (Monkey) they were able to engage in interactions during the practitioner-led circle time sessions as they wished. This is a further example of how planned deliberate changes in the environment led to changes in physical environment and social context. As the children are expected to have the skills to engage in group discussions, they are presented with opportunities to practice the skills and thus further develop those competencies. As the practitioners were then able to observe where the children’s skills lay and where they require further support, they were able to target their provision accordingly.

Key to changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice was practitioner use of reflection. As they gained knowledge regarding the Relational Approach they began to reflect on their own practice, making changes guided by the knowledge they had gained through their participation in the project. Pollard (2008) states that the process of reflecting upon practice ‘feeds a constructive spiral of professional development and capability... [and] leads to a
steady increase in the quality of the education provided for children (p.5). I propose that it is crucial that practitioners reflect upon their practice, guided by the knowledge they have gained during their training, for positive changes in the pedagogy and practice to occur.

Conclusions – key factors in the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

These findings provide further insight into the role of the practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies, namely:

The need for practitioners to reflect upon their practice, assess the children’s needs and develop their practice accordingly – Time to reflect on their actions and observe the children’s current competency level is required to ensure they are providing opportunities for children to develop social competencies.

The need for practitioners to hold expectations that the children are capable of developing social competencies and make these expectations explicit – For the Relational Approach to have an impact upon the children, the practitioner should hold the belief that the children are capable of developing the social competencies to interact effectively with their peers. Without such a belief they are unlikely to provide children with the opportunities to develop and practise such skills. As practitioners make these expectations explicit to the children, through the provision of opportunities to develop and demonstrate these skills, i.e. as I observed during the circle time sessions, the children will be able to develop and practice these skills. As this research commenced, Clare did not hold the expectation that the children would be capable of developing the social competencies to engage in discussions about their learning. This had changed by phase three and, as a result, I observed Clare initiating more fluid circle time session, with less practitioner direction.
7.3 Practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions

Practitioner use of modelling and the impact this had on children’s peer interactions were explored within this theme.

Practitioner modelling of social competencies

The literature reviewed suggests that there are two distinct types of practitioner modelling, 
\textit{behavioural modelling} (modelling an action) and \textit{cognitive modelling} (modelling both the action and the thought process involved in that action) (Jonassen, 1999). I found that these types of modelling could be delivered in one of two distinct ways, through \textit{explicit modelling} which involved the practitioners intentionally modelling behaviours to children or through \textit{incidental modelling} which involved the children observing behaviours without the practitioners being aware that modelling was taking place.

I found that the practitioners at Bumbles modelled social competencies to children and their use of modelling increased over the three phases of the research. This partly related to the Relational Approach programme activities generating increased opportunities for modelling, for example during the pre and debrief, and partly through changes in practitioner practice. As the practitioners became increasingly process focussed they were less time bound and increased opportunities for modelling arose during discussions, opportunities which would have previously been ignored to keep the focus on the task in hand. Such discussions provided opportunities for episodes of SST (Sylva et al., 2004, 2007).

Context was a key feature in the type of modelling behaviours used by the practitioners, with differences found between the practitioner-led and child-led contexts. Within the practitioner-led context I observed both explicit and incidental modelling and both behavioural and cognitive modelling. Explicit cognitive modelling was identified as most beneficial to supporting the development of children’s social competencies. Opportunities for explicit cognitive modelling were realised in a variety of situations. Some of these
opportunities were provided by the relational activities provided in the handbook. For example, in one observation Beth was observed demonstrating the behaviour of noticing and acknowledging the kindness of others. Further opportunities for explicit cognitive modelling were provided by story books. I noted that using story books was particularly helpful for discussing challenging behaviours with the children, a practice which is supported by Neo-vygostskians who advocate the use of the language of story books as a way to both think and communicate (Mercer, 1996), and by Bandura’s SLT (1977). SLT supports such an approach as it affords children the opportunity to observe a behaviour, in this instance by the characters in the book, and supports the development of their understanding that there are desired behaviours which result in positive rewards and less desirable behaviours which can have a negative impact upon interactions and relationships. Using the characters in a story to explore these issues allows practitioners to discuss challenging behaviours without reminding children of challenging situations, for example when they had a dispute between themselves. In these instances the modelling was planned and the practitioners were aware they were modelling to the children.

Within the child-led context there were fewer incidents of practitioner modelling observed, but examples of explicit and incidental modelling and of behavioural and cognitive modelling were recorded. Examples of explicit cognitive modelling were noted during episodes where children were encouraged to take turns or to include others in their activities, the practitioner modelled the language and behaviours required and explained the processes behind these actions, i.e. to think about how they may feel if they were excluded from a game.

Further instances of modelling captured during child-led activities frequently related to the practitioners’ interactions with each other. During phase one I observed the practitioners using language in their interactions with each other in the presence of the children which they would not use when interacting with the children. I concluded that this was a form of
incidental behavioural modelling. Such modelling was observed in the earlier stages of the research, by phase three the practitioners had considered how the way they interacted with each other may influence the children’s behaviours. As time progressed, the practitioners’ interactions with each other altered and developed into episodes of explicit behavioural and explicit cognitive modelling. From the latter part of phase two and into phase three, I observed practitioners using their conversations with their peers to model social competencies to the children. This related to a conscious change in practitioner practice. Clare commented in phase three, ‘the children pick up on what’s around them, if we are asking them to behave in a particular way then we must be seen to be acting in that way as well, it’s obviously really’.

A further important feature of practitioner modelling I observed within both the practitioner-led and child-led contexts included practitioners supporting children to practise behaviours which they themselves had modelled to the children. Bandura (1977) identified within SLT a need for moteric reproduction processes, i.e. a need to provide opportunities for children to practise the behaviours they have had modelled to them and to have opportunities to develop their application. Instances of this support for the application of modelled behaviours was seldom observed in phases one and two, it did however become more commonplace in phase three. This suggests that, as the practitioners became more aware of ways in which they could support the development of the children’s social competencies, they were able to identify and capitalise on opportunities as they arose. I observed the practitioners supporting the children to practise the social competencies they had discussed previously, making clear to the children when the competencies they had discussed would be applied and how they could think about this. An example of this is provided in the excerpt on pg.158 where Clare says to Tabitha, ‘Remember we talked about touching people and asking them first in circle time?’ as Tabitha shocked James when she started to unexpectedly rub sun cream into his arm.
Whilst the focus of this research is the development of children’s social competencies, I also noted an increase in the modelling of cognitive problem-solving skills in phase three of the research. Given that the EPPE research has shown that high-quality settings value cognitive and social development equally, I believe that this is further support for my claim in the previous section that there has been an increase in the quality of the provision at Bumbles. This noted increase in the use of practitioner modelling of problem-solving skills may also be of value in developing understandings of the processes by which the Relational Approach was shown to increase children’s reading and Mathematics attainment in the SPRinG schools. If the teachers became more adept at modelling cognitive processes as they have with the modelling of social competencies, this, in conjunction with the increased opportunities provided by working with their peers, may have supported children’s learning within academic subjects. This would be an interesting point to explore in future research.

At times it was a challenge to consistently model the desired social competencies as ‘usual’ everyday practice conflicted with the newly adopted pedagogy. In chapter six I provided an excerpt in which an outcomes focussed activity (pg.160) – the production of a Mother’s day card – led to a practitioner incidentally modelling behaviours which were in direct conflict with her newly adopted relational pedagogy. This incident highlighted the need for practitioners to constantly reflect upon and review the planned activities to ensure that their approach to these activities remains congruent with the Approach adopted. This particular incident also highlighted the need for these changes to be communicated to parents. Had the child not made a card to take home the parent may have wondered why her son had not participated in the activity. I speculate that parents have an expectation that all children will all bring home a card or picture on special occasions, e.g. Mother’s day, therefore explaining why a decision had been made not to insist a child participated in an activity may be required to maintain positive relations with parents.
It is possible to conclude that the practitioners did model social competencies to children in a number of ways and in a variety of contexts. A process which I suggest developed as a result of the Relational Approach training.

**Development of children’s social competencies**

I have identified a number of changes in practitioner pedagogy and practice and, as such, in the environment at Bumbles. These changes have taken time to embed, at times, have provided challenges for the practitioners. Given the purpose of the Relational Approach is to support the development of children’s social competencies to increase their opportunities for learning and development, it is necessary to consider whether these changes are mirrored by changes in the social competencies displayed by the children. This research focussed on three embedded case children: Izzy, a high social status child; Tabitha, a medium social status child; and Tomas, a low social status child.

In Izzy’s case, the number of interactions Izzy was observed within remained stable. The interactions she engaged in included a wider group of children, specifically children younger than her. I also found that the number of social competencies she displayed increased. These increases were displayed through laughing and smiling, being more inclusive, mediating other children’s disputes and sharing. I also observed a decrease in the challenging behaviours exhibited by Izzy, most notably a reduction in the instances of bossing other children and in negative behaviours, such as pushing, pulling, excluding, ignoring and glaring.

These changes also correlated with changes in Izzy’s interactions with the practitioners. I was particularly keen to see if Izzy began to demand less practitioner time, given the SPRinG research concluded that following the implementation of the approach there was a decrease in the time children demanded of teachers (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008). Whilst the number of practitioner-child interactions I observed involving Izzy were relatively
stable across the three phases, with a slight decrease in the number of interactions across the phases, I did observe some changes in the nature of these interactions. The data related to practitioner practice revealed small increases seen in the support given to Izzy for the development of prosocial skills and the pedagogic style adopted by the practitioners in their interactions. With the practitioners observed engaging in more acting and playing with Izzy and increased episodes of SST. I conclude that Izzy is benefiting from the changes in practitioner practice previously highlighted. I also found further support for the claim that there was an increase in the quality of Izzy’s interactions with her peers. I found that there was a decrease in the number of times the practitioner needed (or chose) to become involved in a dispute in which Izzy was involved. Izzy was involved in fewer disputes and, of those she was involved, in she was able to resolve the issue herself.

The case of Tabitha, the medium social status child, highlighted the stark differences in children’s pre-school experiences. Unlike Izzy, who was frequently at the centre of the children’s activities and conversations, Tabitha was observed frequently hovering at the edge of other children and their games. She was rarely seen engaged in direct conversation with her peers. She appeared to lack the confidence and the skills to engage with the other children as they played. I observed some improvement over the three phases of the research with slight increases recorded in her involvement in group activities, the number of interactions she had with non-friends and with children from a different age group. In addition, the quality of those interactions improved as I observed an increase in the relational rating of the activities she was involved in, an increase in the relational rating of the observations made, and an increase in her level of engagement in activities. The improved quality of Tabitha’s interactions is also apparent in increases in her enjoyment, an increase in the number of peer interactions she engages in, and an increase in the number of observations of her being inclusive, helping other children and sharing with her peers.
Whilst positive changes were recorded for peer interactions, I also noted that this also brought about a small increase in the number of challenging behaviours I observed Tabitha engaged in. I believe that this reflects the fact that she was, by phase three, engaging with her peers, something which was seldom observed in phase one. I also believe that it will take time for her to develop the social competencies required to sustain her peer interactions as she explores ways of being in her peer group. I believe that this is beneficial to her given that research has shown that building and maintaining these relationships are crucial for children’s learning and development (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford, 2003) and future academic success (Rosegrant, 1992; Gura, 1992).

The number of interactions Tabitha engaged in with practitioners did not change substantially across the three phases of the research, however, as with her peer interactions the quality of these interactions increased. The practitioners were observed encouraging Tabitha in phase three, rather than responding to her as in phases one and two. I believe that this is further evidence of a change in practitioner practice which is impacting positively on the children’s experiences at Bumbles.

Tomas, a low social status child, presented an interesting case for examination as there was speculation at the outset of the research that he may have an ASD. This concern stemmed from the fact that he has a brother who has been diagnosed with an ASD and Tomas was exhibiting some similar traits. As a consequence, the practitioners at Bumbles were monitoring his development.

The implementation of the Relational Approach at Bumbles appeared to have an impact on the development of Tomas’ social competencies. At the outset of the research he did not display many social competencies and frequently seemed unaware of his peers. This altered across the three phases of the research with increases recorded in the number of group activities in which he engaged, the number of interactions he had with non-friends, the number of interactions he had with children from a different age group, the relational rating
of the activities he was involved in, and the relational rating of the observations made. Whilst he was still predominantly observed in interactions with a single peer partner, Tomas was observed in an increased number of positive interactions with his peers displayed by an increase in his enjoyment, an increase in the number of observations of him talking to his peers, an increase in sharing, and an increase in his efforts to attract the attention of his peers.

As with Tabitha, as Tomas engaged in an increasing number of peer interactions there was also a slight increase in the number of challenging behaviours he was observed exhibiting, including increases in instances of ignoring and glaring. I believe this reflects the fact that he, like Tabitha, is learning how to be a member of his peer group, as he is now interacting with a larger group of his peers and that the complexity of these interactions has increased from one word or simple sentences to full conversations.

Given the practitioners initial concerns about Tomas I was initially surprised to see that he was observed engaged in very few interactions with the practitioners. However, as with the other children observed, the quality of these interactions was seen to increase slightly with increases recorded in the quality of interactions and behaviour management and in the categories for respect, enjoys and appreciates, communication, prosocial skills and pedagogic style. Suggesting that, as with Tabitha, Tomas is benefiting from higher quality interactions with the practitioners in phase three and also, again, supporting the claim that children spent more of their time when at pre-school with their peers than they do interacting with a practitioner.

In the case of Tomas particularly I recognised that attending Bumbles alone was likely to have had an impact on his interactions with other children, particularly given the challenging relationship he appears to have with his brother at home. However, the practitioners stated that the implementation of the Relational Approach had been a key factor in supporting the
development of his peer relationships and had led to his social competencies developing more quickly than they would have had they not been involved in the research.

The data indicates that there is an increase in the social competencies displayed by children and that these competencies are used within a variety of interactions. The practitioners at Bumbles agreed with this assertion. They themselves recognised that there has been a change in the way the children interacted and the ways in which they approached tasks together.

**How the language and behaviours modelled by practitioners was used by the children within their peer interactions**

The language and behaviours modelled by the practitioners were used by the children during their peer interactions. This occurred as a result of explicit or incidental modelling and behavioural or cognitive modelling. The type of modelling had an impact in the ways in which the children were able to use and develop the language and behaviours observed. Behavioural modelling was more likely to result in the children imitating what they observed. Imitation involves very little adaptation of the language modelled and the context in which the child applies the language, i.e. the children repeated the language and within the same context which they had observed the practitioner modelling. An example of Imitation came when the children were observed putting their fingers to their lips and *sh-hing* their peers if they spoke during circle time. Behavioural modelling was most likely to lead to incidents of Imitation as the child did not gain an understanding of how to apply the language heard, or understand the meaning behind the language to equip them with the necessary tools to apply it within a different situation. They learned the language or phrase and witnessed an appropriate application, but they did not learn how to apply it in alternative situations as required.

Where cognitive modelling (Jonassen, 1999) was used, whereby the practitioner modelled the cognitive processes to the child in addition to the language and behaviour, this better
equipped the child to apply the modelled behaviour in different situations. The children were learning about the intention and the purpose behind the language, not just the phrase. I found many examples of the children applying language they had cognitively modelled to them by the practitioners. Such observations were not made in phase one, but became visible towards the end of phase two of the research with greater numbers observed in phase three. In phase three the children were observed giving much more attention to the needs of their peers and supporting each other to resolve disputes. The change over time indicates that these skills developed as the practitioners became more adept at modelling and as the expectations the practitioners had of the children became explicit.

The fact that the children were observed supporting each other and considering each other’s needs is particularly interesting given the point raised by Kutnick et al. (2008) that children of this age are often considered too egocentric to participate in cooperative working. This research documents that this is not the case, but illustrates that the children require support to develop their understanding of the social competencies needed to consider and support the needs of their peers.

Given these findings, I propose that cognitive modelling is a key factor in the Relational Approach supporting the development of children’s social competencies and is crucial to the role the practitioner plays in the development of children’s social competencies.

Conclusions – key factors in the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

The findings presented under theme three led me to conclude that practitioners do model social competencies to children in a number of different contexts and in a number of ways. The ways in which practitioners model language to the children, i.e. whether through behavioural modelling or cognitive modelling, is a crucial factor in how the children are able to then apply the language modelled. Instances of explicit cognitive modelling are crucial for
changes in children’s peer interactions as they should gain an understanding of the intention behind an action if they are to be able to apply the social competency as required.

In addition to the type of modelling used, practitioners should also provide the children with opportunities for motoric reproduction processes. This will allow the children to develop the use of the language and behaviour modelled, enabling them to apply the social competencies when appropriate – rather than within the limited context in which it was originally observed.

Consideration of these findings led to the identification of further crucial factors in the role for the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies, namely:

**The need for practitioners to model the desired social competencies** – Previous research suggests that modelling social competencies was likely to be a key factor of the role of the practitioner in supporting children’s social competencies development. Kutnick and Berdondini (2009) state that during the SPRinG activities practitioners modelled behaviours to children, and King (2008) stated that practitioners need to make explicit the different types of questions possible and the types of responses they generate so that the children can then try these methods. I found evidence to support this claim and further understandings of this, as I found that the type of modelling used by the practitioners led to different outcomes. I assert that cognitive modelling of social competencies is required to ensure children move beyond Imitation of practitioner language to develop the skills required to use social competencies as required in a variety of contexts.

In addition to cognitive modelling, I also recognise that the use of behavioural modelling is important, specifically within unintentional modelling episodes, for example, where practitioners are engaged in dialogue with each other. To ensure that the ethos of the Relational Approach is embedded in the culture of the pre-school, the children should see
the practitioners engaging with each other in the manner they expect the children to adopt when engaged with each other. Children learn from the behaviours they observe (Bandura, 1977).
7.4 A Framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

Consideration of the three research themes has led me to identify a series of five complex mediating factors which together provide a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies. I have identified that the practitioners should:

- Understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of relational programmes and activities.
- Provide a suitable environment in which positive relationships and the development of social competencies can thrive.
- Reflect upon their practice and observe the children’s behaviours and use the information gathered to inform their practice.
- Hold expectations that the children are capable of developing social competencies and make these expectations explicit.
- Model the desired social competencies.

I propose that, combined, these inter-related factors provide the necessary environment for the benefits of the Relational Approach to be realised, and that these factors would be applicable to practitioners wishing to build children’s social competencies and develop group work practice within their setting.
8. Conclusion

In this chapter I revisit the research aims and consider the key findings of the research in relation to the framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies. Following this, I reflect upon the methodological approach before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of the study and the implications of the research findings for ECEC policy and practice.

8.1 Revisiting the research aims

This research was both evaluative and theory seeking. The evaluative element of the research documented the processes by which the Relational Approach was developed in Bumbles, including the Relational Approach training and whether it led to changes in the children’s social networks which aligned with the findings of the SPRinG research. This evaluative element was heavily linked to the research projects funded by the Esmée Fairbain Foundation and the European Commission, and was essential to allow me to contextualise the theory-seeking element of the research. These issues were considered within the theme of The development of the Relational Approach. Scrutiny of the questions posed within this theme led me to conclude that the Relational Approach was successfully developed within Bumbles and that its development led to: changes in the composition of groups in Bumbles; increased practitioner support for the development of children’s social competencies; and an increase in children’s social networks. Whilst I found little evidence of the use of groups as a pedagogic tool, I found that the practitioners were developing new practices and creating a new environment which supported children’s peer interactions to thrive. Whether the changes observed will lead to increased use of groupings as a pedagogic tool in Bumbles in the future remains unclear.
These findings led me to conclude that the implementation of the Relational Approach at Bumbles provided me with a suitable context within which to explore the theory-seeking element of this research.

The theory-seeking element of the research sought to explore how practitioner practice altered as a result of participating in the Relational Approach training and how, if at all, this led to changes in children’s peer interactions. Through this exploration, I sought to deepen understandings of the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies. Previous research, explored with the literature review, indicates that the role of the practitioner and practitioner modelling were likely to be significant factors (e.g. Sheridan, 2007; Philips et al., 1987) yet, the processes by which these factors led to changes in children’s behaviour remained unclear. Little is known about the role of the early years practitioner in modelling appropriate social behaviours (Buysse et al., 2003) and more specifically there is little understanding of how practitioner language can affect pupil discourse (Gillies, 2008) or how any changes in practitioner behaviour manifests, if at all, within children’s behaviours (Prinsen et al., 2007).

These issues were considered under the two research themes: Pedagogy and practice and Practitioner modelling and children’s peer interactions. The combination of tools used provided an overview of the developments in practitioner practice across both practitioner-led activities, e.g. circle time and story time and within child-led activities. Scrutiny of the research questions posed under these themes led me to conclude that that the development of the Relational Approach at Bumbles led to changes in the pedagogic styles of the practitioners, the extent of which depended upon the pedagogic position from which the practitioner began. These changes led to an increase in the prevalence of those attributes recognised as relating to high-quality provision in EPPE (Sylva et al., 2004) including: instances of SST; practitioners use of open-ended questioning; the formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities and; support given to children to
rationalising and talking through their conflicts. This evidence led me to conclude that there was an increase in the quality of provision at Bumbles, as identified by Sylva et al. (2004) as a result of the changes in practice the development of the Relational Approach brought about.

As the practitioners at Bumbles developed the Relational Approach they increasingly modelled social competencies to the children. This modelling occurred in a number of different ways, including explicitly or incidentally. These episodes of modelling were either cognitive or behavioural in nature. I found that these different types of modelling led to different changes in the children’s peer interactions. Where the practitioners cognitively modelled to children this had the greatest impact upon the children’s peer interactions, as the children were able to take what they had modelled to them and apply this within a variety of situations. This may be due to the children become more adept at recognising social cues and using this knowledge to adapt their behaviour appropriately (Crick and Dodge’s model, 1994). Behavioural modelling, whether explicit or incidental was more likely to lead to imitation, where the children used the language and action as they had observed it with little or no adaptation. Whether repetitive imitation can in itself lead to changes in children’s peer actions over time remains unclear.

Being in a position to capture these changes and any subsequent changes in the children’s peer interactions provided me with a context in which to explore the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.
8.2 Developing a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies

Interrogation of the data led me to identify five complex interrelated factors which together provide a framework for understanding the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.

**Factor one: practitioners should understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of relational programmes and activities**

I propose that having a clear and developed understanding of the theoretical framework will be crucial for the practitioner to be able to fulfil the other factors identified as essential aspects in supporting the development of children’s social competencies. For example, this knowledge will support their reflections and observations and help them to identify potentially beneficial changes to their practice.

When using the example of the Relational Approach I found that the level of support individual practitioners required to develop an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the Approach will depend upon a number of factors, specifically the position from which they begin, i.e. whether their approach is more outcomes- or process focussed. As with the case of Beth, there are many practitioners who have a general democratic and process- focussed pedagogy that have some understanding of the importance of supporting children’s peer relationships. These practitioners may need some support to put this into practice and to realise the potential of the group to support learning and development.

For other practitioners, as seen in the example of Clare, gaining an understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the Relational Approach, or relational pedagogy more broadly, may be their first introduction to giving detailed consideration to how adopting an authoritative or an outcomes-focused pedagogy may not be the most appropriate method
of ensuring children can gain the most from their pre-school experience (Sheridan, 2007; Philips et al., 1987). Such practitioners will be required to change fundamental beliefs they hold to develop the Relational Approach. For these practitioners it will be crucial that they understand the potential benefits, as the time and dedication needed to change one’s practice is substantial (Stevens, 2007) and as such practitioners will need to be committed to developing their practice over time.

Given the need for practitioners to understand the theoretical underpinnings of any approach which aims to support the development of children’s social competencies I would advocate the use of the Relational Approach. This programme has a clear theoretical and conceptual underpinning, a programme to guide practice, along with substantial experimental evidence for the benefits of its use (SPRinG, 2005). This is in direct contrast to the other potential programmes/aids available to supporting the development of children’s social competencies, for example SEAL and circle time, as discussed in the literature review I found these lacked a clear theoretical and conceptual underpinning (e.g. Craig, 2007) which would support the practitioners to develop their practice.

**Factor two: practitioners should provide a suitable environment in which positive relationships and the development of social competencies can thrive**

There are a number of facets to providing a suitable environment in which group work can thrive in pre-schools. These include: creating a suitable physical environment (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick, 2007); developing a culture which promotes positive relations; and providing children with opportunities for collaboration (Blatchford et al., 2003).

The schools-based literature I reviewed emphasised the need to provide a layout which allowed children to work together. Within the pre-school environment, changes to the configuration of the space was a lesser concern given the focus on free-flow play activities, however the physical space must still be considered. The analysis of the environmental
rating scale data revealed that the development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles led to changes in the physical environment which were supportive of developing a relational pre-school culture, for example, the wall of kindness, joint work being displayed on the walls, and activities that required partners being provided. Each of these actions is a further signal to the children that collaboration and joint playing and working is valued and expected.

It has been shown that adopting a whole staff team approach to a new initiative is more likely to lead to positive gains than one practitioner acting alone (e.g. Banerjee, 2010). In line with the findings of the SPRinG research (Kutnick, Ota and Berdondini, 2008) I suggest that all practitioners should take on any approach which supports the development of children’s social competencies. Furthermore, they should all promote prosocial behaviours and encourage the children to be more considerate of their peers. Research has shown that a practitioner who adopts a democratic style, and staff teams who present a united approach to social competency development, create an environment which encourages children to be more considerate of their peers and to develop prosocial behaviours (Sheridan, 2007; Philips et al., 1987). Where practitioners adopt a more authoritarian approach, the children have been shown to display more anti-social behaviours (Sheridan, 2007). As this research has shown children take the language and behaviours modelled by practitioners into their peer interactions, I suggest that it is crucial that practitioners model positive peer relations through their own interactions.

**Factor three: practitioners should reflect upon their practice and observe the children’s behaviours and use the information gathered to inform their practice**

When discussing the role identified for school-based teachers in the development of group work skills in the literature review, I claimed that for each of the elements identified to be realised there is a need for the teacher to regularly reflect upon their actions. I assert that this is an essential element in this framework. Without reflecting upon their practice
practitioners will not be able to identify positive changes which can be made, for example to the environment, or to their practice. Reflection has been recognised as a key element in developing the quality of educational provision and in itself supporting practitioners to develop their practice (Pollard, 2008). This links back to factor one as I suggest that without the underpinning of an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the approach they are taking, meaningful reflection will difficult to achieve. Without an understanding of what you are doing and why you are doing it is not possible to identify areas of practice which require consideration. Time to do this and to develop the skills required to develop thoughtful searching reflective practice and being open to the views of others (Dewey, 1933 and Schön, 1983) may also be required.

As the practitioners reflect upon their own practice it will also be necessary for them to observe the children to ensure that they have a clear understanding of their needs (Johnson and Johnson, 2008). Practitioners need to be aware of the children’s needs to inform their planning and ensure the children receive the support they need to develop their social competencies (Gura, 1992). As was highlighted in the analysis of the training sessions attended by Beth, participating in and experiencing the Relational Approach activities led by the trainer and researcher was a supportive experience in that it deepened the practitioners understanding of their role within this process.

Combining awareness of their actions with an understanding of the needs of the children, the practitioners will be able to plan to support the development of children’s social competencies.

**Factor four: the practitioner should hold expectations that the children are capable of developing social competencies and make these expectations explicit**

Within the literature review I identified a possible barrier to group work programmes being developed for pre-school children as it may be believed that children of this age are too egocentric to develop the social competencies required (Kutnick at al., 2004). In this
research I found that Clare held the belief that the children would not be capable of telling the practitioners what they thought. Yet the findings suggest that, when given the appropriate support, the children were able to develop the social competencies necessary for collaboration and cooperation. I recognise that for practitioners to fully engage with the implementation of the Relational Approach, or the development of a relational pedagogy more broadly, it is crucial that they believe that the children are capable of developing the necessary competencies and of interacting with each other in this way. I propose that without this belief they are unlikely to expect the children to develop the skills. Having expectations that the children will engage with each other in a cooperative way has been shown to be a crucial aspect of group work. For pupils to feel the group is important and that the success of the group is relevant to them it must be made explicit that this is the case (e.g. Kerr, 1983). Whilst group work as identified by the Relational Approach was not used, the children were required to participate in joint activities, e.g. jigsaws and circle time activities.

**Factor five: practitioners should model the desired social competencies**

The data revealed that modelling can be either explicit or incidental and either behavioural or cognitive. The data also showed that cognitive modelling is more likely to result in changes in children’s behaviours, whereas behavioural modelling is more likely to result in Imitation of language observed without any adaptation made to behaviour. Bandura, in his model of SLT (1969), recognises the potential for modelling to impact upon children’s actions. He states however that simply having a behaviour modelled is insufficient for learning to take place. He recognises a number of processes which the expert and novice must be engaged in for learning to occur:

- **Attentional Processes** – the novice must be paying attention
- **Retention Processes** – the novice must be able to retain the information gleaned and be able to act on the information as required at a later stage
- **Moteric Reproduction Processes** – the novice must have opportunities to practise the behaviour and develop its application

- **Motivation Processes** – for a behaviour to be imitated there must be a motivation to do so.

(Bandura, 1977)

When comparing my findings with SLT I would support the claim that *attentional processes* are an essential feature of modelling as the child must observe the language and action for it to impact upon them. *Retention processes* will also be necessary as, without this, the language and behaviour model cannot be drawn upon by the child at a later stage as required. Though I do not have evidence from my research to verify such claims, I do believe that, should these be absent the modelling would not alter the children’s behaviour, as they would not have been aware of the modelling or remember what they had observed at a later stage.

I did find evidence within this research that the practitioners in Bumbles provided opportunities for *moteric reproduction processes*. I believe that these are a crucial element in the act of modelling as the practitioners supported the children to apply the social competencies modelled. As previously suggested, *motivation processes* are a key aspect of developing children’s social competencies and group work skills as without recognition from the practitioners of the progress the children are making in developing these skills the children may not be motivated to make changes (Stevens, 2008).

The findings I presented concur with Bandura’s SLT model (1977). I would, however, make an addition which recognised that the type of modelling used is crucial and that for changes in behaviour to occur the modelling needs to be cognitive in nature.

In addition to the cognitive modelling, I also found that it was crucial that practitioners modified their discourse more generally and reflected upon the language they used in their
everyday interactions as such actions constitute behavioural modelling. In the literature review I identified that teacher discourse during group work has shown how what teachers say and do conveys a great deal of information regarding the expectations placed on pupils as learners (Webb, 2008). I propose that the discourse used by practitioners in both learning activities and their own peer interactions creates a culture in which the children learn the expected, desired and valued behaviours. Research has shown that the approach taken by practitioners, i.e. whether authoritative or democratic impacts on the nature of the children’s interactions and whether they were cooperative (Sheridan, 2007). It is therefore necessary that the practitioners use language which further supports the children’s understanding of the expected behaviours. This links to both the need for the whole staff team to adopt the same approach and for practitioners to reflect upon their actions. This would ensure a consistent message was presented to the children whilst providing the practitioner with the information required to modify their discourse appropriately.

These five reciprocal and dynamic factors provide a framework for supporting practice which presents an understanding of the complexity of the role of the practitioner. To achieve these in practice will require time and effort. The evidence provided by the SPRinG research (Blatchford et al., 2005) and related early years research (e.g. Sheridan, 2007) suggests that this will be time well invested and will support the potential of children’s peer interactions as sites for learning and development to be realised.

This framework has been established using the Relational Approach as an example of an initiative which supports the development of children’s social competencies. I would, however, suggest that the five factors identified would be valuable not only to those developing the Relational Approach but to any practitioner wishing to support the development of children’s social competencies and to gain the greatest potential from children’s peer interactions as a site for learning and development.
8.3 Reflecting upon the research process

Methodology and methods revisited

The social constructivist approach I adopt is evident throughout this research, not least by the emphasis placed on learning as a social process (Kim, 2001). The methodology was justified by the opportunities it afforded. As a social constructivist position is one which emphasises that reality is constructed through human activity and that knowledge is culturally and socially constructed (Kim, 2001, p.2), I sought to involve the practitioners throughout the research, from the development of the Relational Approach activities through to the final group interview, which provided them with an opportunity to shape the conclusions drawn. The video data was a particularly useful tool as this allowed many iterations of analysis to take place and thus for potential alternative perspectives to be considered.

Involving the practitioners was a crucial element of the research as, as discussed in chapter two, notions of quality are value-laden (Sheridan, 2009; 1994) and culturally sensitive. Those working inside pre-schools may have a different opinion of quality than those external to the setting, e.g. inspectors and parents (Katz, 1993) and, I suggest, researchers. In addition to differences in what one person and another may deem high-quality within pre-schools, I also noted that the tools used to measure quality themselves are shaped by the perspectives of those responsible for their design. I made particular reference to how such tools place little emphasis on children’s interactions with their peers and place greater attention on practitioner-child interactions (e.g. CCIS and ECERS-R).

To help overcome some of these issues, in addition to involving the practitioners wherever possible within the research process, I used a complex series of data collection tools. These tools acted in a cumulative and complementary manner to provide a data set which, whilst valuing the knowledge base which already exists, e.g. through considering items identified by the EPPE team as relating to high quality (Sylva et al., 2004b), provided more detailed
information on practitioner use of groups and the interactions which took place within Bumbles pre-School. Combined, these tools provide information on the development of the Relational Approach in Bumbles, the intricacies of practitioner modelling and its impact on children peer interactions and subsequently the role of the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies more broadly.

Interpretation of the data collected was impacted upon in a number of ways, for example, I measured practitioner-child interactions using the CCIS, which was developed by Carl (2007), who was working in the United States. Furthermore, the analysis of data collected using other tools, such as the sociometry, were shaped by the methods used by the SPRinG research and the research project to which this piece of work is aligned. Involving multiple perspectives in this way is congruent with the social constructivist position adopted. These diverse perspectives permitted the production of a detailed case study, in line with the original aim of this research.

In chapter three I noted that it would be crucial that I considered Yinn’s (2009) principles which underlie good case study research, i.e. that it should:

- use all the evidence you have collected to exhaustively consider your research questions leaving no loose ends
- address all major rival interpretations of your data
- focus on the most significant aspect of the case study and not be distracted by other issues
- use your own expert knowledge of the subject matter and current thinking in the field in your interpretation.

I have considered these points throughout the analysis and have given time to each within my interpretation of the data. Whilst developing this case, I have made claims which I have proposed extend to the wider ECEC context, though I have recognised that case study data
is bounded and limited, I feel that this is appropriate as this data is placed within a larger body of work. In the first instance there are the findings of the SPRinG research which has shown the potential benefits of the Relational Approach (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2004; Kutnick, Ota and Berdonini, 2008). In addition there are the findings of the Esmée Fairbain- and Socrates- funded research projects to which this research is aligned, the findings of these studies are summarised in Appendices 2 and 3. The findings of these projects provide further evidence that the Relational Approach can be successfully developed within pre-schools and that the benefits which accrue align with those evidenced by the SPRinG research (Kutnick et al., 2007), thus they support my claims.

**Limitations of the study**

Foremost, this research is bound by limitations of culture and focus. This work was conducted within a particular economic climate, within a small, broadly middle class intake pre-school in England. Had I conducted this piece of work in a different time and place it may have led to different findings. Indeed, throughout the process of data collection, analysis and the writing of the thesis there have been a number of changes made within the education system. The most pertinent being the changes to the curriculum. The revised EYFS in (Early Education, 2012) and its focus on the unique child and the significance of environment and personal relationships and creates a new context in which to consider the findings of this research. Further work is planned to investigate the potential of the Relational Approach within this new context.

As I noted in chapter three, research is shaped by personal experiences and beliefs. In the case of this research my involvement in the SPRinG project undoubtedly shaped the path this research took. The perspective from which I set out was one which assumed that there was a need to provide training and support for children to ensure that they develop the social competencies required for group work (Huber and Huber, 2007). This is a position challenged by those who believe that positive working relationships develop as a result of
successful working in groups (e.g. Bornstein, 1989; Harmon-Jones and Allen, 2001). It would be difficult to know how the children’s relationships would have developed had the Relational Approach not been used. However, the literature is iterative of the fact that there is great potential for children’s peer interactions to be used to support learning and development, a potential which is seldom realised (e.g. Howe, 2010). I believe that the position adopted in this research is one which is justified as it adds to understandings of how this potential can be realised.

The series of complex and complementary data collection tools selected, whilst useful, meant that some tools were not exploited to their greatest potential. The sociometry, for example, was used rather crudely to determine the relative social status of the children and to gain an understanding of whether their social networks increased over time. Whilst this was sufficient to understand whether the impact at Bumbles aligned with the SPRinG findings and to identify children with differing social status for the embedded case studies, more work could have been done on the mapping of children’s social networks and whether friendship groupings in Bumbles grew. Any future research conducted in this area may benefit from focussing more deeply on such issues.

The decision was made not to subject the findings to any statistical analysis; as the sample was considered to be too small to justify this. This raises questions of reliability and generalisability. Whilst this is a commonly recognised issue within case study research, it is useful to consider the findings of this research within the wider research context. This small scale more qualitative study offers an extension to the SPRinG research findings which are based upon a large quasi-experimental study. It does not stand alone. Secondly, this study was aligned with two further studies which examined the use of the Relational Approach with pre-schools. The findings of these studies lend further credibility to the conclusions drawn regarding the evaluative element of this research. The findings of these projects,
detailed in Appendix 2 and 3; broadly support the findings reported here that the Relational Approach did lead to similar outcomes in pre-schools as it did within schools.

The data analysis could have been strengthened further by the introduction of a control group. As was discussed within the literature review, studies involving pre-school age children can be particularly challenging as the developmental changes in children of this age can make interpreting data and drawing conclusions difficult. Whilst it was not possible to use a control group, due to time constraints, an attempt to overcome this issue was made through the collection and use of the scoping phase data. The scoping phase data, though less detailed than the data collected during the core data phases, allows a comparison between both the children’s behaviours at the end of the previous year and the roles adopted by the practitioner at the end of the academic year. This data allows some consideration as to whether the changes observed related to developmental changes or changes in practitioner practice as the children mature or something else. Whilst this does not eliminate the impact the children’s development may have on the findings the scoping data allows the findings to be placed within a broader context.

I noted previously that including the perspectives of others is not only pertinent to the social constructivist position adopted but also in understanding notions of quality in ECEC, something which is touched upon throughout this research. This work could have been strengthened by the inclusion of the perspectives of children and their families. Providing the children with a voice may have allowed for alternative conclusions to be drawn and may have provided a useful insight into their actions. Should I extend this work I would look to include the children’s voices within the research process.

Finally, this research, as with most research, was time bound. It does not therefore capture how the Relational Approach developed within the pre-school over the longer-term, nor whether the practitioners began to introduce collaborative group work activities. Whether the children’s experiences at Bumbles equipped them for group work in school or impacted
upon their social or cognitive development in the longer term also remains unknown. Understanding whether this experience has impacted upon the children’s primary school education experience would further understandings of the significance of supporting children’s social competency development whilst at pre-school.

**Future research**

Throughout the discussions a number of potential areas for expansion of this research have been identified. Two areas which I would like to explore further include more detailed examination of the role of language and further investigation into children’s cognitive development.

As noted previously, the SPRinG research team conducted detailed analysis of children’s conversations during paired activities and how this language altered as the teacher developed the Relational Approach in the classroom. Whilst this study has indicated that there is a relationships between the language used by practitioners and the language used by children within their peer interactions, and that how this is modelled to children has an impact on the ways in which the language is used, further analysis of the language used would be valuable. Such analysis could focus on how the language of the practitioner can affect pupils discourse (Gillies, 2008) within paired tasks, looking more closely at how they are supporting each other’s learning during such tasks. As with the SPRinG research, this could focus on how adept the children become at working together. Specifically, whether the children develop language which allows them to develop their role as a guide or more knowledgeable other (Rogoff, 1990) in activities, and whether the language they develop as a result of the Relational Approach activities allows them to engage in a greater number of episodes of SST (Sylva et al., 2005). The language used in such episodes could make a contribution to our understanding of how SST can involve a single peer partner (Syraj-Blatchford, 2002) given that the focus of SST is often placed on the role of the practitioner.
Related to this is the consideration of children’s cognitive development in future research. An investigation into whether the introduction of the Relational Approach improved children’s attainment in pre-schools could be valuable. There are obvious issues around determining attainment for children of this age and how this could be measured in an appropriate way, as research studies have concluded that young children experience high levels of stress when subjected to testing (e.g. Fleege et al., 1992). Yet understanding whether the Relational Approach can support the learning of children at all ages may be useful and influence policy and curriculum development given the previously noted tension that exists within educational debates between process- and outcomes-focussed positions. Increasing understandings of the impact of process on children’s learning at this age could contribute to that understanding. In addition, I have speculated within this thesis that an increase in the quality of teaching following the introduction of the Relational Approach may have been a contributing factor to children’s increased attainment in the SPRinG research findings. The proposed extension to this research could investigate this notion further.
8.4 Implications for ECEC policy and practice

In chapter two I described how within ECEC the role of the practitioner is seen as vital at the expense of focussing on the potential of children’s peer interactions to support learning and development and seeing children as each other’s resource (Barnes and Todd, 1977, Mercer et al., 2004). In the same chapter, I note that Mathieson suggests that PSHE is one of the most difficult parts of the curriculum to implement. I propose that is in part due to children’s personal social and emotional development being seen as a part of the curriculum rather than adopting a process focussed relational pedagogic position which places relationships at the heart of all learning. Whilst I acknowledge that children’s relationships are given attention with ECEC policy and practice, I suggest that, in the main this attention fails to recognise children’s peer interactions as a context for learning and development. As such, I propose that ECEC policy and practice needs to focus on the third dimension of learning proposed by Blatchford et al. (2005) and develop a relational process focussed approach which is embedded in the environment and culture of ECEC.

To conclude, through this research I intended to explore whether the Relational Approach to group work was suitable for use within pre-school settings, and gain a deeper understanding of the processes by which the Relational Approach led to changes in children’s social networks and peer interactions. I have argued that the focus on child-practitioner interactions, by pre-school practitioners and policy makers, has led to a lack of attention being given to the potential third dimension of group working and children’s peer interactions. Through this research I have shown that the role of the practitioner in supporting and developing this potential third site for learning is crucial. To understand this role I have provided a framework of five interrelated factors which provide an understanding of the role the pre-school practitioner in the development of children’s social competencies.
In the introduction to this thesis I noted Piaget claimed that ‘if...we had to choose from among the totality of existing educational systems those which would best correspond with our psychological results, we would turn our methods in the direction of what has been called ‘group work’...’ (Piaget, 1932, p.412). I also noted how the work of Blatchford et al. (2005) and Howe (2010) have noted the benefits of group work and yet it is still underutilised. A number of factors appear to cause this. Huber and Huber suggest that it is the delays, deficits and disruptions caused when group work is first embarked upon which prevent practitioners from developing group work in schools (2008). I suggest that through embarking on a journey to develop the Relational Approach, with the support of the Relational Approach training and the Relational Approach programme, these issues can be overcome. The children can be supported to develop the social competencies required for successful peer interactions and collaboration. Whilst this will take considerable time and effort to develop, the evidence suggests that this will be time well invested.

Word Count: 82,193
9. Bibliography


Kutnick, P. and Brighi, A., with Avgitidou, S., Genta, M.L., Hannikainen, M., Karlsson-
relationships in European early education settings: sites for enhancing social inclusion,
personal growth and learning?’ European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 15

approach’, in C. Howe and K. Littleton (eds) Educational Dialogue: understanding and

Kutnick, P., Colwell, J., Avgitidou, S., Marselou, V., Hannikainen, M., Rautamies, E., Genta,
M.L., Brighi, A., Mazzanti, C., Nicoletti, S., Sansavini, A., Guarini, A., Gallingani, F., Ortega, R.,
approaches in early years education: enhancing social inclusion personal growth and
learning’, final project report prepared for the European Commission, Education And
Culture Unit, Socrates Programme.


development in the school curriculum; some preliminary results on science tasks’, British

Kutnick, P., Ota, C. and Berdondini, L. (2004) SPRinG at the University of Brighton
Developing a relational approach for peer-based experience in pre-school classrooms;
group working and relational skills with your class. Draft Handbook. Unpublished

classrooms with young school-aged children: facilitating attainment, interaction and
classroom activity’, Learning and Instruction, 18: 83-95.

University Press.

Lang, P. (1998) ‘Getting Round to Clarity: what do we mean by circle time?’ Pastoral Care in
Education, 16, 3-10.


10. Appendices

1. The SPRinG Project and Working With Others (WWO) Research and Education Unit
2. Relational Approaches in early education - European-funded research
3. Developing a Relational Approach to peer-based pre-school experience - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded research
4. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1998))
5. Relational Approach activities
6. Information sheet for practitioners
7. Consent form for practitioners
8. Pre-school maps
9. Sociometry
10. Environmental rating scale
11. Practitioner interview questions
12. Video analysis tools
13. The Relational Approach activities used within the pre-school projects
14. The Relational Approach training
1. The SPRinG Project and Working With Others Research and Consultancy

The Social Pedagogic Research into group-work research (SPRinG)

This section as adapted from the following report:

The SPRinG Project – adapted from Improving the Effectiveness of Pupil Groups in Classrooms

Authors - Peter Blatchford, Maurice Galton, Peter Kutnick and Ed Baines

ESRC Project Ref: L139 25 1046 End of award report June 2005

The full report can be accessed at: www.esrc.ac.uk

Further information about the SPRinG research can also be found at: http://www.spring-project.org.uk/

Objectives of the SPRinG research

The main impetus for the SPRinG (Social Pedagogic Research into Group work) project was to build on earlier research and address the wide gap between the potential of group-work to influence learning, classroom behaviour and attitudes to learning, on the one hand, and the limited use of group-work in schools, on the other. Overcoming this gap suggested that a new approach to conceptualising group-work in classrooms was needed to fully integrate group-work into the fabric of the school day, and provide a more sustained use of group-work beyond the life of the actual research. The SPRinG research sought to develop with teachers a programme of group-work that could be successfully integrated into school life. This programme would then be systematically evaluated by examining pupil progress over a full school year and in comparison to a control group in terms of (a) attainment, (b) motivation for group working, and (c) within-group interactions. The training involved a relational programme designed to develop support, communication and joint problem-solving skills among pupils.

The research aimed to:

1. Enhance the achievement and motivation of pupils when working in classroom groups by actively involving teachers in a programme designed to raise task related levels of
group work, higher order cognitive exchanges and concentration on task, during typical classroom activity.

2. Evaluate the effect of (a) training pupils in group-work skills (b) varying group size and (c) different task demands on the level, type and quality of group-interaction,

3. Provide a high standard of evidence on which to base future practice by comparing under controlled conditions the relative effectiveness of group-work in typical classroom settings in terms of pupil attainment, motivation and attitudes.

4. Develop a social pedagogy of groups providing a solid evidence base for the use of group-work in the curriculum by examining its generalisability across different Key Stages, learning contexts and for specific purposes.

5. Disseminate results and recommendations on effective group-work skills to academic, practice and policy based audiences.

The main research questions were as follows:

1. What classroom management and training strategies facilitate greater levels of peer and interactive group-work at different Key Stages?

2. What effect do training procedures, group size and task settings have on the level and quality of interaction in classes and what combinations lead to effective interactions and pupil concentration?

3. How effective is the peer and interactive group-work initiative at raising pupil attainment, and enhancing pupil motivation and attitudes, and contribution to groups, in relation to two control groups?

4. To what extent do these benefits persist over time and generalise to different contexts and pupils and across age groups?

**Conducting the research**

The study had five phases. Following an Introductory Phase (Phase 1), there was a Developmental Phase (Phase 2), which involved working closely with teachers in seeking to develop the most effective methods of implementing group-work and included
development of the programme and research tools for evaluation. The Main Evaluation Phase 3 was designed to test how well the group-work initiative works by experimental comparison, and longitudinal follow-up of children. An Applications phase (Phase 4) examined how a whole school approach to group-work can be developed, aspects of group-work involving children with particular needs and how group-work can be used in schools in ‘difficult’ circumstances. A Dissemination phase (Phase 5) was designed to be the last stage of the project.

Summary of results

Despite teachers’ concerns that group-work might get in the way of coverage of mainstream curriculum areas there was evidence that involvement in SPRinG had positive effects on pupils’ academic progress. At KS1 benefits were seen in reading and mathematics. At KS2 group-work seemed to benefit all types of knowledge in science but especially problem solving and inferential thinking. At KS3 the success of group-work depended on the type of topic, but appeared to benefit higher cognitive levels.

Involvement in SPRinG led to more, and better quality, involvement in group work, and less individual work, more on task interactions in groups, and interactions were more likely to be sustained and substantial, and contributions high level, in comparison to control groups.

In line with programme aims, SPRinG teachers were more likely to monitor interactions between pupils and less likely to engage in direct teaching. Pupils in SPRinG classes engaged in more autonomous learning in groups.

Especially at KS2, involvement in SPRinG reduced differences between boys and girls and pupils of different attainment levels in contributions to group work.

Results on pupil attitudes and motivation to group-work were less clear cut, though there was a suggestion that involvement in SPRinG seemed to arrest deterioration in attitudes to group-work and school subjects. At KS1, pupils showed developing preferences for paired and small group-work over individual work. Further analyses, especially at KS3, is proving to be insightful in showing ways that attitudes to group-work can vary in a systematic way between different groups of pupils.
1. Attainment and Learning

**KS1**

Performance In Primary Schools (PIPS) test scores were collected in reading and mathematics. In Year 1, post-test reading scores for SPRinG classes were higher than control, especially noteworthy given that SPRinG classes took pre-tests later than control classes. In Year 2, post-test reading scores improved in SPRinG classes more than control. Mathematics scores for SPRinG classes were initially lower than control classes at the pre-test and significantly higher on the post-test and greatest improvement was found in lower attaining children. In the control classes, mid attaining children improved the most.

**Classroom behaviour**

**KS1 Systematic observations**

a. Work setting over time SPRinG classes decreased individual and whole class settings and dramatically increased group work. Control classes maintained individual, whole class settings. SPRinG classes undertook more core curriculum subjects in a group-work setting; especially mathematics and science.

b. Within individual tasks, SPRinG and Control classes demonstrated high levels of on-task’ behaviour (70%+).

c. Teachers were most involved with Control classes while SPRinG children worked more autonomously.

d. Activity with peers: SPRinG classes showed more ‘on task’ and ‘task preparation’ behaviours. Control classes showed more ‘procedure/routine’. SPRinG children increased sustained interaction with group members while control children decreased interaction and were likely to focus on children outside their groups.

e. Peer-based talk: In instances of high level talk, SPRinG classes dominated (97% v 3%).
Working With Others Research and Education Unit

Based within the University of Brighton the Working With Others Research and Education Unit emerged out of the 4-year SPRinG Project (Social Pedagogic Research into Groupwork) which ran from 2000-2004.

As the SPRinG project drew to a close a number of schools were keen to build on the positive impact they were observing in their pupils, both in terms of learning in the classroom and for peer relationships and behaviour in the playground. They were keen to implement the Relational Approach across their whole school communities; extending beyond individual class teachers to whole staff teams including teachers, teaching assistants and midday meal supervisors.

In 2004 Dr Lucia Berdonini and Dr Cathy Ota established the Working With Others Unit and worked with an initial group of 6 schools. By the end of 2007 Working With Others was working with over 100 schools across the south and employing a team of trainers with first hand practical experience of implementing the approach with pupils at early years, primary and secondary level.

Rather than one-off training sessions WWO offers schools membership for a year. This includes both in and out of school training and ongoing support that seeks to provide sustained help in embedding and ensuring long term impact across the whole school. Many schools continue their membership beyond their first year and a number of WWO schools have renewed their membership for 3 years.

Further information can be found at: [http://www.workingwithothers.org](http://www.workingwithothers.org)
2. Relational Approaches in early education - European-funded research

Executive summary taken from: RELATIONAL APPROACHES IN EARLY EDUCATION: ENHANCING SOCIAL INCLUSION, PERSONAL GROWTH AND LEARNING: FINAL REPORT 2004 – 2500 / 001-001 SO2 61OGE

Prepared for the European Commission, Education and Culture Unit

Authors: Peter Kutnick and Jennifer Colwell, Sofia Avgitidou and Vasiliki Marselou, Maritta Hannikainen and Erja Rautamies, Maria Luisa Genta, Antonelli Brighi, Chiara Mazzanti, Sandra Nicoletti, Alessandra Sansavini, Annalisa Guarini and Francesca Gallingani, Rosario Ortega, Eva Romera and Clare Monks, Maelis Karlsson-Lohmander and Monica Löfqvist.

Approach of the project: This was a unique project – aimed at the identification of activities (and preparations for those activities) in which children and their peers are engaged in joint play and groupwork during their time in early education settings. Working with practitioners, the project encouraged the development of peer-based relational activities and enhanced opportunities for social inclusion, personal and social growth and learning attractiveness.

Methodology of the study: The research was undertaken in: Finland, Greece, Sweden, England, Italy and Spain, with a research team based in each country.

The methods used in the study have drawn upon specially developed research tools to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Aside from the initial survey approach, action research and reflective approaches have been used to encourage the (further) implementation of peer-based relational activities within early education settings in the partner countries. In each of the six partner countries two early education settings were surveyed and used in the implementation of a peer-based relational approach.

Key preliminary findings: Overall results identified:

Contexts: All countries maintained early education curricula and curricular guidelines that covered especially social and intellectual development of children, but there were some substantive differences between countries in the provision of early education, number and type of adults involved in each setting, physical make-up of each setting,
and whether social developmental aspects of the curriculum were brought to fruition in the setting;

**Mapping across settings and countries:** Children had distinctively different pedagogic experiences when interacting with practitioners as opposed to peers, these experiences found children in large, socially inclusive groups with their practitioners and in small, socially exclusive groups with their peers;

**Interviews:** Practitioners, generally, did not have formal training regarding peer-based experience and in some countries rarely implemented activities in their settings that would enhance peer-based (relational) experience. Practitioners were concerned about individual children that did not display social/relational competencies – and in many cases focused on the individual child’s skills rather than seeing these competencies as part of the inclusive setting;

**Rating scales (supported by mapping and interview):** Finnish and Swedish early education opportunities offered to young children were more likely to include a substantial amount of relational experience than other countries; inclusion of this experience may be associated with higher levels of practitioner training of their children and a collaborative orientation amongst children.

**Implementation of peer-based relational approaches phase:**

**Case studies:** Peer-based relational approaches were implemented in all 12 settings (two settings from each of the six countries). Actual implementation strategy varied by country, with Finland, Greece and Sweden focusing on practitioner-based reflective strategies and England, Greece, Italy and Spain using an action research strategy to integrate relational activities into children’s settings. All countries reported positive (social inclusion oriented) changes for children and practitioners and a desire to maintain/further develop relational approaches in their settings;

**Rating scales:** In an analysis for all countries over time, each of the six items showed improved planning and support for relational approaches. Similar analyses were undertaken for each partner country, showing improved ratings for Learning Context,
Activities and Tasks, Adult Encouragement, Adult Training, Peer Interactions and Peer Relations.

**Mapping and rating scales:** These were undertaken at the beginning and end of the early education year in all countries except Finland. Mappings showed that adult-led groups remained socially inclusive but became smaller in size over the year. Child-led groups increased in size and this allowed greater social inclusion. Child and adult-led groups increased their proportion of joint interaction with communication over time, and adults became less directive and more reflective. Rating scales undertaken in the autumn showed similar country-based differences to scales in the survey phase; and over the year, England, Greece, Italy and Spain showed significant gains in collaborative activity, practitioner support for and child use of relational activity (Sweden maintained high levels through the year). Practitioners and classes that rated consistently highest in the summer also showed the most inclusive and communicative settings.

**Sociometry:** When examining the number of nominations for play and work given by children in all countries (except Finland), it was found that a higher number of nominations were given at post-intervention than at pre-intervention, (Spanish participants gave many more nominations than participants in other countries). In the analysis of the number of reciprocal nominations given by children for play and work in all countries (except Finland), it was observed that there was a higher level of nominations at post-intervention than at pre-intervention, mainly in Spain and Greece. Also, it was found that Spain gave a higher number nominations than other countries. With regard to the level of nominations for play and work in practitioners’ sociogrammes, a higher level of nominations were given at post-intervention than at pre-intervention in England and in Greece (one setting). The same was true for reciprocal play and work nominations. In both cases, it was found that practitioners in Greece gave more nominations and reciprocal nominations than practitioners in other countries.

3. Developing a Relational Approach to peer-based pre-school experience -
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded research

Executive Summary taken from:

Developing a relational approach to peer-based, pre-school experience: establishing the
bases for inclusion and educational achievement Final Report

Prepared for: Esmee Fairburn Foundation

November 2006

Authors: Peter Kutnick, Jennifer Colwell, Julie Canavan, Helen MacIntyre, With Cathy Ota
and Sarah Walkden

Executive Summary

This research project builds on previous research conducted as part of an extensive four
year SPRinG project (Social Pedagogic Research into Group work ). In this project the team
at Brighton collaborated with schools and practitioners in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex
and West Sussex to investigate effective group work with primary school pupils.

This previous research found that when teachers and pupils were offered opportunities to
develop their relational and group work skills through training and reflection together,
children were more able to support each other’s learning and demonstrate enhanced
social and communication skills. In settings where children were encouraged to work
together in this way practitioners reported greater inclusion in the class as children were
more sensitive and aware of each other as part of a whole class group. Furthermore when
compared to control classes, children undertaking the SPRinG training showed higher
levels of attainment, greater willingness to participate in group working with peers and
increased levels of motivation to share learning experiences with others.

The SPRinG Project focused on Key Stage, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. As such the project
reported here sought to develop a relational/group working programme suitable for staff
and children in the Early years.

The project sought to:

Work with early years practitioners and children to survey the quality of the peer-
based experience;

With early years practitioners, develop a new programme based on a ‘relational approach’
for peer-based experience for implementation in early years;
Implement and evaluate the programme, especially noting effects on emotional, social, moral and cognitive development and skills promoting social inclusion of early years children.

**Specific approach of the project**

This final report describes the activities undertaken in the five (of six planned) phases of the project. Phases were planned as: (1) Introduction: to establish methods and techniques to be used in later phases an initial data set was collected in the schools to be involved in the project (phase one data); (2) Survey: A survey of approximately 12 nursery or reception schools to establish the character/proportion of pedagogic interactions between child with practitioner and child with peers was collected (phase two data); (3) Survey analysis: to provide a quantitative characterisation of practitioner and child interactive activities; (4) Initiation of social inclusion activities: to encourage inclusion, personal and social growth and learning attractiveness in collaborating classrooms through the co-development of relational/group work approaches and allowing pre- to post-implementation comparisons on social and moral development of children as well as observation and field notes on child and practitioner involvement; (5) Analysis of implementation activities: to provide quantitative and qualitative of classroom actions, social/moral development of children and practitioner/child involvement (phase three data); and (6) Dissemination: of results in both formal and informal publication venues-including the drafting of guideline/handbook for practitioners.

The focus of this final report is on the data collected in phases two and three (with phase one to phase three comparisons where appropriate); with additional details on the implementation and assessment of the relational activities. The final stage - the dissemination stage - is currently being undertaken, and the practitioner handbook is being worked upon in consultation with nursery and school practitioners involved in the project.

**Methodology of the project**

The report identifies that five (of six) phases have been completed; allowing the analysis of Stage A Survey and Stage B Implementation. The Survey draws upon specially developed and adapted research tools which were used to gather quantitative and qualitative data; including: mapping of child-peer and child-practitioner activity, sociomatrices of child social status in play and work, reflective rating of social inclusion in the classrooms, practitioner interviews concerning social and relational development of their children, and narratives of each early years setting. Implementation draws upon the same research tools as the Survey, although these were used at the beginning and end of a school year as part of an action research oriented stage. In addition, Implementation also used apperception-based tools to assess social/moral development of children over the Stage B year.
**Key findings**

**Key findings from Stage A**

Drawing from the quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the narrative context, the survey was able to identify a range of issues and concerns. Overall results identify:

**Context:** Within early education settings in England, ‘personal, social and emotional development’ is one of six categories the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS). While not expressed in so many words, this category covers the social (pedagogic) basis for learning and children's eventual social and cultural inclusion. The first phases of this project sought to identify whether and how these social pedagogic and inclusive practices were encouraged in nursery and reception classes with 4 year-olds.

**Interviews:** Practitioners were aware of the importance of social development and communication in their children, but only a few of the practitioners had thought about/introduced into their classes practical approaches to encourage this social development. There was a strong tendency to see social development as part of children's natural growth – embodied in the individual child (expressed in social contexts such as the nursery or primary school) and few practitioners received training for group and social development of their children. When they identified social problems in their classes, the problems were attributed to (the individual child's) poor social skills; resolving these problems, again, focused on the individual child and did not account for the child's peers in the classroom. There was little evidence of training pupils in group work that addressed relational issues and skills, especially through curriculum activities.

**Mapping:** Maps clearly identified that children engaged in two separate social pedagogic worlds within their classrooms; the worlds were related to practitioners and peers. These worlds engaged children in different sized and composed groupings, and children undertook different learning activities in these groupings. Mapping identified that both practitioner oriented and peer oriented groupings had benefits for children, but the maps also identified that practitioner-oriented groups often did not engage children in interpersonal/collaborative discussion; a large majority of children’s talk to teachers and peers in this grouping was of a ‘parallel’ nature. Although practitioners modelled social integration and communication within groups this was not transferred to peer oriented groups which had very high levels of solitary activity (even when the child was in the presence of peers). The social pedagogic context of peer-oriented groupings identified in the maps suggest that, currently, children were only encouraged to develop and use limited relational/communication skills, which occurred primarily in socially exclusive (homogeneous) peer relationships.
**Sociometric data:** Evidence showed children had a larger range of play and work preferences than practitioners perceived. Practitioners’ sociometric identification focused on ‘low status’ children while children focused on a full range of low, medium and high status peers.

**Rating Scales:** Rating scales revealed that whilst the learning context and some activities were designed with collaboration in mind there was little evidence of: (1) practitioners encouraging or providing training in relational/collaborative skills, and (2) children operating collaboratively.

**Key findings from Stage B**

**Mapping:** Overall, mappings showed changes in the practitioner- and peer-oriented groupings; direction of change was different when children interacted with adults or peers. Within practitioner-led contexts, size of groups decreased which resulted in an increased number of these groupings found in classrooms. Reduced group size would have some impact on, for example, the practitioner role. Within child-led contexts numbers of groups (per class) decreased confirming an increase in group size and which corresponds to the increase in proportions of mixed-age, mixed-sex and mixed friends/not friends groups.

Key changes which substantiate an overall move towards inclusion are marked by the increase in joint practitioner/child composed groups and it was within this new pedagogic context that the increase in proportions of mixed-sex, mixed-age and mixed-friendship groups were most marked. Equally, the increase in groups operating with communication was also most marked in this new social pedagogic context and accounted for half of all groups at phase three.

Changes in ‘who composed the groups’ indicated a blurring of the two previously separate pedagogic contexts: practitioners gave more responsibilities to children in composing groups within practitioner-led activities, whilst involving themselves more in child-led contexts. Practitioners also expanded their roles to include more ‘observing’ and ‘responding to children’ rather than solely adopting the instructional/directive role.

There was a general move away from friendship only (peer-based) groups. There was also a substantial decline in the category ‘individual’ indicating more paired and/or joint working took place.

The shift in activities children engaged in at phase three was further indication of the move towards collaborative play and work; this was most marked in practitioner-led contexts. Also, given the increase in groups jointly composed by practitioners and children, suggests that children had involvement in the structuring and implementation of (many of their) collaborative activities.
Comparisons of Phase one to Phase three mapping data: A comparison of the phase one and phase three data confirms the findings presented above of an overall move towards more inclusive groups as a result of the intervention. An increase of mixed-sex, mixed-age (within nursery classes only), mixed friends/not friends groups reflects the shift away from the predominance of single sex, single age and friendship groups that characterised phase one. Increased interaction between children is demonstrated by the increase in proportion of groups operating with communication.

Rating Scales: The analysis of rating scale data indicated that there were large differences in the extent to which the relational/group work programme was implemented within different settings by the end of the school year. The data also indicated that the way practitioners set up their ‘classrooms’ was not correlated to the level of interactions between children, that is a setting may have joint art work and games for children to complete in dyads or small groups however this did not correlate with the amount of collaboration occurring within the setting. However, levels of interaction between children was found to be significantly related to the extent to which practitioners structured activities and provided training and support to promote collaboration. Adult and peer support for collaboration improved over the programme year.

Sociomatric data: The reception classes have shown increased number of play and work choices and increased reciprocal play and work choices for both children and practitioners. For the nursery children however the number of play choices increased but the number of work choices decreased; during phase two there were a number of younger children who stated ‘everybody’ when asked who they liked to work within their nurseries, these children were more likely to make selective choices in phase three. The decrease in number of nursery work choices, therefore, may demonstrate an increased understanding of relationships rather than a decline in sociability.

Analysis of the Sociomatric data in relation to the Rating Scale data revealed a significant correlation between time spent promoting social relations in the class and number of play, reciprocated play, work and reciprocated work choices made by children and practitioners. The more effort put into the relational/group work programme by practitioners, the greater the number of sociometric choices.
4. Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale - Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1998)

Full list of criteria for measuring quality.

SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

1. Indoor space

Children need sufficient space that is well lit and has a comfortable temperature for learning and playing. Indoor space that is well maintained and in good repair sends a message to the young child that is welcoming and inviting.

2. Furniture for routine care, play and learning

Children need appropriate furnishings to meet the demands of their daily schedules. Basic furniture such as cots, tables and chairs should be sturdy and appropriate to the size of the children in the group in order for children to be comfortable, have proper body support, and focus on learning, playing, and routine activities rather than their own discomfort. Caregivers need easy access to routine care furnishings, such as cots, in order to maintain proper supervision and provide smooth transitions between activities.

3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort

Children need space and opportunity to relax and rest. Soft furnishings and toys allow children opportunities for relaxation and comfort. Cozy areas provide a space for quiet activities to occur and should be protected from active play so children can snuggle, daydream and lounge.

4. Room arrangement

Creative room arrangement promotes a child’s positive self-image and encourages a wide variety of age appropriate activities. Well-defined interest centers where materials are accessible help children to understand about organization and returning materials to their proper place.

5. Space for privacy

Some children experience unacceptably high levels of stress when exposed to constant activity and interaction. Places where children can escape from the pressures of group care promote positive self-esteem. Providing a child with opportunities, space, and time to be alone can contribute to positive classroom behavior.

6. Child related display
Every child needs to know that others value his/her play or work. Artwork or other individual work that is created by the children should be displayed in the classroom at the child’s eye-level. This promotes feelings of positive self-esteem and sends the message to the child that his/her work is valued and appreciated.

7. Gross motor play

Children need daily opportunities to exercise large muscles, run in open spaces, and practice gross motor skills. (Safety is always a number one priority.) Space to develop children’s large muscles through a variety of play experiences should be made safe by providing adequate cushioning for fall zones. All play equipment should be safe and effective monitoring should be implemented to teach children safe play behavior and to safeguard against accidents.

8. Gross motor equipment

Children need age appropriate stationary and portable equipment to promote a wide variety of skills that exercise large muscles while developing confidence and abilities. Equipment should be sound, sturdy, safe and accessible to children daily.

PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES

9. Greeting/Departing

Parents and children need a warm, welcoming, and pleasant atmosphere to make the daily greeting and departing routine a happy one. Positive greetings help to promote the children’s self-esteem and create a welcoming environment for parents.

10. Meals/Snacks

Meals and snacks that follow USDA guidelines contribute to the health of children and provide a model for good nutritional habits for life-long practice. Proper hand washing along with careful food preparation teach children proper hygiene and promotes sanitary conditions.

11. Nap/Rest

Nap and/or rest time should be appropriately scheduled and supervised for the children in the group. Adequate separation of cots helps to prevent the spread of germs. Soft music or a soothing story helps to facilitate a peaceful rest time that is important in helping children to balance the day and renew their energy.

12. Toileting/Diapering

Young children need appropriate supervision of the toileting process in order to care for basic needs and to teach the importance of good health habits. The schedule should be
individualized. Provisions, such as soap and steps near the sink, should be convenient and accessible so that children can wash hands after toileting; this promotes self-help skills and good personal hygiene. Diapering should always be managed in a manner that promotes safety and good health practices.

13. Health practices

Practicing preventive measures, such as washing hands after handling pets or wiping noses, help to educate children to achieve life-long health practices. Taking appropriate action when children are sick will minimize the spread of germs.

14. Safety practices

Protecting children is critical in providing quality care, whether through adequate supervision or minimizing hazards both inside and outside. Caregivers should anticipate potential safety problems and demonstrate, model, and teach children safe practices.

Language-Reasoning

15. Books and pictures

The use of books and pictures is an important means of learning for children as they make sense of the world around them. Books, pictures, and language materials should be available in sufficient number both for independent use in a reading center and for use by a teacher with children in formal and informal settings.

16. Encouraging children to communicate

Activities and materials that promote language development should be available for use throughout the classroom and the daily schedule. Teachers should establish an environment where language exploration and usage is encouraged.

17. Using language to develop reasoning skills

Logical relationships and concepts should be presented in appropriate ways. Children learn through interaction with materials and people, both peers and adults, in the context of play and daily routines. Language provides the key tool for success and problem solving, as children are encouraged to talk through their thought processes.

18. Informal use of language

Language is a way for children to expand understanding. Caregivers should engage children in give and take conversations for enjoyment and learning. They should support child-to-child conversations as well.

Activities
19. Fine motor

Children need a variety of age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate toys and materials that they can manipulate with their hands and play with at will. These activities strengthen fine motor control while encouraging skill development that contributes to academic readiness.

20. Art

Children benefit from exposure to child-initiated art activities that are open-ended and process oriented. Children’s art should be respected and appreciated as individual, creative expression. Materials and opportunities to create art projects at a beginning and more advanced level should be available as children are developmentally ready for them.

21. Music/movement

Music and movement are valuable means of learning. Children need a supportive environment that includes a teacher and a variety of tools to encourage their self-expression through music and related activities.

22. Blocks

Block play, with a variety of blocks and accessories, allows children the opportunity to explore spatial, mathematical, and role-play possibilities. Powerful block play requires sufficient space in a protected area and time to expand on concepts and ideas.

23. Sand/water

Sand and water play gives children the opportunity to learn concepts through active exploration with their senses. The addition of interesting props extends the learning potential offered through sensory play.

24. Dramatic play

Dramatic play gives children the opportunity to discover an array of roles and responsibilities. It provides a vehicle through which they make sense of their world. Dramatic play is enhanced by space, time, props, materials, and supportive teachers.

25. Nature/science

Science and nature activities and materials foster curiosity and experimentation benefiting the young learner through direct experience and application to other areas of learning. Concept and observation skills are strengthened through science procedures.

26. Math/number
Math skills, when introduced through appropriate hands-on methods, form a foundation for school readiness and later academic success. Math skills can be taught effectively through routines, schedule, and play activities.

27. Use of TV, video, and/or computer

TV/video viewing and computer use tend to be passive in comparison to active involvement with materials and people. The use of each should be confined to subject material that is age-appropriate and mentally stimulating. Time limits encourage more active learning. Participation should not be required.

28. Promoting acceptance of diversity

Children need to be exposed to the similarities and differences of people in positive ways through books, pictures, toys, materials, and interaction. This exposure encourages respect for others and lessens misunderstandings.

INTERACTIONS

29. Supervision of gross motor activities

Caregivers should use gross motor activities as learning opportunities to promote positive social interactions and to encourage the development of skills and new experiences. Diligent supervision of gross motor activities, whether indoors or outdoors, is critical to preventing accidents and insuring safe, active play.

30. General supervision of children (other than gross motor)

During activities, caregivers must balance the level of supervision and control based upon the ages, abilities, and individual needs of the children. Adequate supervision and awareness of the whole group is required for children’s health and safety and in the recognition of accomplishments, which is necessary for children’s emotional well-being.

31. Discipline

The set-up of the environment, teacher expectations, available materials and opportunities, and daily schedule significantly impacts children’s behavior in childcare. A classroom and curriculum geared toward developmentally appropriate practice will lead to generally good behavior that is the product of self-motivation rather than the result of punishment and control.

32. Staff-child interactions

Caregivers, who are nurturing and responsive, promote the development of mutual respect between children and adults. Children, who trust adults to provide for their
physical, psychological, and emotional needs, develop their own sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

33. Interactions among children

Because self-regulation, proper emotional expression, and positive social relationships are such essential skills for later schooling and life, teachers must encourage children to develop acceptable behaviors by providing a setting that encourages real opportunities for initiative taking and competence building. Providing opportunities for children to work and play together, to solve conflicts in productive ways, and to participate in group activities are ways teachers promote positive social relationships.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

34. Schedule

Children thrive on having a consistent routine that provides a balance of activities designed to meet individual needs and foster physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Best practice promotes a daily schedule with large amounts of time for play, smooth transitions between activities, and a balance between child-initiated and teacher-directed activities.

35. Free Play

When children are permitted to select materials and companions, and, as far as possible, manage play independently, they practice making decisions and having control of their world. Caregiver intervention should be in response to children’s needs, an invitation, or an opportunity to expand play activities.

36. Group Time

In group-care situations, the focus needs to be on meeting individual needs and guiding children as they interact in small groups. Whole group activities should be kept to a minimum and limited to gatherings that follow the interests and involvement of the children.

37. Provisions for children with disabilities

Meeting the needs of children with disabilities requires knowledge of routine care needs, developmental levels, individual assessments, and the integration of the children in ongoing classroom activities. It also requires the involvement and establishment of a partnership between the parents and staff in setting attainable goals that will assist the child in reaching his/her full potential.

Adapted from Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—Revised Edition
5. Relational Approach activities

Examples of Relational Approach activities used during the SPRinG research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind-fold walk</td>
<td>To build trust</td>
<td>One child takes on the role of walker and the other leader. The leader gives directions and steers through pressing gently on the shoulder of the walker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel</td>
<td>Awareness of non-verbal communication</td>
<td>The practitioner identifies an emotion e.g. angry or sad. The children then act out the emotion with facial expression or, space permitting with whole body language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative letters</td>
<td>Enhance Social and communication skills</td>
<td>In pairs the children are asked to make the shape of letter with their bodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative drawing</td>
<td>Reach a common goal</td>
<td>In pairs children are given one piece of paper and two pencils and are asked to draw a picture together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Information sheet for practitioners

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION: Relational Approaches in Early Education

The Education Research Centre at the University of Brighton has both European and national UK funding to research early education provision and how a relational approach might enhance learning, social inclusion and personal development.

Funding

European funding is provided through the EU Socrates programme (General activities of observation, analysis and innovation Action 6.1.2 and 6.2). This is a comparative research project with five other European countries (Finland, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden) which aims to describe children’s experience in early childhood settings.

UK funding is from the ESME FAIRBAIRN FOUNDATION.

What’s involved

We want to draw a general picture of what children usually do in early childhood classrooms, what kind of activities they choose and how they relate to one another. This information will require short interviews with children and yourself as well as a series of observations (whole and half day) in the classrooms.

Who’s involved?

The University of Brighton is working with research teams in Finland, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden.

The research team in Brighton, based at the Education Research Centre is headed by Professor Peter Kutnick who is working with researchers Dr Cathy Ota, Dr Lucia Berdondini, Jennifer Colwell and Nadya Henwood.

14 preschool settings (roughly 7 nursery and 7 reception classes)

Background to Project

The project draws on the experience of early childhood researchers and practitioners across Europe. It also emerges from their extensive four year SPRING project (Social Pedagogic Research into Group work). In this project the team at Brighton collaborated with schools and teachers in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex to investigate effective group work with primary and reception pupils.

This previous research found that when pupils were offered opportunities to develop their groupwork skills through training and reflection together, children were more able to support each other’s learning and demonstrate enhanced social and communication skills. In settings where children were encouraged to work together in this way teachers
reported greater inclusion in the class as children were more sensitive and aware of each other as part of a whole class group.

Much of this research at Brighton was focused on Key Stage 1 and so through this further funding we are looking to extend our research into early years settings and explore the potential of developing effective group work skills with this younger age range.

**What the project intends to do**

3 to 5 year old children in pre-schools spend a majority of their time with peers. Very little of this peer-based experience tends to be structured to promote social and cognitive development. The project intends to:

1. Work with pre-school teachers and children to survey the quality of their peer-based experience
2. With pre-school teachers, develop a new programme based on a ‘relational approach’ for peer-based experience for implementation in pre-schools
3. Implement and evaluate the programme, especially noting effects on emotional, social, moral and cognitive development and skills promoting social inclusion of pre-school children
4. Prepare and disseminate programme materials/handbook promoting the relational approach for other pre-school teachers and contexts.

**Why is this project important?**

An increasing number of 3 to 5 year olds are entering pre-schools in nursery or reception classes. Pre-school experience takes place in a ‘social pedagogic’ context, acknowledging that children’s learning and social development is related to the quality of their classroom relationships. We propose that a pre-school programme based on developing an innovative ‘relational approach’ is likely to increase children’s learning potential, social inclusion skills and emotional/social/moral development.

The relational approach differs from previous studies concerning this age group; these studies have focused on teacher-pupil pedagogy and structured activity without acknowledging that children spend most of their time with peers.

While a majority of children’s pre-school experience is undertaken with peers (often away from the presence of the teacher) and most of this experience is unplanned and through this project we propose to develop and initiate an age-appropriate relational approach that will allow pre-school children to maximise the benefits of their peer-based experience.
Methods

The project is a collaborative venture between the research team and early years practitioners. As such the team and teachers will meet regularly to co-plan and review development of this relational approach as appropriate for early years children. To enable these meetings practitioners will be ‘bought out’, that is costs for supply cover will be met by the project so that practitioners can attend the meetings.

Research will involve:

1. **Familiarization visit**
   1.1 the purpose of this visit will be for the researcher to become familiar with the setting and children.
   1.2 Fieldnotes will be taken
   1.3 The researcher will ask for a class list, including date of birth of children
   1.4 Using a instant Polaroid camera the researcher will need to take individual photographs of the children. Collected together in an envelope these will be left at the school and used at the next visit for the sociomatrices data collection (see below)

2. **Sociomatrices with individual children**
   2.1 we will need some space either in or outside of the classroom to work with individual children, the task will take only a few minutes with each child
   2.2 working with each child we will ask them to pick out pictures of children they would like to play with
   2.3 laying out the same pictures again we will ask the child to pick out pictures of those children they would like to work with or make things with if the teacher asks them to work together

3. **Classroom mapping**

Sitting in the classroom the researcher will draw a map of where children are located and whether they are alone or with others.
4. **Child observation**

The researcher will choose a small sample of children in each class and make notes of their interactions and activities for approximately an hour.

6. **Teacher Interviews**

We would like to have a short interview with the teacher for approximately 20-30 minutes to find out general information about the class, any particularly approaches / curriculum used by the teacher with their pupils. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. We will discuss all of these details in our meeting, including discussing possible times and dates for carrying out this research, discussing in greater detail what your involvement would be if you agree to participate and all permissions required and who would see the data and the final report.
7. Consent form for practitioners

Participant Consent Form

Relational Approaches in Early Education

I agree to take part in this research which is to investigate how a relational approach might enhance learning, social inclusion and personal development in pre-schools.

The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved.

I have read the information sheet and met with the research team and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.

I am aware that I will be required to undertake training which will be held at the University of Brighton, participate in interviews and allow the researcher to undertake observations of our practice.

I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.

I agree that data collected is also to be used for the PhD study being undertaken by Jennifer Colwell.

Name (please print) .................................................................

Signed ..........................................................................

Date ..............................................................................
8. Preschool Maps

Timing for the completion of this mapping:

This mapping focused on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner directed activities</th>
<th>Child directed activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date of observation: Time of observation:

Stage I and II – Classroom Plan

Please draw a plan of the observation area so that questions can be answered in Stage III, after the observation session.

At the start: draw a quick plan of lay-out of the observation area, noting the position of tables, toys, activity areas, walls, doors and other major features.

At the ‘practitioner directed’ or ‘child directed’ time, note on your observation plan where each child is working, either with an M or F, denoting whether they are male or female. If some children are working outside of the room please note them to one side of the plan. Also note the position of each adult including yourself.

DEFINITION OF GROUP - A ‘grouping’ refers to children engaged in the same activity and seated or interacting close to each other. Thus a grouping may be anything from a single child or a number of children working on an individualised activity; to pairs, 3s, 4s, larger groups, or the whole group, working on the same activity. There may be more than one grouping at one table or activity area - especially if children are working on different activities. Group definition – based on activity ....Activity as 1. doing something together 2. proximity 3. any kind of communication (verbal, non-verbal)

Next draw a circle around those children engaged as a group on the SAME task and number each grouping. If possible it may be useful to also note names of children.

If children are sat in the the same space but are engaged in different tasks then treat them as separate groupings. Groupings may be as small as an individual or as large as the whole class and you may find a variety of group sizes working simultaneously. If there is a whole class session, circle everyone. If all children are working on their own, then they need not be circled into a group.

For each grouping note, within the circle, the activity being undertaken.

Next, for each grouping note whether the activity was child or practitioner initiated and the role of any adult present.

Key

- M - Male
- F - Female
- P - Practitioner

\[\text{Computer} \quad \text{Table} \quad \text{Door} \quad \text{Table}\]
Please complete a row of the table for each grouping indicated on your classroom plan. If multiple groups have similar features feel free to use " to indicate that the current group is working on the same curriculum area as the group in the row above. Please refer to the appropriate boxes when asked and insert the **single** most relevant code letter, those in bold, in to the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Composed the Group</th>
<th>Social Relationship</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P = Practitioner</td>
<td>F = Friends</td>
<td>S = Same age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C = Child</td>
<td>N = Not Friends</td>
<td>M = mixed age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M = Mix</td>
<td>U = Unknown</td>
<td>U = unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O = Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group No.</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>No. of boys</th>
<th>No. of girls</th>
<th>Who composed the group?</th>
<th>Social relationship</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Practitioner present?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group No.</th>
<th>Brief description of task, if not on map</th>
<th>Notes on engagement and interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Sociometry

Data was collected by asking each child to identify from photographs of all of the children at Bumbles they liked to play with and all the children they liked to work with/do activities with. The staff team were also asked which children they thought each child would select. Reciprocal nominations were analysed (that is, were children had nominated each other) to identify children’s social networks. All data was collated in a table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poppy</th>
<th>Isaac</th>
<th>Oscar</th>
<th>Izzy</th>
<th>Conrad</th>
<th>Tomas</th>
<th>Ruby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izzy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conrad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results allowed the numbers of children each child liked to play with and work with to be identified. This allowed the relative social status of individuals to be identified i.e. if a child had the most reciprocal nominations they were considered to be of high social status. In addition, comparisons were made between practitioners predicted choices and children’s actual nominations – giving insight into practitioners’ understandings of children’s social worlds.

This method was selected as it aligned with the method adopted by the SPRinG research team. As I wished to determine whether the Relational Approach had a similar impact with the pre-schools as it did within the SPRinG classrooms it was necessary for me to use the same data collection tool. The information gathered through the sociometry was supplemented by my observations of the children and the practitioners knowledge of the children to identify children used in the embedded cases.
10. Environmental rating scale

Learning Contexts

Children’s environment conducive to collective actions

- flexible seating
- working spaces for more than one child
- toys/games can be undertaken by more than one child at a time
- displays jointly created by children
- activity corners equipped for joint play

Activities and Tasks

Activities/ tasks / resources conducive to sharing & joint working

- children asked to undertake activities in pairs or larger groups
- children asked to agree to do a task together
- children asked to talk during activity with partner
- children asked to debrief with partner

Role of Adult

Adults encourage children to work with one another

- pre-briefing to encourage sharing/ joint involvement in tasks
- de-briefing to encourage reflection on how they have co-operated
- adult modelled sharing and co-operating
- adult directed children to resolve problems amongst themselves
- adult indicated joint activities for children to share

Adults introduce training / sensitivity to peer relational support through exercises to encourage

- trust
- friendliness / belonging
- empathy / sympathy
- sharing
- communication skills
- commitment to joint activities

Peer Interactions

Children engaged in interactions sharing and building on other’s ideas

- exploratory talk
- constructive evaluation of other’s ideas
- trying to reach consensus and compromise
- productive discussion and/or conflict
- conversational skills - active listening, no interruptions
- use of group roles

Children active in relational activities

- involvement in shared group work
- positive attitude to working with others
- support each other in activity
- able to organise around activity so they can see and speak to each other
11. Practitioner interview question examples

Scoping Phase

Have received any training regarding grouping and using groups in your teaching? If yes, where was this?

Have the children received any support regarding grouping and working with each other? If yes please describe this and when and how often it took/takes place?

Can you describe a typical daily programme in your preschool?

What do children like to do most in Bumbles? (children’s preferences)

How do children relate with each other? Can you tell me a few things about their relationships? Are any children more popular than others? Why? Are any children excluded? Why?

Do you have any concerns about any child’s relationships?

If yes, What do you do about these concerns?

In your preschool, do you follow any particular curriculum guidelines? If so please explain these guidelines and how they relate to your actual practice.

Phases two and three

How useful was the Relational Approach training?

What did you take away from the training day?

Have you use the activities provided?

Have you amend the activities, if so how?

Have there been any changes in Bumbles following the training?

Do you think this has changed the children’s pre-school experience? If so how?

Have you noticed any changes in the children? Any changes in the ways in which they relate to each other?
12. Video Analysis

This appendix provides detail on the categories used to conduct the analysis, with a specific emphasis on the analysis of the video data. There are four core aspects to the analysis of the video data:

1. general scoping/framing: providing information on the context of the observation
2. coding practitioner behaviours and interactions
3. coding child behaviours and interactions
4. recognition and transcription of illustrative cases

Data gathered for points one, two and three were collected in excel files to allow the data across phases to be compared easily. PWAS (SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to generate descriptive statistics. Throughout the processes employed for generating this data I focussed my analysis on the research questions and noted any examples of practitioners modelling behaviours for example and, undertook the observations of the children with this in mind. This allowed me to consider whether practitioner modelling for example was seen to be impacting on children’s interactions, and for me to identify illustrative cases. This process was long and involved and the video data was watched a minimum of five times, more for sections noted as being of significance to the research questions.

General Scoping Categories

The majority of these categories were identified as being of relevance during my time working on the SPRinG and other funded research projects and represent an overlap between my work for the thesis and the work undertaken under the direction of Professor Kutnick.

- Is the Activity Practitioner-led or Child-led? This means is it an adult-led session e.g. story time, circle time etc or child-led free play time. [code: 1 child, 2 practitioner, 3 joint, 4 unknown]
- Is there any group activity? [code: 1 yes adult initiated, 2 yes child initiated, 3 yes unknown origin, 4 no]
- How many practitioners present in the area? [N]
- How many practitioners Involved? (must be involved, not in the room involved in another task)
- What role has the practitioner taken?
  - Director
  - Facilitator
  - Observer
  - No adult present
- How many children are involved (i.e. may be interacting or playing next to, but not including children in the room but in no way involved in any interaction or related activity)?

- Are these children Friends, not friends or unknown (based upon most recent Sociomatry plus observations)? [code: 1 friends 2 not friends 3 mixed 4 unknown]

- What is the activity type? [code as below]
  - Free play child-led: child freely choosing own activity no adult involvement.
  - Child-led but practitioner-involved: adult assists with jigsaw on child’s initiation, looking for SST type behaviours.
  - Adult-led circle time.
  - Adult-led other activity: story time, music time, cooking, and painting.
  - Snack time.
  - Care activity e.g. hand washing, greeting, applying sun lotion.

- Relational rating of the activity [code as below]
  - 1 Poor: practitioner-led and directed, no opportunity for child input.
  - 2 Adequate: mainly practitioner-led but some emphasis on children’s input or social skills e.g. a story may refer to prosocial behaviours
  - 3 Good: activity requires some child input and children are required to work together in some capacity
  - 4 Excellent: children are involved in initiating the activity, they are involved in discussions and they are allowed to steer the activity as is appropriate. E.g. use of pre and debrief or SST.

- Relational Rating of the observation [Based upon rating scale data give score]
  - 1 Poor: little or no evidence, no support given
  - 2 Adequate: some evidence e.g. room might be set up for group activities or some support noted
  - 3 Good: involved in relational activities or practitioners seen to be supporting children to develop their peer relations
  - 4 Excellent: children supported in developing social skills, practitioners providing excellent environment and activities

- If relevant, was the pre brief carried out? [code: 1 yes 2 no 3 not applicable 4 unknown i.e. observation cut short] (only to be coded in adult led activity). The pre brief is when the adult introduces the task and explains not only what the task is but what the child has to do to be a pat of it, i.e. be a good listener.

- If relevant was the de brief carried out? [code: 1 yes 2 no 3 not applicable 4 unknown i.e. observation cut short] (only to be coded in adult led activity). The de brief is when the adult provides a plenary to the task and asks not only what went well with the task but asks what the child did well and what they could do next time.


- Rating of how focussed the child is on the activity (categories driven by data)
  
  o 1. **Seems disengaged**, body language shows not looking, child may actively move away.
  o 2. **Intermittent focus** sometimes appears to be listening but easily distracted.
  o 3. **Generally attentive**, body language shows interested, also may contribute to discussion.
  o 4. **Seems totally engaged**, joins in conversations and activities.

- Quality Rating [coded based upon the number of items seen below]

I have identified within the literature review those attributes which have been shown to be related to high quality provision, as identified by EPPE ((Sylva et al. 2004a). I have focussed by research question on looking at increases of:

  o Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)
  o practitioners use of open-ended questioning
  o formative feedback given to children during practitioner-led activities
  o inclusion of and support given to children to rationalising and talking through their conflicts

The following sub-sections will explicitly define what is meant by these terms and how they have been identified as occurring within the analysis of the video data.

**Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)**

In SST rather than a practitioner asking questions which have a right or wrong answer they engage in a conversation with a child in an intellectual way which extends the narrative, solves a problem or clarifies a concept. SST is defined as:

[Periods] where two or more individuals work together to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc. Both parties contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the child’s understanding.

(Sylva et al 2007 p2)

This can be achieved within child-peer interactions as well as child-practitioner interactions (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The video data was repeatedly scrutinised for episodes of SST and the number of instances recorded in each of the three phases compared.

**Practitioner’s use of Open-ended Questioning**

This was very much linked to SST but also opened more broadly to include instances in which practitioners used questioning techniques which promoted child involvement although did not necessary build on a child’s interests. Examples of this were seen in caring activities such as snack time and within circle time. EPPE (2004) states that open-ended
questioning is associated with higher cognitive achievement and yet accounted for only ‘5.1% of questioning used even in ... excellent settings’ (Sylva et al 2004:37).

The number of open-ended questions observed during each of the observation period was recorded.

**Formative Feedback Given to Children during Practitioner-led Activities**

The EPPE research team identify that formative feedback is part of excellent practice in ECEC provision as it relates to increased attainment. The SPRinG project also found formative feedback and opportunities to consider actions and how we would improve upon these for the future led to increased attainment in cooperative activities – improved social competencies resulted from scrutiny of those competencies. Thus, I have included observations of the formative feedback given to children based upon the number of instances of formative feedback.

- **1 Poor:** no formative feedback given on child’s input.
- **2 Adequate:** some feedback provided on children’s input or social skills e.g. comments about speaking up but these are mainly procedural
- **3 Good:** practitioner provides a response to some of the children’s input, and provides advice and ideas for future input
- **4 Excellent:** practitioner provides a response to each child’s input, and provides advice for future input and engages the child in this conversation asking them to consider their input.

**Inclusion of and Support given to Children to Rationalising and Talk through their Conflicts**

As identified in the category Behaviour Management adapted from Carl (2007) instances were practitioners involved children in conflict resolution were recorded. This would include instances where children were seen to be in conflict and/or where a child approached a practitioner to recount/explain/complain about an incident and/or another child. The practitioners response was evaluated in terms of their approach and how they open the dialogue to included children and their perspectives and their ideas on how to resolve the issue or their presentation of a resolution e.g. well Izzy you can play with it later as opposed to ‘what is the problem? Izzy can you think of a way you can both sort this out together?’

**Coding Practitioner Behaviours and Interactions**

Following the general scoping analysis the following codes were used to analyse the practitioner behaviours and interactions. These categories are adapted from Carl (2007) as discussed in the literature review, this model provides a detailed assessment of quality of practitioners interactions with children. They were selected from the more detailed categorisations developed by Carl as these are the behaviours which I have identified as being key within the development of social competencies and group work skills in the literature review. Each table which follows provides detail on how behaviour was coded.
**Practitioner-Child Interactions:** (Adapted from Carl 2007:181)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Inadequate</th>
<th>2 Minimal</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaks with irritation (sharp tone, raised voice) or harshness.</td>
<td>Speaks warmly to children (tone and words).</td>
<td>Verbally demonstrates enjoyment of children (Hi! Welcome to school today! I’m glad you are here!)</td>
<td>Practitioner consistently seeks out opportunities to positively acknowledge children (‘Catch them being good’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of voice and manner are insincere (Practitioner may say one thing and mean another). Uses sarcasm.</td>
<td>Children are praised for their efforts (Good job!)</td>
<td>Tone expresses acceptance and patience to children, even in difficult situations.</td>
<td>Practitioner’s tone is happy and conveys to children that they are delightful and respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive or flat affect.</td>
<td>Practitioner’s tone and manner match.</td>
<td>Emotion/tone appears to be genuine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Respect** (Adapted Carl 2007:187)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Inadequate</th>
<th>2 Minimal</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constantly says “No!” or engages in power struggles over issues that do not relate to the child’s health or well-being.</td>
<td>Demonstrates acceptance of children, both personally and generally.</td>
<td>Expresses acceptance of children.</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for children to be successful so they can be praised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punishes children for asserting themselves or saying “No”.</td>
<td>Demonstrates knowledge of child development and child’s abilities.</td>
<td>Practitioner demonstrates understanding of child development.</td>
<td>Conveys to children they are valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Makes negative comments or statements directed toward any child or practitioner (shows obvious favouritism).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Limits saying “No” to situations that relate to children’s safety or emotional well being.</td>
<td>Plans experiences that engage children’s interests, resulting in less opportunity for off task behaviour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Time Management** (Adapted Carl 2007:218)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Inadequate</th>
<th>2 Minimal</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Places high value on obedience/compliance.</td>
<td>A general schedule is adhered to.</td>
<td>Events are handled with flexibility.</td>
<td>Practitioner encourages children to actively participate and allows them to guide where the session is going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takes a totally directive approach.</td>
<td>Deviation from the task is minimised as such children are hurried and quietened.</td>
<td>Time spent is child driven, rather than practitioner driven.</td>
<td>Allows for change in daily schedule based upon children’s needs/interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Routine times are not used as bonding/learning times.</td>
<td>Practitioner spends majority of time engaging with children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Inadequate</td>
<td>2 Minimal</td>
<td>3 Good</td>
<td>4 Excellent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seems to dislike children.</td>
<td>Interaction with children is done mainly during routine care; little playing with children.</td>
<td>Practitioner knows the children well and is able to respond to their temperament and cues, anticipating their needs.</td>
<td>Practitioner engages all children in conversations, asking of their interests and preferences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet children are ignored.</td>
<td>Maintains eye contact with children when they speak or babble.</td>
<td>Children are treated with respect.</td>
<td>Expresses delight in children’s activities (claps hands, cheers.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are treated with indifference (act like they have no feelings); disrespected.</td>
<td>Quiet children are engaged with and given attention even while being good.</td>
<td>States appreciation for child’s efforts.</td>
<td>Conversations regularly include references to child’s individual lives (siblings, parents, pets referenced; previous experiences, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes little interest in children’s activities or accomplishments.</td>
<td>Children who are playing well and quietly are acknowledged for their positive behaviour.</td>
<td>Praises children for their accomplishments.</td>
<td>Children are not hurried and quietened so planned activities can be strictly adhered to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention only given during routine care or for negative behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Behaviour Management** (Adapted Carl 2007:245)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Inadequate</th>
<th>2 Minimal</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When children misbehave, they are handled abruptly or harshly.</td>
<td>Children are redirected appropriately when they misbehave.</td>
<td>A variety of options are used for children (i.e., duplicate toys, activities used to engage children when they misbehave).</td>
<td>Practitioner actively and consciously stresses prosocial behaviour through books, actions and activities.</td>
<td>Practitioner helps children take the viewpoint of others when they misbehave (discusses consequences, explains how actions affect others).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner speaks with irritation or lectures when children misbehave.</td>
<td>Expectations are generally age appropriate.</td>
<td>Practitioner engages with children to prevent misbehaviour before it occurs (is aware of the children’s cues of frustration).</td>
<td>Children involved in establishing rules.</td>
<td>Children are encouraged to resolve problems themselves rather than being given solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules are not explained (“No, stop that!” with no reason why).</td>
<td>Rules are explained to children on a basic level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children excluded from group – contained or restrained.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

227
### Supporting the development of Communication Skills

(Adapted Carl 2007:245)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignores children’s attempts at communication.</td>
<td>Acknowledges children’s attempts at communication. Nods, makes eye contact, attempts to decipher child’s needs and vocalizations. Verbally responds to child’s cues of distress. Uses individual child’s names when speaking with them. Uses terms that are familiar to children. Some encouragement given for children to communicate with each other.</td>
<td>Listens attentively when children speak. Rephrases their conversations. Dialogues with children. Conversation is interactive. Checks for clarification when talking to children. Make sure they understand what is being said. Uses clear, one step directions. Provides activities which encourage children to interact. Supports the development of children’s interactions through activities.</td>
<td>Adds to children’s attempts to dialogue; adds words and explanations to talk. Helps children understand their feelings and emotions by labelling communication. Encourages verbal communication. Fosters conversations between children. Provides activities which support the development of children’s peer relationships. Provides activities which require children to communicate and ‘solve’ or complete together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks over children as they talk. Uses terms that are unfamiliar to children. Does not call the child by name. No attempt to encourage children to interact with each other. Discusses child/ren with other practitioner as if children don’t understand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

228
## Promotion of Prosocial Behaviour (Adapted Carl 2007:277)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence of promotion of Prosocial Behaviours.</td>
<td>Evidence of prosocial behaviours being promoted.</td>
<td>Children are helped to acknowledge the viewpoint of others.</td>
<td>Everyday experiences are used as time to learn and practice prosocial behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative peer interaction is ignored.</td>
<td>Practitioner verbally reminds children of positive social behaviours.</td>
<td>Encouragement of verbal behaviour for conflict resolution.</td>
<td>Various activities used to promoted prosocial behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment is set up so there are few instances of aggressive behaviour.</td>
<td>Children are praised for prosocial behaviour.</td>
<td>Pre and debrief used to support children’s understandings of what it means to be a member of a group and the behaviours which support this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pedagogic Style** (based upon literature review summary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Inadequate</th>
<th>2 Minimal</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioners adopted a directive role.</td>
<td>Practitioners adopt a primarily directive role but there is limited opportunity of child input.</td>
<td>Children are given some opportunity to direct the session.</td>
<td>Practitioners adopt a primarily facilitative role allowing the child to participate in shaping the activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal questioning of children.</td>
<td>Children are asked questions but these are in the main closed or children’s time to answer is frequently quietened so the activity can progress.</td>
<td>Some limited instances of sustained shared thinking seen but not always followed through.</td>
<td>Practitioners ask open-ended questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are not involved in shaping the activity.</td>
<td>Children’s led is not followed.</td>
<td>Practitioners ask some open ended questions and children are given time to respond.</td>
<td>Instances of sustained shared thinking are observed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity is adhered to as planned and children’s interest largely ignored.</td>
<td>Limited feedback is provided.</td>
<td>Some feedback is given on the children’s contribution to the activity.</td>
<td>Practitioners provide formative feedback through the activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the activity is not explained.</td>
<td>Practitioners solve problems without child input.</td>
<td>Children are given opportunities to shape the rules of the activity, with some scope given for children to resolve issues themselves.</td>
<td>Children are encouraged to problem solve any issues with adult support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of the children are not explained.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practitioners explain the purpose of the activity to the children and what is expected of them.</td>
<td>Practitioners review the activity and their input at the end of the session.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No feedback is given.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identifying episodes of modelling

Practitioner Modelling

This analysis was data driven, episodes of practitioner modelling were transcribed and analysed as detected.

Within this Bandura’s model of SLT (1968) was considered and as such I focussed on:

**Episodes of behaviour modelling** – practitioner providing models of behaviours whether overt or using prompts such as books.

**Changes in practitioner behaviour** – changes in their general approach, changes in the interactions with their peers for example

**Changes in practitioner pedagogic style** – such changes would be evident from the other data collected e.g. increased use of groups as a pedagogic tool, more control given to the child i.e. creating own groupings.

**Attentional processes** – is the practitioner providing activities which encourage the learner to pay attention and do they support this.

**Retention processes** – is the practitioner ensuring children are aware the skill being modelled will be useful in the future and support an understanding of its future applications.

**Moteric Reproduction Processes** – is the practitioner providing opportunities for the child to put the behaviour into action and develop its application.

**Motivation Processes** – for a behaviour to be imitated there must be a motivation to do so i.e. a reinforcer. For a child at preschool this may involve praise from practitioners for example.

(Bandura, 1969)

Children’s uptake of Practitioner modelling

This was data driven, episodes of practitioner modelling were identified and analysed as detected. These were then be mapped onto child observations and any evidence for their uptake recorded. Uptake may have involved direct copying ‘imitation’ of an adult behaviour or noted change in a child’s behaviour.
Coding Child Behaviours and Interactions

Children’s behaviours and interactions will be coded using event sampling coded on the following scale adapted from the TMR Network project, chair of committee Angela Costabile (2000). Additional categories were added as repeated engagement with the data highlighted additional recurring behaviours.

Prosocial behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 SMILING /LAUGHING</td>
<td>a child smiles at another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 EMBRACING</td>
<td>a child embraces another or puts his arm on another's shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 KISSING</td>
<td>a child kisses another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 HOLDING HANDS</td>
<td>a child holds hands with another;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 CARESS</td>
<td>a child caresses the face or a part of another's body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 LOOKING</td>
<td>a child looks at another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 WALKING TOWARDS</td>
<td>a child walks toward another or a peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 WALKING FOLLOWING</td>
<td>a child walks following another or a peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 WALKING ALONGSIDE</td>
<td>a child walks alongside another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 POINTING</td>
<td>a child indicates something to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 SHOWING AN OBJECT</td>
<td>a child indicates an object to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 TOUCHING FRIENDLY</td>
<td>a child touches another one with the aim of calling him/her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 TALKING</td>
<td>a child talks to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 ATTRACTING ATTENTION VERBALLY</td>
<td>a child invites another to look, calls another, says something in a loud voice to another, asks something loudly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 DISPLAYING VERBALLY</td>
<td>a child draw attention to one's own qualities e.g. &quot;I can&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 SINGING</td>
<td>a child sings a song or encourages another to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 HELPING</td>
<td>a child helps another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 DEFENDING/PROTECTING</td>
<td>a child during a dispute or a discussion defends another or tries to protect him from something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 DEFENDING/PROTECTING</td>
<td>defends another or tries to protect him from something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 DANCING</td>
<td>when a child dances together with others or performs dancing steps or physical exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 INCLUSIVE</td>
<td>children include others in the activity, actively request their involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 MEDIATORY</td>
<td>children attempt to resolve any problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
involving either themselves or others finding resolution, either through encouraging forgetting or a specific action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>Children engage in sustained conversations about a topic or concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Antisocial behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PUSHING</td>
<td>a child pushes another in order to hurt him/her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PULLING</td>
<td>a child pulls another in order to hurt him;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>KICKING</td>
<td>a child kicks another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>HITTING</td>
<td>a child hits another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SPITTING</td>
<td>a child spits at another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EXLUSION</td>
<td>excludes another from a group or a game, tells others not to speak or play with the child using verbal expressions or gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>TEASING</td>
<td>a child interferes with games or ongoing activities, taunting, jeering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>VERBAL THREAT</td>
<td>verbally threatens violence or hostility, e.g., &quot;I'll tell the teacher&quot; or &quot;I won't invite you to my birthday party&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>PHYSICAL THREAT (with or without object)</td>
<td>an intimidating act towards the victim or close proximity threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>LONELY</td>
<td>A child is alone a seems unhappy, sad, may cry, or watch others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>BOSSING</td>
<td>child dominates activities, forces games, changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>IGNORING</td>
<td>Child ignore requests from others to change games, or pass toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>DESTRUCTIVE</td>
<td>Child destroys another’s game or work with a deliberate action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Relational Activities for use in pre-schools

The activities used in the SPRinG project were developed and supplemented to ensure suitability of use in pre-schools. More time was needed to build communications skills and many activities changed from the original SPRinG activities with the practitioners selected and modifying activities from their repertoire. Examples of the activities used by the practitioners are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I was</td>
<td>Self awareness &amp; communication</td>
<td>The children each take a turn in stating “If I was an animal I would be.....”. E.g. If I was an animal I would be a kangaroo because I am good at jumping/ I like jumping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I introduce to you</td>
<td>To build trust</td>
<td>In a group. Children pass around the group a stuffed toy introducing the toy to the child sat next to them. Once this can be achieved the children then add something they like about the child e.g. nice ribbon in hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face Patting</td>
<td>To build trust</td>
<td>Children face each other and gently brush the face (or hands initially) of their partner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Practitioner Training
The focus of these sessions was introducing the practitioners to a process of building trust, sensitivity and problem solving skills and the concept of pre- and de-briefing, rather than introducing specific activities which many of the staff had used to some degree already. The purpose of the training was to provide a way of approaching the use of the activities with consistency and purpose and, to integrate these into the curriculum and everyday practice; rather than them being an add-on to the session.

Training day one

Day one focused upon introducing the programme to the group and agreeing the rules of the group. This involved introducing practitioners to the process of developing Trust, Communication and Problem Solving, along with the notions of pre- and de-briefing. A key aspect of the training was to engage practitioners in the activities themselves throughout the day so they could get a sense of working together as a group and allowing time for reflection and discussion of the feelings the children may experience.

By way of introduction to the session, practitioners viewed a PowerPoint presentation which included pre- and post-intervention videos of pairs of dyads working together. The schools from which these videos were taken had participated in the SPRinG project in primary schools. The practitioners were advised that the research team wanted to extend the strategy developed in the SPRinG project specifically for the Early years. It was clearly stated that their expertise was needed and valued in this process. Whilst the activities provided were seldom new to practitioners, the consistent use of the activities, their ordering and gradual inclusion into the curriculum was.

Practitioners were provided with a folder including information and activities during this day to take away.

Training day two

This followed much the same format as day one, reiterating the relational programme. However, half of the day was allocated for initial responses on practitioner’s first attempts at the activities and how both the children and other members of staff had received them. This reflective consideration allowed for concerns to be addressed and for the practitioners to offer support to each other. A key point stressed in this session was that rather than ‘backing away’ from an unsuccessful experience, practitioners should try and reflect upon what went right and what went wrong. The addition of children’s reflections would be helpful to this developing understanding – and forms the basis for classroom ‘debriefing’.
Time was also given for planning at least two lessons – particularly as a way of supporting the practitioners in delivering the intervention, as time for planning was acknowledged as an issue.

**The supervision sessions**

These sessions were much less formal. Practitioners were given time to discuss how they and the children adapted to the activities and the pre and debriefing sessions, that is, introducing and discussing the skills needed to complete an activity and a follow-up discussion on the successes and problems encountered upon completion of an activity. Time was also allocated for planning sessions with practitioners from other schools; these sessions gave practitioners the opportunity to discuss the different ways in which they overcame any difficulties in implementing the programme.

During the data collection it was observed that many of the preschools struggled to implement the pre- and de-briefing. As a result, one of the supervision sessions was used for discussion around the pre and de-brief their suitability of young children and the obstacles to effective implementation. These discussions allowed the group to jointly develop strategies to overcome the obstacles as was suitable to the preschool environment.

It is important to note all training and supervision was conducted inside normal work hours and the preschools were financially compensated for their time to cover any additional cover staff payments needed.